THE STORMTROOPER FAMILY:
HOW SEXUALITY, SPIRITUALITY, AND COMMUNITY
SHAPED THE HAMBURG SA

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By

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ABSTRACT

The dissertation explains the attraction of the stormtroopers (Sturmabteilung; SA), the Nazis’ paramilitary band of “political soldiers” in the city of Hamburg. It argues that social networks and personal relationships – including family ties, religious affiliations, and sexual bonds among stormtroopers – represented the primary means of recruiting and integrating new members into the Nazi movement. The SA emphasized the social, emotional, and political benefits that young men could accrue by joining the group, which established an array of social welfare systems during the dismal days of the depression. In return for food and housing, male camaraderie, a sense of ersatz family, and the promise of social and economic integration into the local community, young stormtroopers became the Party’s foot soldiers. SA pubs and barracks were simultaneously places of refuge and sites of violence, where the stormtroopers were taught to strive for a sacrificial death that Party propagandists could use to argue for Nazi heroism, Communist criminality, and republican inability to maintain order in the German state.

Hamburg’s stormtroopers claimed to defend their communities and families. The stormtroopers’ justifications for their violence are unintelligible outside this local context, which in Hamburg often featured appeals to Hanseatic independence, economic
autonomy, and gendered authority for aspiring merchant men over their families and neighborhoods. Stormtroopers claimed altruistic motivations and heroic self-sacrifice, but their main concern was with keeping their own threatened places in the local hierarchy. SA men mobilized political, racial, and gendered arguments for their own authority, worked to align differing organizations behind a common Nazi banner, and built structures that sheltered them from the inherent clash between their ideas and reality. The stormtroopers’ political mobilization was thus a quest for local personal status carried out in the context of a national political struggle.
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To

My Family
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One of the only possible points of agreement I have with my subjects is a recognition that any heroic accomplishment is made possible only through the steadfast support of family, friends, and comrades. The strength and energy gained through such a network made possible this dissertation, which in turn describes how similar systems of support can be horribly misused.
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INTRODUCTION

Three generations have now been born since the global trauma of the Second World War. Soon there will be few left alive who saw with their own eyes the Nazis’ rise. Yet no matter how distant the actual Nazi past becomes, its popular image remains fresh. Americans now use National Socialism and its symbols as shorthand for unquestioned villainy, for an eruption of the satanic into the political. For decades, when a film or other pop cultural product has needed a bad guy who can be accepted as evil with little justification, the Nazi trumpeter has called. In the public mind, Nazis were all such extreme sadists and murders that their depravity reached the levels of a Platonic Form - long after the Nazis’ physical bodies have died, they exist in the ether as an embodiment of pure evil, waiting to be conjured again into the world as needed.

It is not my intention to examine how this negative idealization came to be. Many scholars have already considered Nazism’s hold on the public consciousness, some prompted by Susan Sontag’s influential 1974 essay “Fascinating Fascism.” Sontag examined Nazism’s continued popularity as a source for “playing with cultural horror” in the worlds of art, film, theatre, and myriad sexual subcultures.¹ The use of Nazi iconography in all these cultural products resulted, Sontag wrote, from “a general fascination among the young with horror” combined with an eroticized view of Nazism from which later generations “hope a reserve of sexual energy can now be tapped.”² Fascism thus fascinates because it combines a core of unadulterated evil with a surface

² Ibid.
layer of beauty, idealism, and perfection. Those who seek to tap into sources of power and energy - whether as models on which to base theatrical sexual practices, as Sontag wrote about, or as negative images against which an American film hero can struggle without guilt or self-examination - thus have a model in Nazism. As Sontag wrote, “Now there is a master scenario available to everyone. The color is black, the material is leather, the seduction is beauty, the justification is honesty, the aim is ecstasy, the fantasy is death.”

Our culture has thus held tight to National Socialism. We use it as synecdoche for political evil – one aspect that stands in for the entire concept. Andrea Slade has shown that images of Nazism - especially sexualized images - are not mere cultural products bereft of political meaning. Instead, “accusations of Nazism, deployed as the ideal nemesis of both the American nation and of democracy, can issue from just about any political orientation” and have been essential to contesting the definition of democracy itself. Activists on both sides of the political debates surrounding abortion, corporatism, empire, environmentalism, globalization, and homosexuality have thus mobilized allegations of fascism in order to tar their opponents as enemies of decency, morality, and democracy.

These accusations can be as intemperate as they are frequent. American high political culture consequently derides comparisons to Nazism as immature, sophist, and

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self-defeating in legitimate political debate. The view has even become formalized since 1990 as “Godwin’s Law:” anyone who raises the Nazi comparison loses the political debate, regardless of the merits of the claim.\(^5\) Thus, when US Senator Dick Durbin observed on the Senate floor in June 2005 that the treatment of American-held prisoners in the Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib prisons resembled what was done “by Nazis, by Soviets in their gulags, or some mad regime… that had no concern for human beings,” the political media savaged him without respite.\(^6\) The assault came not only from his Republican opponents, but also from Democrats in his home state. Chicago’s Democratic Mayor, Richard Daley, proclaimed that “I think it’s a disgrace to say that any man or woman in the military would act like that.”\(^7\) Durbin withdrew the comments a week later in an emotional speech on the Senate floor, and his office issued a cringing apology. “I have learned from my statement,” Durbin said, “that historical parallels can be misused and misunderstood.”\(^8\) The political class had sent a clear message: to compare Americans to National Socialists is to mark oneself as intemperate and to doom one’s argument to immediate dismissal.

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\(^5\) This description more properly refers to the cultural reception of the law, which has broadened it from its original goal of limiting the duration of online discussion threads in the Internet’s early days. Mike Godwin, who coined the Law, observed that “As an online discussion continues, the probability of a reference or comparison to Hitler or the Nazis approaches one.” When this takes place, the discussion has outlived its usefulness and has to be terminated. Godwin described the law with the intent to curb the numerous and blithe accusations of fascism that are often leveled in political debate. “I wanted,” he wrote, “folks who glibly compared someone else to Hitler or to Nazis to think a bit harder about the Holocaust.” Godwin has since cited Abu Ghraib specifically in an admission that not all comparisons to National Socialism are invalid. See Mike Godwin, “I Seem to be a Verb: 18 Years of Godwin’s Law,” Jewcy, [http://www.jewcy.com/post/i_seem_be_verb_18_years_godwins_law](http://www.jewcy.com/post/i_seem_be_verb_18_years_godwins_law) (accessed September 8 2008).


\(^7\) Ibid. Daley seems to have taken particular offense because his son then served in the Army.

\(^8\) Ibid.
But upon what basis were Durbin’s remarks excoriated? Not on their objective merits: he spoke based on FBI reports that described how Guantanamo guards used sensory deprivation, long-term isolation, extreme temperature exposure, prolonged stress positions, and denial of food and water to destroy their prisoners’ psyches. These techniques were all used in Nazi prison camps, as were acts of sadomasochism and sexual humiliation similar to those used in Abu Ghraib. By 2005, the world had already seen photographic evidence that these techniques were in use by Americans. Objections to Durbin’s statement were thus entirely subjective and political, not objective or empirical. None challenged that the abuse had taken place. None denied that the Nazis had done the same deeds. Durbin’s attackers could only reject out of hand the possibility that the Americans under discussion could in any way be similar to Nazis who had done the same thing. Any disconnect between the idealized image of America and the reality of American actions was also dispelled by appeal to the nation’s ultimate good intentions. The perpetrators of prisoner abuse were therefore merely “bad apples” who had acted from individual psychosis, not indictments of an increasingly brutal camp system that had drifted uncomfortably close to Nazi models. Outraged claims to offense at the impolite

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9 Rush Limbaugh claimed that the abuses were “like a college fraternity prank” and that the guards were just good people who deserved the “emotional release.” The transcript of this show has been wiped from Limbaugh’s website, but a partial record has been preserved at Media Matters for America, “Limbaugh on torture of Iraqis: US guards were ‘having a good time,’ ‘blow[ing] some steam off,’” http://mediamatters.org/items/200405050003 (accessed September 09, 2008).

nature of Durbin’s remarks thus drew attention away from the merits of the comparison and prevented any rational discussion of the issues at hand.

In the 18 years since its invention, “Godwin’s Law” has taken hold of American political culture, which cannot recognize or admit any similarity to National Socialism because of an emotional commitment to a binary divide between American good and Nazi evil. Within this problem lies a reticence to differentiate between evil deeds and evil intent. In today’s simpleminded view, Nazi deeds can only come from ill intent, weakness of character, or cultural flaws present in Germany but not in America.\(^\text{11}\) Daley declared it a disgrace to say that Americans had behaved in ways similar to Nazi guards. Though we may assume that he also felt it a disgrace to commit these acts, he failed overtly to condemn them. Instead, he noted that “No one has been killed down there, no one has been seriously injured.”\(^\text{12}\) Leaving aside the merits of this claim – which were

\(^{11}\) This largely explains the disconnect between the poor scholarly reception and great public acclaim that greeted Daniel Goldhagen’s *Hitler’s Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1996). Goldhagen studied a Hamburg battalion of reserve policemen who participated in the *Einsatzgruppen*’s mass murder of Jews on the eastern front – the same group of policemen whom Christopher Browning had studied in his groundbreaking work, *Ordinary Men*. (New York: HaperCollins. 1992). Browning explained the motivation for mass murder as a product of wartime conditions into which ordinary men had been thrust. This made some into a “nucleus of increasingly enthusiastic killers,” but allowed others to retain varying measures of humanity - to the point that when given the chance to refuse participation in one massacre, ten or twelve stepped forward (168, 56-57). Goldhagen, on the other hand, studied the same subjects to advance his claim that they all shared a simple motivation – “eliminationist antisemitism” that pervaded almost all members of German society. Academics in America savaged the book for its reductionism, chided the public for its ill-considered embrace its thesis, and bemoaned the fact that studies of the Holocaust were being forced back into the historiographical battles of the early 80s. (For one temperate but firm example, see Raul Hilberg, “The Goldhagen Phenomenon,” *Critical Inquiry* 23:4 [1997]. 721-728.) But Americans were committed to retain Germans as a cultural and political Other whose actions could be explained by their inherent natures. Germans, paradoxically, affirmed the book’s argument as well, for it had evidently “responded to the socio-psychological uncertainty in the German public.” (Axel Körner, “‘The Arrogance of Youth’: A Metaphor for Social Change?: The Goldhagen-Debate in Germany as Generational Conflict” in *New German Critique*. 80: Special Issue on the Holocaust (2008) 61.)

dubious at the time, and have grown more suspect since\(^\text{13}\) - it was a weak defense even if true. Daley relied on a comparison between Abu Ghraib and Auschwitz that was as misguided as any metaphor Durbin could have mustered. Daily said:

> If you read the history of the Holocaust, nothing can compare with the Holocaust. Let us set that aside. Anytime people mention the Holocaust and they start referring one incident or two incidents to the Holocaust, that’s so disrespectful for all the victims of the Holocaust. You talk about 6 million people intentionally killed... I'm going to get you a book on the Holocaust and have you read the Holocaust, and if you really believe those men and women in Guantanamo Bay are Nazis, then you'd better rethink what America's all about.\(^\text{14}\)

Durbin never mentioned the Holocaust in his statement, but Daley and the rest of the American political class reflexively saw his comments only through its lens. The verdict was clear: Since 21\(^\text{th}\) century Americans have not committed intentional, industrialized genocide that slaughtered millions, any comparison of American policies or actions to those same deeds as done by Nazis is illegitimate.

This standard is too high. If ghettos, gas chambers, and extermination camps are required to label political behavior as fascist, then the Nazis themselves must be excluded for most years of the Party’s existence. To require a Holocaust to label a political style as fascist is to limit comparison to the point of impossibility. If the admonishment “Never Forget” is to have any meaning, the very fact of the Holocaust mandates comparison – in this case, not between Guantanamo and Auschwitz, but between Guantanamo Bay and

\(^{13}\) Print outlets quoted Daley’s statement as “No one has been killed down there [in Guantanamo]...”, a formulation that left the possibility that the Mayor spoke only of Guantanamo Bay, at which no deaths had then been reported. Even this generous interpretation, however, ignored the fact - known at the time - that inmates at other US camps had died from their captors’ abuse. Two such cases at the Bagram Collection Point in Afghanistan were widely reported only weeks before the Durbin controversy. See “Army file details brutal deaths of Afghan detainees” in New York Times, May 21, 2005, A1.

\(^{14}\) NBC5.com, “Daley calls for apology”
the hastily assembled “wild camps” of the early Nazi regime. Daley’s horror at Durbin’s comparison suggests the evident belief that Auschwitz appeared overnight. Yet it took many years for the Nazi Party to intensify its persecution of Jews to the ultimate horror of the gas chambers, which cannot be taken as a teleological end. The people of the time, those “ordinary Germans” whose culpability for Nazism’s horrors has obsessed the world ever since, could only read National Socialism’s intentions contemporaneously. Their complicity and the mechanisms that generated it must be viewed in this light.

Daley admonished that anyone who considers the fascist implications of American politics should “rethink what America’s all about.” Perhaps, however, the comparison should instead cause us to rethink what Nazism was all about.

* *

The Nazis’ paramilitary formation, the SA (Sturmabteilung; storm-troop) comprised the heart of the National Socialist movement during its rise to power and in its decisive first years in control of the German state. These stormtroopers were the most dedicated and active part of the movement, and they quickly achieved a justified reputation for violence and brutality. They were self-proclaimed brawlers and brutes, yet they justified their behavior with reference to the far greater evils that they claimed to prevent. Hamburg’s stormtroopers thought they were doing good. They saw themselves faced with a threat to their lives and livelihood, their families and neighborhoods, their city and their people (Volk). They thus chose to enter the SA’s ranks, to put on its uniform, and to commit moral and legal crimes in its name. They justified these actions
not by conceding or admitting their immorality, but by constructing themselves as a heroic bulwark against immorality and evil.

The SA’s heroic identity was as difficult to maintain as it was essential to its recruits’ political and psychological well-being. The movement’s only path to power was to convince the public at large of its virtue, a project for which the Party developed a sophisticated array of propaganda techniques. The contents of this propaganda - that is, the facts it laid forth, the ideological and historical claims it made, and the anecdotes it told - are usually dismissed as lies, and justly so in most cases. But to disprove after the fact a propaganda article’s false claims does not address the power it had to persuade a contemporary audience. The Nazi movement grounded its propaganda claims in anecdotes and evidence manufactured from its members’ everyday experiences. First through word of mouth and person-to-person, then through an increasingly sophisticated network of leaflets, newspapers, and books, stormtrooper self-depictions made episodes from ordinary life into testaments of the SA men’s struggles, personalities, and ultimate virtues. The NSDAP and SA then proved adept at encouraging and even staging events that sustained their claims, until with enough effort even the more established newspapers in a city’s media scene began to relay Nazi narratives. Some stories’ mere existence - such as any episode of public violence by Communists - proved Nazi tropes. These stories had far more propaganda value when printed in a staid, bourgeois-liberal newspaper than when read in the Nazis’ own untrustworthy broadsheet. The stormtrooper lifestyle thus evolved to pursue attention-getting political events, to stage intimate family gatherings as advertisements of their propriety, and to initiate episodes of spectacular
violence in which they could be seen as victims of Communist brutality. These events shaped public discourse about the SA to friendly ends, but the cycle of word and deed had an even more important function as well. Before the stormtroopers could convince others that they fought in defense of the common good, they had to believe it themselves.

Using Hamburg as a case study, this dissertation narrates the stormtroopers’ efforts to construct heroic self-images, to convince others of their morality, and to mobilize claims to virtue in defense of political crime. Such an approach proceeds with great debt to several important schools of historical thought. The first includes the classic political and structural studies of the SA and of the Nazi Party’s social basis. These debates are intimately tied to larger questions of guilt for National Socialism’s sins. A second school of historiography attempts to understand the psychology and motivation of individual Party or SA men. Many of these works are rooted in problematic psychoanalytical theories, but they can prove useful starting points for historical investigation when combined with a third historiographical tradition - products of the so-called gender turn. Works with this approach prove particularly valuable in a study of the SA, which proudly proclaimed itself a movement of men whose personal lives carried great political meaning. They also combine well with the trend toward historicization and Alltagsgeschichte as applied to the Nazi movement. Together, these approaches can generate a more nuanced understanding of the grass roots experiences at the heart of the stormtrooper mentality. These three historiographies have all influenced my reading of the SA’s rise and Weimar’s fall.
The history of the Nazi Party and the state it created is among the profession’s most prolific and highly developed sub-fields. Over a hundred monographs on National Socialism appear each year, and searches of academic databases for such terms as “Nazi,” “Hitler,” and “Holocaust” can return unmanageable numbers of results. Of the best and most influential of these works, many have focused on structural and organizational approaches - that is to say, they are political histories along traditional models. For many years, positions on major historiographical debates - such as the political typology of Nazism or fascism, Hitler’s personal role in the Nazi Party and state, the “intentional” or “functional” nature of the Holocaust, the uniqueness of the German case, and the continuity or disconnect between different eras of German history - were discussed in terms of political systems, party organization, economic conditions, social class, and other “structural” elements of German politics.\(^\text{15}\) The early works of this approach that study the SA include an overlooked but invaluable dissertation by Andreas Werner, which demonstrated in detail the SA’s organizational evolution from a small “fighting club” [*Wehrverband*] to a mass paramilitary army.\(^\text{16}\) His description of the SA’s leadership structure, finances, and relationship with the Party has guided many later histories of the SA, including my own.

By the 1970s, advocates of the “new social history” had added traditional structural approaches to a study of the interrelationship between society and politics.

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\(^\text{15}\) Ian Kershaw gives a full account of these and other debates in *The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 4th Ed.

Politics, they insisted, could not be understood apart from its wider social context.\footnote{Kershaw, 9-12.} To that end, the great histories of National Socialism that emerged in the 1980s sought to clarify the Party’s social basis in order to explain its popularity. Many historians had long considered National Socialism as a “revolt of the lower middle class” based on economic squeeze and fears of “proletarianization.”\footnote{The thesis dates at least as far back as 1930, as for example in Theodor Geiger’s “Panik im Mittelstand,” \textit{Die Arbeiter}, 7 (1930): 637-654.} Despite its popularity, this theory of “panic in the lower middle class” had never fully overcome a lack of conceptual clarity surrounding its central term. It had uncertain empirical backing as well, and the trend to social history thus undermined it severely. A series of influential studies in 1982 and 1983 - especially, Richard Hamilton’s \textit{Who Voted for Hitler}? and Thomas Childers’s \textit{The Nazi Voter} - proved that the NSDAP possessed a far broader basis of support than had previously been assumed. Furthermore, these voters supported the Nazis not only for economic reasons, but also as a form of protest against the Weimar Republic’s social and political conditions.\footnote{Thomas Childers, \textit{The Nazi Voter: The Social Foundations of Fascism in Germany, 1919-1933} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983) and Richard F. Hamilton, \textit{Who Voted for Hitler}? (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982). See Hamilton’s description of voting patterns in Hamburg, 101-128, which this dissertation has used to map the city’s socio-political divides.} Conan Fischer’s \textit{Stormtroopers}, which also appeared in 1983, argued a similar case for the stormtroopers themselves.\footnote{Conan Fischer, \textit{Stormtroopers: A Social, Economic, and Ideological Analysis, 1929-1935} (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1983).} In 1989, Peter Longerich’s \textit{Die braune Battalione} synthesized these social and organizational approaches into an account
that remained the standard history of the SA even before its update in 2003 as *Geschichte der SA*.\(^{21}\) These studies performed valuable work by undermining any association of National Socialism with a single social class, but their successes raised new questions: the Party’s attraction, ideology, and success could no longer be explained by the composition of its social base.

The development came at the same time that rising social historians of Imperial Germany attacked the argument for Germany’s sinister “special path” [Sonderweg], a supposed persistence of economic and political backwardness that after 1918 fostered “pre-industrial mentalities,” prevented democratization, and encouraged political authoritarianism.\(^ {22}\) In this respect, the Sonderweg represents the shadow of Nazism cast over all prior eras of German history: the Sonderweg mobilizes imperial history to find a specifically German deviance that then explains National Socialism. The pushback against this argument of “anti-modernism” in the 1980s included significant works that emphasized the deep and active participation of Germans in imperial political life.\(^ {23}\) These findings gave new perspective on the strength and political power of the German middle class, and they thus set a path for future historians to escape from interpretations of fascism based on an alleged, centuries-long German trend toward deviant political


\(^{23}\) See Roger Chickering’s *We Men Who Feel Most German: A Cultural Study of the Pan-German League, 1886-1914* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1984) and Geoff Eley’s *Reshaping the German Right: Radical Nationalism and Political Change After Bismarck* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980).
authoritarianism.24 Studies now had to account for a broader spectrum of German society - without recourse to the Sonderweg’s constructions of German Otherness, but on a firmer foundation of knowledge concerning the structural conditions of German politics, state, and society.

Bringing individual subjects back into the debate on Nazism allows a return of focus to issues of choice, agency, and individual efforts to navigate the social, economic, and political contexts they inhabit. Structural explanations for political violence may explain an underlying trend toward radicalization, but they fail to illuminate the reasons discrete actors choose one radical party over another. That explanation must be found in an analysis of individual psychology. The earliest attempts to do so appeared in the Nazi period, and they include the classic works of Wilhelm Reich, Max Horkheimer, and other members of Horkheimer’s Frankfurt School. These scholars claimed that the family, as the first environment in which people are made to subordinate themselves to another’s will, was the foundation point of all authority.25 As outlined in the theory’s fullest form, in 1950’s The Authoritarian Personality, the mental structures created in childhood by the dynamics of family life later take on their own force of agency in encounters with the adult world of politics:

Although personality is a product of the social environment of the past, it is not, once it has developed, a mere object of the contemporary environment. What has developed is a structure within the individual, something what is capable of self-initiated action upon the social


environment… This conception is necessary to explain consistency of behavior in widely varying situations, to explain the persistence of ideological trends in the face of contradicting facts and radically altered social conditions, [and] to explain why people in the same sociological situation have different or even conflicting views on social issues…

The Frankfurt School theorists thus explained fascism as a product of family life. The family - especially, they claimed, the bourgeois family - habituated its members to sexual repression, violent discipline, and patriarchal domination. These traits then encouraged political authoritarianism as a quest for a “totalitarian Oedipus.” Wilhelm Reich’s *Mass Psychology of Fascism*, written in the year of the Nazi takeover, explained that a fascist leader’s ability “to arouse emotional family ties in the individuals of the masses” makes him a type of “authoritarian father figure.” Confidence in the Führer as a protective father figure then dissipates the “untenability and contradictoriusness” of fascist politics by displacing intellectual and political responsibility onto the leader, whose personal qualities, intellect, authority, and charisma offer the only resolution of political disagreement. Such an attitude breeds authoritarian subjects because it “impedes social self-administration, i.e., rational independence and cooperation.”

Family structures thus generated fascism by creating a mass of individuals linked through

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27 Wilhelm Reich, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1970 [1933]). The work was banned by both Nazis and Communists when it appeared, and it led to Reich’s ejection from and estrangement with the Communist Party. Reich’s focus on sexual energy – an all-pervading force he called “orgone energy” – as a source for medicinal and political remedies greatly distressed his contemporaries. He came to believe that true antifascist politics, rather than fighting on the Nazis’ home turf of defending the traditional family, would concentrate on movements of sexual liberation. If these movements could succeed, they would defuse the sexual repression that drove people to fascism while at the same time weakening a wide range of oppressive social and political hierarchies. Reich’s later work collecting and harnessing “orgone energy” for medicinal purposes attracted the attention of the FDA in 1954, which banned and burned his works, destroyed his equipment, and imprisoned him until his death in 1957.
28 Ibid. 26-27.
common pathologies. These diminished subjects feel so powerless over their own lives that they seek refuge in ideological causes, especially a “national narcissism” that assuages “the wretchedness of [their] material and sexual situation” through the salve of “the exalting idea of belonging to a master race and having a brilliant Führer.” The dynamic often manifests itself in racial and social prejudice as well – in the National Socialist case, focused especially on Jews and homosexuals.  

Psychological investigations into authoritarian personality structures thus sought to study and categorize large samples of fascist subjects, whether the “potentially fascist” postwar subjects of _The Authoritarian Personality_, or the actual fascist activists who in 1938 submitted personal essays as part of the American sociologist Theodor Abel’s contest for “the best personal life history of an adherent of the Hitler movement.” Local Party offices and SA units promoted the contest as a way to explain to the world the motivations of the “old fighters” and most dedicated members of the SA. Flush with victory, the SA autobiographers proudly recounted not only their good sides, but also the types of negative personality traits in which they had come to revel. Peter Merkel, who used Abel’s collected essays to create a comprehensive personality profile for the stormtroopers and other early party “soldiers”, found that the essays were so grounded in the consciousness of their own morality as to openly display “patent prejudice,” “violent or hateful behavior,” and at times an “obvious lack of mental 

29 Ibid, 63.
30 Adorno et al. 1950. vi. This investigation focused mostly on racial and religious hatred rather than the vitriol directed against sexual minorities.
31 Ibid. 1.
The psychological and psychoanalytical work of the 1930s was quite popular to its contemporaries, and in fact generated a 1943 report on Hitler’s sexuality from the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), a forerunner of the CIA, who hoped to understand the dictator’s mind in order to better direct American policy against him. The report delivered an array of contradictory gossip, all of which reflected poorly on the Führer and his movement:

Some believe that he is entirely immune from such impulses. Some believe that he is a chronic masturbator. Some believe that he derives his sexual pleasure through voyeurism. Many believe that he is completely impotent. Others, and these are in the majority, think that he is homosexual. It is probably true that he is impotent, but he is certainly not homosexual in the ordinary sense of the term. His perversion has quite a different nature, which few have guessed. It is an extreme form of masochism in which the individual derives sexual gratification from the act of having a woman urinate or defecate on him.34

As these experiences showed, attempts to explain and anticipate fascism in the psychologies of its adherents often provoked sensationalism, misdirection, and ultimately only further stigmatization of the subjects these studies purportedly sought to understand. Psychoanalytical approaches located political pathology in individual pathology, and as such they encouraged the public to demonize National Socialists as psychological and moral deviants. In this view, Nazis’ political system thus represented merely the sum

total of its members’ individual psychoses, an approach that is methodologically distorted and morally misguided.\textsuperscript{35}

The problem of stigmatization comes together in the person of the homosexual stormtrooper. Even the term is problematic. Despite the outdated and stigmatizing tone that “homosexual” carries in modern American English, it was the best term available in the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century to describe men who identified as dispositionally attracted to other men. But the word was of relatively recent coinage: It first appeared in a political debate in 1869, achieved public notice through a series of sex scandals, and by the turn of the century had become the focus of burgeoning study by both pro- and anti-homosexual movements. “Homosexual” described men who had sex with other men - not as substitutes for women in male-only environments, or as momentary moral lapses, but as a part of a sustained, inherent, dispositional sexual identity.\textsuperscript{36} But homosexuality was a contested category from the start even among those attracted to their own sex, who diverged in their interpretations of the causes, behaviors, and implications of same-sex desire.

The SA grappled with the controversy on two levels. On the one hand, stormtroopers loudly protested open homosexuality in Germany’s big cities as part of its Party’s campaign for moral renewal of the Volk. The Party as a whole stood quite definitively on the anti-homosexual side of this social and political conflict. Many

\textsuperscript{35} The methodological flaws of psychoanalytic approaches often appear through the widespread connection many analysts felt with Marx. Reich, for instance, identified the psycho-political problem as one mainly of the lower-middle class – the same connection that the works of new social history disproved in the 1980s. See Reich’s description of Hitler and the lower middle class in Mass Psychology of Fascism, 36-48.

\textsuperscript{36} Susanne zur Neiden called the definitional difficulty at play “the riddle of same-sex love,” in her essay “Homophobie und Staatsräson” in Homosexualität und Staatsräson: Männlichkeit, Homophobie, und Politik in Deutschland, 1900-1945, ed. Susanne zur Nieden (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2005), 20-25.
stormtroopers, however, also fought the pro-homosexual (or homophile) movement as a way to resist being counted among its members. In other words, many stormtroopers pursued homophobic forms of politics, as they would now be called, as a way either to deny their own homosexuality or to shape public understanding of homosexuality to more militant ends. Most stormtroopers participated in a longstanding tradition of male bonding and homoerotic militarism, which had long heritage in Germany as a constitutive principle of political and military organization but stood in direct opposition to a homophile movement that often seemed effete, pacifist, and promoted by Jewish social scientists. Thus, while some stormtroopers, including Chief of Staff Ernst Röhm, openly acknowledged their homosexuality among friends and associates, even these men bitterly resisted identification with the growing homophile movement. Though the stormtroopers initially tried to cover up the public presence of homosexuality in their ranks, they also relied privately on emotional bonds between men as the basis of their political and paramilitary activity. The strongly homoerotic nature of stormtrooper politics thus forced the SA to engage in the debate on homosexuality, especially after a Munich newspaper outed Röhm in 1931. After this point, anti-fascists fixated on Röhm and his homosexual comrades as an embodiment of the immorality and political hypocrisy they saw at the heart of National Socialism. As this dissertation will examine, the figure of the homosexual stormtrooper was therefore an important tool of both political recruitment by the SA, and of political combat against the SA.37 But the privileging of this figure also

37 Several excellent studies exist on the antifascist use - and abuse - of a link between homosexuality and Nazism. They include Andrew Hewitt’s: *Political Inversions: Homosexuality, Fascism, and the Modernist Imaginary*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), as well as essays in the collected volume edited by
influenced later interpretations of the SA’s emotional and relational core in several damaging ways.

Many early Anglo-American histories of the Nazi Party took special note of Röhm’s homosexuality as a way to explain the viciousness of internal Nazi politics. William Shirer characterized SA leaders as “notorious homosexual perverts” who “quarreled and feuded as only men of unnatural sexual inclinations, with their particular jealousies, can.”38 Other scholars hinted that the homosexuality prevalent in certain SA circles had great import for the organization’s structure and ideology. Joachim Fest wrote that “in accordance with the homosexual nature of the SA, its members’ devotion was aroused far less by programs than by persons, by ‘born leaders,’ the center of a passionate admiration that was in strange contrast to the strikingly barbaric style of all other expressions of emotion.”39 Furthermore, he claimed, it was Ernst Röhm and “the homosexual element within the SA that had lent not merely the brown terrorist army but the whole of Hitler’s movement some of its most striking and repellent features.”40 In other words, the SA’s course had been steered by its members’ homosexuality, which influenced its organizational structure and encouraged its self-defensive violence. Other writers on stormtrooper homosexuality contended that homosexuality per se did not indicate immorality, but that the pressures society put on the same-sex oriented created moral hazards and political extremism. The resort to homosexuality to explain Nazi

39 Joachim Fest, Face of the Third Reich: Portraits of the Nazi Leadership (Da Capo Press, 1999 [1970]), 143.
40 Fest 137.
behavior became so established as to reach exaggerated levels in some recent works, which conflate all same-sex male affection with a homosexual orientation. Such an association, however, ignores powerful currents of same-sex affection – camaraderie – that reigned not only within the SA and the Nazi movement, but throughout homosocial male environments in a wide variety of historical contexts. Eve Sedgwick labeled this paradoxical and contested nexus of male-male affection “male homosocial desire”: a contested “pattern of male friendship, mentorship, entitlement, rivalry, and hetero- and homosexuality” that simultaneously united men as political actors and kept them in competition for the affection of their peers and the patronage of the powerful.

Sedgwick’s studies of British imperial literature illustrated how same-sex affections, whether overtly sexual or hidden under layers of obfuscation, worked as “the affective or social force, the glue” that forged civic bonds and preserved political life. As Sedgwick

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41 See for example Lothar Machtan’s thesis of Hitler’s homosexuality, which supposedly led him to murder other gay members of the Nazi movement lest they reveal his orientation. (Hitler's Geheimnis. Das Doppelleben eines Diktators [Frankfurt: Fischer, 2003]) Machtan’s thesis was poorly received by historians who were critical of its use of evidence and wary of its political implications. As Geoffrey Giles wrote in a Washington Post Book World review of Oct 25, 2001, Machtan’s formulation “comes perilously close to blaming the entire Holocaust on Adolf Hitler’s alleged sexuality.” Fear that the Holocaust could come to be blamed on the homosexuality of Hitler, the SA, or the Nazis in general are not misplaced. Such a work (Scott Lively and Kevin Abrams’ The Pink Swastika: Homosexuality and the Nazi Party) has already been published by a conservative Christian press who hoped to mobilize opposition to the US gay rights movement.

42 The connection between male homosexuality and political authority is well known in the classical world. Martii Nissinen’s Homoeroticism in the Biblical World: A Historical Perspective (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998) provides a sweeping overview of Mesopotamian, Egyptian, and Mediterranean views on the subject. These societies often diverged wildly from each other in the content of their beliefs, but they all agreed that acts of male homosexuality carried great importance for personal and communal political authority. See also David Halperin’s How to Do the History of Homosexuality (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), which is both a work of classical history and a thought-provoking exploration of how scholars can historicize sexuality.


44 Ibid, 2. See also her classic Epistemology of the Closet, which argues that most modern European political, intellectual, social, and economic “nodes of thought and knowledge” are structured around a
and others have shown, homoerotic operations of the type held against the stormtroopers in fact existed among a wide spectrum of modern political systems. An emphasis on homosexual stormtroopers as unique villains thus misidentifies a common socio-political form as unique to the SA.

The approach also shares the methodological and moral problems of the psychoanalytic account of stormtrooper psychologies. The methodological hazard comes when one considers that homosexual stormtroopers could not have existed in sufficient numbers to control the SA. Even if many members of the SA and other nationalist paramilitaries were what today would be labeled as homosexual (or gay), the actual numbers in the SA can never be known. Michael Kater estimated the number of homosexuals in the SA at around four to six percent, a number that conforms to recent estimates of the overall percentage of homosexuality in western industrial societies. This is hardly a large enough percentage to dominate the organization. Still, the presence of Röhm and other high-ranking SA homosexuals has suggested that the influence of homosexual stormtroopers outweighed their numbers. Hans Rudolf Wahl has thus called for a thorough investigation of SA-leading sexual behavior so that historians may

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45 Michael Kater, “Ansätze zu einer Soziologie der SA bis zur Röhm-Krise.” in Soziale Bewegung und politische Verfassung. Beiträge zur Geschichte der modernen Welt, eds. Ulrich Engelhardt, Volker Sellin, and Horst Stuke. (Stuttgart: Klett, 1976), 818-819. On the percentage of homosexuality in general, see Christopher Bagley and Pierre Tremblay’s “On the prevalence of homosexuality and bisexuality in a random community survey of 750 men aged 18 to 27” in The Journal of Homosexuality, 36(2) (1998): 1-18. This study found exclusive same-sex orientation among men at around 4-5% of the population, with 15% of men being homosexual “to some degree”. These numbers, however, fluctuate greatly depending on historical context, as doctors at Hamburg’s Institute for Sexual Research discovered when repeating a study of young male sexual behavior in 1970 and 1990. While 18% of the boys reported same-sex experiences in 1970, by 1990 the number had fallen to 2%. Günter Schmidt. Das neue Der Die Das. Über die Modernisierung des Sexuellen (Geiβen: Psychosozial-Verlag, 2005).
accurately assess their relevance to the SA’s political practices. But it is notoriously difficult to decode the sexual orientation of men from past eras. Open homosexuals like Röhm were exceedingly rare, while some men ejected from the SA for homosexuality had wives and children. Recent attempts to broaden the definition of homosexuality, by moving to a study of homoeroticism, are appreciated but more difficult to prove. In the cruder of these attempts, any expression of emotional affection and comradely love labels self-identified heterosexuals as latent homosexuals, or as behaving in putatively homosexual political ways.

This construction returns our focus to the moral dimension. To place blame on the figure of the homosexual stormtrooper is to erect a moral blockade between the ‘normal’ reader, putatively heterosexual, and the Nazis. In the end, homosexuals caused history’s greatest evil. The conclusion warps historical scholarship in a variety of ways. It encourages sloppy use of evidence in order to read prominent Nazis as homosexuals, and thus explicable in their evil, as well as unprofessional, revisionist histories that argue against the modern gay rights movement as a child of National Socialism. In other words, while these theories in some ways meet the challenge of providing a positive emotional


\[\text{47} \text{ As demonstrated recently in C.A. Tripp’s attempt to read Abraham Lincoln as gay. The Intimate World of Abraham Lincoln (New York: Free Press, 2005)}\]

\[\text{48} \text{ As was the case with Heinrich M., NARA 3341 SA Kartei 022b, whose complicated sexual history led to his eventual expulsion from the party in 1935. Chapter 6 will consider his case within the context of the 1934 Röhm purge.}\]

\[\text{49} \text{ Klaus Theweleit took this approach in his memorable but problematic study of the Freikorps leaders, many of whom later became SA men. Theweleit psychoanalyzed his subjects’ diaries and published writings in order to uncover their repressed homosexuality. Male Fantasies 2 vols (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987 and 1989).}\]
basis for the SA, but do it in a way that encourages many readers to retain the stormtroopers as a moral Other. By equating sexual deviance and political abnormality, they argue that sexual perverts create political perversions.

Historians can escape this stigmatizing trap through a study of “the history of everyday life” (*Alltagsgeschichte*), also called “the history of experience” (*Erfahrungsgeschichte*). A history of everyday life builds a more sophisticated understanding of grass roots mentalities by studying the empirical and subjective experiences of social groups on a local level.\(^50\) It also matches well the increasingly popular “gender turn” in history, which began with a study of women and women’s experiences but has since moved to also study men, marriage, family life, and the ways in which gender norms both represent and create systems of political, economic, and racial inequality.\(^51\)

Skeptics of these approaches charged that they focused too much attention on experiences tangential to understanding traditional historical problems. But the new fields of inquiry opened up by gender and everyday history have since proved themselves central to a new understanding of political behavior. George Mosse laid the groundwork for placing masculinity at the center of politics and nationalism, both in a comparative manner and in the German case specifically.\(^52\) Since Mosse, many other scholars have

\(^{50}\) Kershaw, 192, 219-220.

\(^{51}\) See Karen Hagemann and Jean Quartaert’s description of “the transition to gender” in Karen Hagemann and Jean H. Quataert, Eds. *Gendering Modern German History* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007), 18-23.

\(^{52}\) His most influential works on this point include *Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), *Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1985), and those sections of *The Crisis of German
described in more detail how codes of male bonding influenced politics in modern Germany. Sven Reichardt’s recent *Fascistische Kampfbünde* might in some ways be the final word on this theory applied to the Nazis and SA. His work was both comparative (between the SA and their Italian cousins, the *squadristi*) and local, and it showed how the SA used violence and a homoerotic environment to integrate its members emotionally. In other words, stormtrooper camaraderie and violence strengthened internal cohesion in the way Reichardt described as “creating community through violence” [*vergemeinschaftung durch Gewalt*]. Reichardt both influenced our understanding of the SA and also provided a model for further research. His work also, however, had the unfortunate side effect of re-igniting efforts to place homosexuality at the center of the SA experience.

This renewed interest included Wahl’s call to investigate the sexual lives of individual SA men. But it has also impacted the interpretation of the SA in a broader sense. Recent histories of masculinity in the SA place the homosexual stormtrooper as a key locus of affection, around whom revolved the emotional bonds that in many ways motivated SA behavior. Broadly defined so as to include self-identifying heterosexuals as

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well, the homosexual or homoerotic stormtrooper conveys the positive motivation of Nazi violence: to protect the beloved (in this case, the comrade) from physical harm. This impulse behind stormtrooper behavior was loudly broadcast at the time, continues to stand up under historical scrutiny, and has thus with good reason taken hold. Yet to explain the SA’s nature with emphasis on its homosexual members ignores these men’s paradoxical standing within the movement. Homosexual stormtroopers were simultaneously the SA’s greatest embodiments and among its most loathed figures, and they were driven from the group at several important junctures. A history of the SA’s homosocial politics should therefore rely less on the identification of specific stormtroopers’ sexual orientations than it should analyze the discursive role of sexuality within the movement. As Sven Reichardt wrote in response to Wahl:

If homosexuality played a role in the SA, then it was *not primarily* because Röhm’s friends in the Munich restaurant *Bratwurstglöckl* inserted themselves into high SA posts, but rather because Röhm’s homosexuality was openly known, and because the SA-men and SA-leaders had to participate in this public discourse. The cultural history of homosexuality in the SA must be written in this discursive-historical sense, not in Wahl’s intention to root out the private life of each SA-leader.57

Wahl’s call is thus both impossible and undesirable. But while a statistical study of the stormtroopers’ actual sexual behavior cannot be undertaken, historians can and should examine the complex internal debate on homosexuality within SA ranks.

This dissertation attempts such a discursive history based on the files of Hamburg stormtroopers who either were open about their homosexuality, who were reprimanded for associating with questionable taverns, or who were expelled from the movement for

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same-sex transgressions. The discourse about homosexuality and masculinity, and the ways in which the SA mobilized it to argue for political power, can be viewed through an approach Joan Scott outlined in her now-venerable essay “Gender: A Useful Tool for Historical Analysis.”\(^{58}\) Scott identified four “interrelated elements” of gender identity: culturally available symbols, normative concepts that fix the meaning of those symbols, interaction with societal structures, and subjective or individual reaction to these influences.\(^{59}\) In other words, her theory suggests that to fully outline a specific historical construction of gender one must examine how historical actors mobilize inherited symbols into new discourses that interpret and create gendered identities. Their discourse emerges both rhetorically and through practical action taken by members of a subculture who enact its principles in their daily lives. This realm of lived experience and individual interpretation then brings the discourse into conflict with the larger world’s social and political structures, which it both influences and is influenced by. Historians must therefore examine not only the symbols with which the participants created and discussed a gendered identity, they must also study the specific biographical cases through which their subjects enacted their identities.

One of the most important symbols available to the stormtroopers in their quest for political power was an enduring stereotype of masculinity, which had long been connected to political authority. The more they could conform to the stereotype, the stronger they believed their argument for political power to be. R.W. Connell spoke to


\(^{59}\) Scott, 41-45.
this practice in his description of “hegemonic masculinity.” The concept describes the type of male identity most honored in a society, which then grants men who conform to its traits political, economic, and personal authority over women, children, and men who do not conform. Leading men thus enjoy a “patriarchal dividend” that includes “honor, prestige, and the right to command,” as well as legal and material benefits. Hegemonic men claim the exclusive right to use violence to defend their privileges, to turn back challenges from other groups, and to bolster their own position vis-à-vis other men, and they justify these rights with reference to their moral standing as the proper kind of man. The specific qualities of an era’s hegemonic masculinity vary with economic and social conditions, and they are constantly under challenge. Hegemony implies the ability of the reigning group to convince others in society that the hierarchy is natural, normal, universal, and irresistible. Eras of particular “crisis” for a society’s sense of hegemonic masculinity often create exaggerated and extreme new forms of masculinity that claim to defend the threatened order, as happened in late imperial Germany and especially under the Weimar Republic.

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61 Ibid, 82.
62 Connell, 83.
65 Connell cautions that descriptions of a “crisis of masculinity” must be used with caution, lest readers impute a more fixed and essentialist character to masculinity than actually is the case. Nevertheless, since historical subjects often misperceive the solidity of their era’s dominant masculinity, they speak and act in reference to just such a “crisis.” Connell, 84. Connell places fascism in this context when he describes it as “a naked reassertion of male supremacy” in societies that were otherwise moving toward gender equality. 193.
The stormtroopers, who had built their political movement on the foundation of their own masculinity, thus attempted to claim the mantle of masculine hegemony by demonstrating conformity to honored modes of behavior. To this end they staged political rituals that allowed them to enact these identities in everyday life and in the public square. The effort parallels the kind Pierre Bourdieu described as a “labor of representation” - a “theatrical production which ‘tough guys,’ especially adolescents, must pursue in order to impose on others and assume for themselves the image of the ‘lad’ who can take anything and is ready for anything, and who refuses to give in to feelings and to sacrifice anything to feminine sensitivity.” Bourdieu’s observation, which he intended to hold both linguistic and political implications, holds true for the SA on two levels. It captures the masculinist content of SA politics in the short term, yet it also emphasizes the sustained effort of public theatricality that stormtroopers pursued in order to prove aspects of their aspirational self-identity. These efforts, however, trapped SA men in competing discourses on violence and sexuality that did not conform to the traditional hegemonic ideals, and thus undercut their argument for political power. SA men felt this disconnect to its greatest extent in the realm of sexuality, which possessed its own “peculiar discursive link” to political authority. Stormtroopers thus participated in a Janus-faced discourse in which they celebrated militarized, homoerotic ties between men while simultaneously declaring that homosexuality was an immoral vice that lured

66 Language and Symbolic Power (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 94. Dominic Bryan has used Bourdieu’s concept as a productive lens through which to analyze street demonstrations, parade violence, and political combat in Northern Ireland. Orange Parades: The Politics of Ritual, Tradition, and Control (London: Pluto Press, 2000). He describes a labor of representation as a “part of an effort by an elite to represent a unified community in contrast to other possible representations, such as those of class, denomination or perhaps generation, and in doing so sustain its own political position.” 8.

67 Nieden, 17.
men into a life of self-interested, cabalistic conspiracy. Nazi rhetoric thus both praised and condemned same-sex bonds of affection. Party propaganda sought to resolve the paradox by declaring the stormtroopers’ homoerotic living arrangements and emotional ties to be a product of the national emergency, which replicated wartime conditions. Stormtroopers would then abandon their same-sex lifestyles after political victory brought economic independence, personal autonomy, and the chance to become the patriarchs of their own nuclear families. But the Party’s effort simultaneously to promote two conflicting families created an escalating cycle of political violence: stormtroopers embraced political combat as the only way to destroy the Weimar Republic and re-create a utopian future based on an idealized past. The process of battle would also shape them into the hard men and noble warriors they claimed to be. By smashing the Republic, stormtroopers believed that they could become accomplished soldiers, successful merchants, and respected fathers, and thus lead their community to new prosperity. The approach brought them to power, but it did not, in the end, generate the results they hoped.

This dissertation uses the methodologies outlined above in connection with an interpretative stance toward National Socialism that that seems to be emerging ever more strongly around the turn of the 21st century, primarily from the pens of younger scholars more distant from the war. Past debates concerning this interpretive frame have called it historicization - as Martin Broszat described it, the possibility of treating the Third Reich
and Nazi Party as “normal” parts of history. Critics of historicization at times charge its practitioners with forgiving, accepting, or even condoning Nazi crimes. I reject this accusation, and prefer to describe to project with the German word *Entdramatisierung*: a removal of drama or de-escalating of emotions in regard to the subject. Without such an emotional détente, the popular conception of Nazism will remain forever in error. These concerns inform the choice of Hamburg as the stage on which this narrative will develop. The citizens of Hamburg - a traditionally independent, self-governing, and cosmopolitan “Free and Hanseatic City” - have long been considered an outpost of “English” political values in the heart of Germany, and are thus already far less stigmatized to an American audience. The men of the SA can then be considered as flawed democratic subjects, who embraced fascism as the best means through which to promote otherwise positive values of family, community, property, and authority. Their choice of violent means with which to advance these ends brings the narrative its tragic element, not only for the SA’s numerous victims but also for the stormtroopers themselves. SA men were among the first to suffer National Socialism’s violence. During the *Kampfzeit*, or “time of struggle” before 1933, stormtroopers across Germany were attacked, arrested, beaten, and killed through political conflict. At the time, they embraced the martyr’s role as a blood sacrifice that would bless the movement and speed it to power. But even after the

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69 Kershaw, 218-236. See also the exchange of letters between Broszat and Saul Friedländer, which began in the *Vierteljahresheft für Zeitgeschichte* and culminated in “A Controversy about the Historicization of National Socialism,” *New German Critique* 44: Special Issue on the Historikerstreit (1988): 85-126. See also Andrei Markovits’s “Introduction to the Broszat-Friedländer Exchange” in Ibid. 81-84.

70 I thank the participants of the German Historical Institute’s Transatlantic Doctoral Seminar (2006) for bringing this term to my attention, as well as demonstrating a variety of ways in which young scholars on both sides of the Atlantic may productively work with and against its suggestion.
takeover, the violence generated by stormtrooper politics rebounded back upon the SA men themselves.

The few stormtroopers who survived the Third Reich wrote bitter memoirs of how their struggle, in the end, destroyed the very things they sought to promote. They fatally damaged both the means (heroic soldier masculinity) and the ends (reactionary conceptions of family, tribe, nation, and religion) of their movement. The stormtroopers’ efforts to construct order from chaos were, if not futile from the start, misguided in their origins and abhorrent in their execution. The story is thus a tragedy for its protagonists, because their own actions brought destruction to their homes, families, and selves.71 Tragedy came as well, if not in the literary sense, for all others who came into National Socialism’s orbit, as the regime the SA helped create eventually killed millions of people far beyond the local boundaries within which the stormtroopers’ story began. The only positive good that can come out of such a narrative is if it serves as a warning to its readers. Thus to this tale’s more obvious tragic aspects can be added a final, potential element: that unless readers see their own societies, their own families, and their own selves in the stormtroopers, similar tragedies will recur. The public wants to retain its understanding of the Nazis as the ultimate bad guys: moral Others whose actions must be

71 As Hayden White wrote, “In Tragedy, there are no festive occasions, except false or illusory ones; rather, there are terrible intimations of states of division among men more terrible that that which incited the tragic agon at the beginning of the drama. Still, the fall of the protagonist and the shaking of the world he inhabits which occur at the end of the Tragic play are not regarded as totally threatening to those who survive the agonic test. There has been a gain in consciousness for the spectators of the contest. And this gain is thought to consist in the epiphany of the law governing human existence which the protagonist’s exertions against the world have brought to pass.” Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973)
scorned in order to preserve innocence of similar tendencies in the Self. Such Other-ing was the very project in which the Nazis themselves engaged.

My dissertation thus reclaims the Nazis as part of the human family - if not a pleasant part, one that cannot be disowned without consequences. It is for this reason I have chosen to focus on the “free and Hanseatic city” of Hamburg – a city-state long lauded by Anglo-American authors as a republican outpost of economic and individual liberty. Hamburg too, saw large numbers of its citizens put on the brown shirt, embrace National Socialism, and loudly cheer democracy’s fall. Readers of Hamburg’s descent into Nazism must grapple with the fall not as a product of an already-authoritarian state or populace, but as the outcome of a deteriorating democratic process.

Several challenges exist for studies on the Hamburg SA. The first concerns the state of the Hamburg SA Brigade’s files. They suffered two major losses, both by fire. The greatest came in July 1943, when major sections of Hamburg were firebombed as part of the Allies’ Operation Gomorrah. To be sure, many other SA units also saw their records burn with their cities. But Hamburg was particularly hard hit, especially given the fact that the Hamburg SA files had already suffered one trial by fire - an accidental blaze soon after the takeover of power. The lost files included almost all the materials on the group’s early history, which is now difficult to reconstruct in detail. Much of this history was never recorded in the first place, as National Socialism in Hamburg was in its early years ill-managed and ad hoc. The state of the files improves in 1925, when the Party returned from the ban caused by Hitler’s premature putsch, and again in 1930 with the
Party’s transformation into a mass political movement. The Party’s firmer footing also brought increasing numbers of newspapers, pamphlets, and books published for political purposes. All stormtrooper writings must of course be read with an eye to the writer’s agenda and self-deception. But many of the stormtroopers’ written works, especially those in fictional or semi-autobiographical form, speak to the emotional truths they saw at the heart of their movement. This dissertation uses such stories as a set of myths that describe an archetypical SA that existed only imperfectly in reality, but nevertheless described the psychological heart of the stormtrooper lifestyle during the Kampfzeit. Anecdotes and episodes from these lives appeared first in Nazi newspapers and the stormtroopers’ national journal, and were often told through the story of an anonymous, “unnamed stormtrooper.” Kampfzeit stories about the unknown stormtrooper in Nazi newspapers gave universal resonance to everyday experiences. After the takeover, they provided a mythic background for the movement by grounding its present in a heroic past. From 1932 to 1937, 16 works appeared starring an archetypical and often unnamed stormtrooper. They took place in a zone that Mircea Eliade, the famous mid-century scholar of myth and religion who was himself linked to Romania’s fascist Iron Guard movement, has called illud tempus: primordial time, a time outside of historical analysis and immune to refutation.72 The Nazis’ idealized accounts of themselves thus reflected a flight from fact itself, different even from biased and ideological histories. As John Marcus noted, Nazi historicity “is distinguished not merely by its bias - an attribute it shares with much non-totalitarian thought - but by its attempt to preclude any open-ended

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re-examination of its historical myths.” After all, Georges Sorel, whose philosophies influenced many fascists, had claimed that myths should not be judged on their truth or accuracy, but rather on their power to motivate action. The stormtroopers’ idealized self-images were thus immune to refutation from competing fact. They also encouraged readers to act in ways similar to the protagonists they portrayed.

This dissertation will approach the stormtroopers’ public pronouncements with an understanding of these purposes. It will read them not for facts about National Socialism, but rather as a discursive strategy to shape beliefs about the movement, both to the city and to the stormtroopers themselves. These stories’ everyday details also testified to the emotional experiences at the heart of the stormtrooper lifestyle – the intimate, everyday events among comrades and families that went unrecorded in organizational files. In the details of each anecdote, they are fictional, but they do explain both the stormtroopers’ beliefs about themselves and the process that created such beliefs.

These can then be compared with more traditional sources like police reports, judicial records, and articles in newspapers the Nazis did not control. Complete print runs for the party-political and non-aligned newspapers survive for the entire period, thus allowing the researcher a comprehensive look how the National Socialists’ Hamburger Tageblatt influenced more traditional and trustworthy news sources to cover political events in ways that advantaged the SA. This level of public discourse often discussed the

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state of the stormtroopers’ family lives, but the true picture of their domesticity - or lack thereof - must often be told through their encounters with the legal system and the SA’s own disciplinary channels.

The SA personnel records at the U.S. National Archives collect the SA’s surviving files on 716 rolls of microfilm, with another 300 rolls of alphabetical personnel records. The collection spans the range of the Nazi Party both geographically and temporally, though the majority of the documents come from the mid-1930s. These files contain a wealth of demographic data on the age, marital status, religion, and other familial traits of the SA men. This study has found 152 members of the Hamburg SA whose family histories can be combined in this way to form a more reliable aggregate picture of the state of the SA family. Official records in the Hamburg Staatsarchiv then chronicle the details, especially in 1934-35 in the context of stricter scrutiny of stormtrooper morality. Trial records from this period thus illuminate not only the post-takeover SA, but often also delve into the stormtroopers’ criminal backgrounds during the Weimar Republic. The police and judicial files for the Weimar and the Nazi periods were damaged through war, neglect, and mismanagement.\(^75\) The files that survive, however, are precisely those that best illustrate the stormtroopers’ turbulent personal lives. They include records of a variety of petty crimes, assaults, extortions, and “moral crimes” that transcribed the stormtroopers’ most hidden personal sins into the public record. In comparison with the stormtroopers’ own testimonies about their experiences,

these sources reveal the chasm between public testimonies and private lives. The tension between competing realities did not cause them to doubt National Socialism’s claims, but rather to cling increasingly to its violent methods as a way to secure the goal of a utopian family life.
CHAPTER 1
THE ORIGINS OF THE HAMBURG SA (1922-1929)

The young SA of the 1920s was not the mass paramilitary army it later became. The image of hundreds of uniformed stormtroopers marching in step through flag-bedecked streets lay far in the future. In its origins, the Hamburg SA was a small, cliquish group populated by the youngest and most physically active members of the local NSDAP. This was the SA as “Wehrverband” or “fighting club” – the first of three phases in the Kampfzeit SA’s organizational life cycle.\footnote{The terms come from Werner and Longerich. The two authors’ conceptions and terminology do not match perfectly, but both describe an SA that began as a small fighting group (Wehrverband) at times loosely connected to the NSDAP, swelled into a mass paramilitary wing of National Socialism (Parteitruppe or Massenorganisation), and culminated in a powerful force carrying out the Nazi revolution (Revolutionsarmee).} During the late Weimar crisis of 1929-1932, the SA became a “mass organization” [Massenorganisation], and it functioned as a “revolutionary army” [Revolutionsarmee] in 1933-1934 as it worked to build the new Nazi state. But as a young Wehrverband, the SA competed against an array of other nationalist pressure groups, veterans’ associations, and political sporting clubs built on pre-1914 models.

The stormtroopers, many of whom had recently returned from the front, sought at first to replicate traditional forms of political action in which their fathers had participated during the imperial period. They sought also the personal and professional fulfillment their fathers had found before the war. Almost immediately, however, they learned that prewar forms of political action proved difficult to replicate after 1918. Their frustration and increasing sense of impotence turned into rage. The adolescent SA of the 1920s was, like many individual adolescents, by turns attention-seeking and secretive,
aggressive and defensive, self-protective and self-destructive. It struggled to find a place in a political world dominated by older and more influential rivals in nationalist politics. Yet by 1929, the stormtroopers had built upon their fathers’ political techniques to form an effective new style of action that could compete with and convert members of competing rightist parties. The story of the Hamburg SA during the 1920s is therefore a tale of its members’ growing political maturity – a development they themselves interpreted as necessary for their personal maturation.

“Hansastadt Hamburg”: Political Culture in a Free City, 1712-1918

Historians have called Hamburg a “special case.”² It was a Free Imperial City under the Holy Roman Empire, one of a few city-states allowed to run its own affairs with little interference from a distant monarch. It was the largest, richest, and most important town of the old Hanseatic League, and thus possessed a social and cultural identity that was urban and provincial, yet also seafaring, cosmopolitan, and connected to foreign lands both on the continent and around the world. It was also governed by elites, a political form that Germans often call Honorationenpolitik – the government of notables. By 1712, when a new constitution empowering the Senate (Rathe, later Senat) and the Citizens’ Council (Bürgerschaft) became Hamburg’s “perpetual, immutable, and

² P.E. Schramm, Hamburg. Ein Sonderfall in der Geschichte Deutschlands (Hamburg: Christians, 1964). Schramm’s term has become a rallying point for historians of Hamburg, who have taken the term as a point of pride for the city even as they critique the accuracy of a “special case.” For one such critique, see Mary Lindemann’s “Fundamental Values: Political Culture in Eighteenth-Century Hamburg” In Patriotism, Cosmopolitanism, and National Culture in Hamburg: Public Culture in Hamburg 1700-1933, ed. Peter Uwe Hohendahl (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2003), 17-32.
irrevocable fundamental law,” the city had developed a form of republican oligarchy in which the heads of prominent merchant families managed city affairs with an emphasis on independence and trade. Hamburg’s political forms, according to its partisans, harkened back to ancient models – “that fortuitous mélange of aristocratic and democratic values revered since antiquity for its ability to produce social harmony, economic prosperity, and political stability while skirting the dual horrors of tyranny and mobocracy.” Hamburg’s notables, like the citizens of an ancient Greek polis, assumed responsibility for the protection and promotion of their “father city” [Vaterstadt]. They earned the right to do so through their deep familial and mercantile roots, as well as their conscious embrace of a corresponding set of civic virtues. These virtues mandated utilitarian policies that would maximize economic prosperity and bring public good to all. As such, the city-state conception of civic virtue was paternalistic and elitist, yet also focused on public works and the idea that the rule of law brought security and common gain. Civic values also lauded the educated middle classes as the foundation of society: not only merchants, but also lawyers, doctors, writers, pastors, and other intellectuals made up Hamburg’s civil society. Because of this constellation of social, political, and

3 Lindemann, 18. Ironically, this constitution came about through the intercession of Holy Roman Emperor Joseph I, whose imperial commission resolved a dispute between Hamburg’s political and religious factions that had been a source of conflict since the 1680s. See Gerd Augner, Die kaiserliche Kommission der Jahre 1708-1712. Hamburgs Beziehung zur Kaiser und Reich zu Anfang des 18. Jahrhunderts (Hamburg: Verein für Hamburgische Geschichte, 1983)

4 Lindemann, 19.


6 Katherine Aaslestad, Place and Politics. Local Identity, Civic Culture, and German Nationalism in North Germany during the Revolutionary Era (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2005), 33-45.

7 Ibid. 56-68.
economic traits, Hamburg often seemed culturally connected more to republican polities in England and Venice than to most other German cities. To be sure, Hamburg’s bourgeoisie differed from these others in its emphasis on austerity, its rejection of the Venetians’ ostentatious consumerism, and its distaste for the English aspiration to gain titles, landed property, and a place in the aristocracy. In Hamburg, bourgeois notables expected that the members of each new generation would confirm their elite status through a display of individual responsibility, morality, and self-discipline. By demonstrating these virtues, sons of the next generation confirmed their worthiness to wield political power over their city and its people.

Through the political upheavals of the late 18th century and the rising nationalism of the 19th century, Hamburg’s notables steered an independent course. They sought merely that the city run its own affairs, and they resisted absorption into larger states whether French, Danish, or German. Despite occasional occupation by various continental armies, Hamburg retained its independence and self-governance well into the 19th century as “an island of republicanism in a monarchical sea.” But Prussia’s wars of German unification in the 1860s and 1870s ended Hamburg’s official independence. Bismarck pressured the city to participate in Prussia’s wars against the Danes in 1864 and the Austrians in 1866, and he also made assurances that he would respect Hamburg’s economic interests and political independence. The Senate did not fully believe these promises, but it feared that continued resistance to Prussian plans would only bring

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9 Evans, 2.
outright annexation. It thus acquiesced and joined the Prussian-sponsored North German Confederation, as the last north German territory to compromise its sovereignty in this way. In 1871, all Confederation states became absorbed into the unified German Reich, and Hamburg’s formal independence was at an end.

True to the fears of those who resisted unification, Hamburg’s experience under the German Reich from 1871-1918 weakened the city’s Honoratiorenpolitik. Though some historians have still considered Hamburg a “foreign body” in the monarchy, most scholars note the decline of traditional republican values and practices after unification. Richard Evans’ influential Death in Hamburg portrayed the 1892 cholera epidemic as a breaking point between political forms. The epidemic, and the Senate’s failure effectively to respond to the crisis, “struck the death-knell for the old system of amateur government by local notables” and marked “the victory of Prussianism over liberalism, the triumph of state intervention over laissez-faire.” The crisis also inaugurated the rise of Hamburg’s labor movement and Social Democratic Party through an expansion of citizenship that transformed broke the elites’ monopoly on political participation. The mobilization of the masses in the 1890s changed both the style and the substance of political debate, as populist pressure groups arose throughout the Reich to promote economic reform, leftist labor politics, antisemitism, and radical nationalism. These rising pressure groups mixed with political parties to form clubs or associations - Vereine or Verbände - along

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12 Evans, viii.
models that had long existed in republican Hamburg, but were now turned to new purposes.\textsuperscript{14} During the great mobilization of the 1890s, Vereine based around ideology - many others were entirely apolitical and instead devoted to all manner of recreational activities - grew increasingly linked with political parties and specific political agendas. The most influential Vereine of this new type focused on economic issues, militancy, and nationalism. The Pan-German League and Navy League were among the two most prominent, and they enjoyed immense popularity in the coastal cities of northern Germany. Hamburg itself possessed the traits identified by Roger Chickering as that most conducive to associational political life: the city was a Protestant administrative center in which a large and influential class of merchants and officials felt threatened by rising Socialist gains in electoral politics, yet the notables clung to power using restrictive suffrage to secure a governing majority despite numerical decline.\textsuperscript{15} In the Kaiserreich’s final decades, the notables used political clubs and patriotic societies to integrate traditional political elites, prominent merchants and economic leaders, and a members of an increasingly numerous “national middle class” into a dizzying array of political clubs, gymnastic societies, trade associations, and veterans’ groups. These citizens could then, in theory at least, produce political consensus.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{14} Thomas Nipperdey, “Verein als soziale Struktur in Deutschland im späten 18. Jahrhundert und frühen 19. Jahrhundert,” in Geschichtswissenschaft und Vereinswesen im 19. Jahrhundert: Beiträge zur Geschichte historischer Forschung in Deutschland, Harmut Boockman et al. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1972), 1-44. On the rebirth of these “patriotic societies” in Bismarckian Germany see Chickering, \textit{We Men Who Feel Most German}, 23-43.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid, 142-143.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid, 194-205.
This dissertation is not the place to debate the actual influence of patriotic associations in imperial Germany.\textsuperscript{17} But the common conception of nationalist \textit{Vereine} as an illiberal, aristocratic defense mechanism of the upper class, which sought to divert social conflict outward through militant agitation, must be questioned – not least because in Hamburg the merchant bourgeoisie occupied social and political spaces inhabited by other regions’ aristocracies. In the end, rather than diminishing local political conflict, mass mobilization through political clubs only increased political strife.\textsuperscript{18} The trend worked to the detriment of Hamburg’s traditional \textit{Honoratiorenpolitik} – as did the growing power of the local SPD, whose adherence to a national platform and emphasis on party discipline reduced the possibility of compromise between political elites of differing factions.\textsuperscript{19} As the turn of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century approached, Hamburg’s notables were losing power from two sides. From above, they saw their independence diminished in favor of national policymakers in Berlin, while from below arose a newly politicized working and lower-middle class intent on breaking the elites’ political monopoly.

Hamburg’s traditional political forms were thus under siege even before the Great War of 1914-1918 transformed Germany into a virtual military dictatorship.\textsuperscript{20} The experience was in many ways the apotheosis of Hamburg’s loss of independence under the Empire. After the war ended with the Kaiser’s abdication, Hamburg looked to regain its independence, and its notables looked to recapture their political primacy. Neither of

\textsuperscript{17} The debate roughly maps the debate about the German \textit{Sonderweg}. Proponents of the special path tend to see the political \textit{Vereine} as tools of the monarchy without any real influence, while its opponents seek to prove robust populist participation in imperial politics.

\textsuperscript{18} Chickering, \textit{We Men Who Feel Most German}, 303.

\textsuperscript{19} Evans, 539-548.

\textsuperscript{20} On the wartime bureaucratic takeover of Germany by military leaders, see Chickering, \textit{Imperial Germany and the Great War, 1914-1918} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 76-82.
these hopes came fully to pass. As the Revolution of 1918 unfolded, bourgeois liberals came to realize that while the threat from above to Hamburg’s *Honoriatiorenpolitik* had been turned back, the threat from below was stronger than ever.

The Revolution of 1918 began in earnest on October 30, when sailors in Kiel refused to participate in a suicidal attack on the British fleet. Within days, the revolt acquired political character. The sailors hoisted red flags on their ships’ masts, formed workers’ and soldiers’ councils on the Russian model, and spread out across the North German coastal towns. It was a mass mutiny previously unthinkable in the German military, and one made possible only because sailors, soldiers, and workers had already lost faith in traditional political leaders. Hamburg’s citizens – both the notables and the masses – were no different. The city also hosted naval repair facilities, quartered many sailors, and possessed a large working class. These traits made it ripe for revolution even without the active measures revolutionary sailors and workers put forth. On November 4, the crew of a ship under repair in the harbor made contact with a trainload of sailors newly arrived from Kiel. The next evening they occupied ten police stations, where elderly policemen surrendered their weapons without resistance. Meanwhile, the workers’ and soldiers’ council in Cuxhaven printed tens of thousands of revolutionary pamphlets, which they dropped from a plane over Hamburg. They also sent the cruiser “Augsburg” upriver to found in Hamburg a Lower Elbe Sailors’ Council High Command

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“Oberste Marinerat Niederelbe” and to support a revolution in the city. Revolutionary sailors joined forces with members of the Independent Social Democrats (USPD), the SPD’s left wing which had broken away from the party in April 1917 over the war, and the Spartacists, a recently formed splinter group that sought a more combative revolutionary strategy. The developing revolution found similar allies across Germany. Once revolutionary councils had been established in cities as varied as Bremen, Munich, and Berlin, the Kaiser and his advisors surrendered power. Wilhelm abdicated his throne on November 9 and turned power over to a civilian government headed by Prince Max von Baden and the Social Democrat Friedrich Ebert.

In Hamburg, the Senate and Assembly that the workers’ councils had dissolved were soon re-formed, and bourgeois notables found themselves sharing power with a newly resurgent SPD. Such cooperation annoyed more orthodox and traditional elites, but it had proven productive in the past. Now, the two factions – the SPD as the voice of moderate social democracy, and a constellation of center-right or liberal parties that represented Hamburg’s traditional notables – joined forces to turn back the rising radicalism of the left, which coalesced in April 1919 with the founding of the German Communist Party (KPD). In this centrist alignment, however, the Social Democrats were definitively in charge. Historian Friedrich Meinecke, writing in 1930 from the viewpoint of the north German liberal elite, described his group’s “practical capitulation to the inevitable, which might be ennobled as the patriotic view that Germany’s salvation lay in

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23 Ibid. 78-80.
25 Evans, 555-556.
the consolidation of all non-Bolshevik forces.”

Hamburg’s notables had always considered themselves pragmatic managers of their city’s well-being, and they sought to retain this role by adjusting to new realities and working with the SPD to ensure Hamburg’s continued prosperity. But the Revolution of 1918 was not merely a political event that ended the national monarchy in favor of a republic. Because of its connection to the lost war and its tragic consequences, it was also a social upheaval that threatened any political form born in its wake.

**Hamburg After the First World War: Social and Political Change from 1918-1923**

The social and political disruptions caused by the loss of the war in 1918 have always played a prominent role in historical explanations of Weimar’s frailty and Nazism’s rise. Violent revolutions plagued the “stillborn democracy” from the start. On the left, they ranged from the Spartacists’ ill-fated Berlin uprising in January 1919 to the Hamburg KPD’s massive revolt of October 1923. These had to be put down by a combination of SPD civil defense forces, military and police units, and nationalist veterans’ groups known as Free Corps (Freikorps). The Free Corps and their cousins the *Wehrverbände* - paramilitary groups often aligned with political parties - attempted their

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26 Meinecke, 15.
27 Hans Mommsen called this process “The Inner Rejection of the Peace” in his *The Rise and Fall of Weimar Democracy* (Frankfurt am Main: Propyläen Verlag, 1989), English translation by Elborg Forster and Larry Eugene Jones 1996, 89-128. Theodore Abel’s analysis of SA biographies revealed this to be the general consensus among the stormtroopers as well, 21-39.
own coups as well, as in the failed Kapp Putsch of March 1920 and Hitler’s own attempted putsch in November 1923. Nationalist secret societies also murdered a number of republican officials, especially from 1921 to 1923. Though none of the revolts succeeded, they created an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty that prevented political stabilization in the early Weimar years. Additionally, the postwar need for private defense groups – *Freikorps* for border protection, and citizens’ militias (*Einwohnerwehr*) to fight urban uprisings – taught many nationalist war veterans that the country had lost the political and moral will to defend itself. They thus joined paramilitary *Wehrverbände* with a sense of moral superiority to the pacifist and socialist elements now in charge. These men became among the earliest recruits to the SA.29

Many Germans also saw both political and moral peril in 1918-1923. As Richard Bessel notes in his study of the war’s aftermath, Germans interpreted the political chaos and economic misery of the postwar years as the loss of a stable, prewar social order:

The world, it seemed, had been turned upside down. Authority no longer commanded respect; ‘bad elements’ dictated the tenor of public life; respect for hard work and thrift were collapsing with the currency; cavalier disregard for civilized rules of behavior had replaced pre-war social stability; a get-rich-quick mentality prevailed and success came to the unscrupulous rather than the industrious; and the ‘strict order of former times’ had dissolved in an anarchy in which sound moral values appeared to count for nothing.30

Hamburg’s future stormtroopers agreed with this assessment. The sight of mutinous sailors and rebellious workers occupying the Rathaus square particularly horrified them.

Alfred Conn, a charismatic leader who headed the Hamburg SA for a time, described the revolutionary scene as a “dissolution of all order” that “caused pain in my soul.” Conn tried to make sense of the situation by seeking advice from his father’s elite social network:

To ease my conscience, I contacted Bürgermeister Schröder, whom my father knew from school, and I asked him what I should do. I told him that I had sworn my loyalty to the Senate and was prepared to honor it, if he felt it was needed and that we could then reconquer Hamburg. But His Magnificence impressed upon me to stay away from such things. And surely he was correct. The Bürgertum from which I descended had grown averse to conflict [blutschen], and had allowed itself to be trampled by a handful of rebellious sailors. Was it worth it then, to defend them in the future?

Conn therefore abandoned his ideas of turning back the supposed assault on traditional Hamburg. He instead joined his father’s trading firm, which had been in the family for generations. Many of Hamburg’s early stormtroopers who came from merchant families followed this pattern, whether working directly for their fathers or using their fathers’ contacts to start businesses of their own. Many of the future SA-Medical Officers (SA-Sanitätsführer) followed their fathers into medicine. This group returned from the war and began their studies at the newly opened University of Hamburg, or in medical schools in Lübeck and Kiel. Even SA-men who pursued different careers than their fathers often allowed their fathers significant influence over their choices. SA-Mann Hans M. described in his official biography [Lebenslauf] how he had come to a career:

“In compliance with my fathers’ wishes I learned the profession of upholsterer and

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31 FZG 11C1 Alfred Conn. Aufzeichnungen, 10.
32 FZG 11C1 Alfred Conn. Aufzeichnungen, 10.
33 For several examples from the NARA A3341 SA Kartei: 006 Otto A., 030, Herbert B., 071 Franz H., 096 August K., 123 Paul B., 141a Adolf L., 205 Kurt H.
34 NARA A3341 SA Kartei: 060 Friedrich F., 105 Friedrich O., 092 Karl K.
decorator.” Future stormtroopers also found work through mobilizing traditional forms of male associational life such as fraternities. Male networks and role models proved crucial in rebuilding lives interrupted by the war, as well as socializing young men as members of Hamburg’s elite governing class.

The young men who were to form the SA thus began their political lives in an atmosphere of extreme instability in which traditional political solutions seemed increasingly inadequate. At first, Hamburg’s early stormtroopers modeled their lives on their fathers’ prewar paths, which had given their families social and economic standing as prosperous members of Hamburg’s merchant notables. The National-Liberal or Conservative sympathies of the fathers’ generation led their sons into politics along similar ideological lines. Many of the future stormtroopers first joined their fathers’ political parties, as Conn did with the German National Peoples’ Party (DNVP). The DNVP, along with the German Peoples’ Party (DVP) and others, were new entities that many stormtroopers and their fathers joined as substitutes for the old Conservative, Nationalist, and National-liberal parties. Seen from both the liberal center and the nationalist right, the German party system had so fractured as to be unrecognizable, especially given the further splintering of these new parties in the early 1920s.

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35 NARA A3341 SA Kartei 048b Hans M.
36 Albert Krebs got his job in this way with the conservative, Nazi-sympathizing trade union the German Nationalist Workers Association (DHV), as he described in The Infancy of Nazism: The Memoirs of Ex-Gauleiter Albert Krebs. (New York: New Viewpoints, 1976), 4-5.
37 On the origins of the DNVP and its overlapping relationships with the Conservative Party and other bourgeois political entities, see Lewis Hertzman’s DNVP: Right-Wing Opposition in the Weimar Republic, 1918-1924. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1963,) 32-55.
multitude of parties that competed for loyalty of the old liberal notables, the reactionary conservative nationalists, and the mobilized working class meant that the Republic could be neither stabilized nor overthrown. The liberals’ failure to generate positive consensus proved fatal to both local and national republicanism. Bourgeois liberal powerlessness was felt particularly in Hamburg, where they had long reigned. Ironically, nationalist disunity proved equally fatal to democracy by encouraging a competition for increasingly extreme methods of nationalist politics, in which the young SA used violence to solidify a new and militant rightist coalition. The disunity of the right was therefore, as Larry Eugene Jones has commented, “a prerequisite for the establishment of the Third Reich that was every bit as essential as the fragmentation of the bourgeois middle or the schism on the socialist left.”

Even if the fathers’ parties had fractured, stormtroopers hoped to replicate the previous generation’s political practices – at least at first. After 1918, the Vereine played a key role in reconstituting social ties and rebuilding Hamburg’s political community. According to Freudenthal’s study of Hamburg’s Vereine, many reached new membership highs in the years 1918-1924. Hamburger saw the Vereine as a way to rebuild ties of family, friendship, or common economic or social interest that had been weakened by the war and revolution. The postwar return to Vereinsleben (“club life”) prompted the eventual creation of the SA in two ways. First, it created a seemingly natural affinity for

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rightist political parties among the patriotic sons of Hamburg’s Burghers. Second, it influenced the political methods used by the NSDAP, which began its life as a political club along the old model before it birthed the SA from frustration at the failure of traditional politics.

Many early stormtroopers were raised in nationalist families. So to question these convictions was to question the lessons their fathers had taught them. To the sons, the revolution of 1918 did not prove the flaws in the imperial system, but showed instead that internal enemies had subverted the state to selfish and destructive purposes. In essays that described their paths to National Socialism, many stormtroopers cited their family backgrounds as their reason for opposing socialism and revolution. Sturmführer Schipper, an “old fighter” who was among the original Hamburg stormtroopers, described his nationalist politics as a simple matter of how he was raised:

Having been raised from my youth as a nationalist, I recognized quite early that political fragmentation and the Marxist course would lead to the powerlessness and death of our Vaterland. In accordance with my upbringing I joined the so-called nationalist camp.

To Schipper, nationalism was self-understood, and it needed little explanation other than an appeal to what he had learned at home. SA-Mann Werner B., one of the stormtroopers who had moved to Hamburg from its Prussian outskirts in search of economic opportunity, agreed. He wrote that “Communist ideas were foreign to me, having grown

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42 The bourgeois-conservative press Hanseatische Verlaganstalt pushed this line of argument in many of its works, including those by the nationalist journalist Gottfried Zarnow (Ewald Moritz). His 1933 work Der 9 November 1918 called the revolution “the most disgraceful treason known in the history of mankind,” which was the work of “malicious agitators” who “kindled it” for selfish gain. (Hamburg: Hanseatische Verlaganstalt, 1933), reprinted as “Stab in the Back – A Nationalist View” in Hunt, ed. 16-24)
43 StAH B228
up in an East-Prussian family of teachers with strong *vaterländisch* orientation." The proud father of another stormtrooper, “who from his 18th year onwards was moved by nothing else than a desire to fight for the Führer and for National Socialism,” expressed similar sentiments when he credited his son’s SA membership to “a strict breeding and sense of order learned in his parents’ home.” The stormtroopers saw nationalism and antisocialism as a natural inheritance.

They did not, however, automatically end up in the SA. Given the fractured rightist milieu, the majority of Hamburg’s stormtroopers began their political activity in other parties than the NSDAP, and with other paramilitaries than the SA. Many stormtroopers served simultaneously in more than one *Wehrverband*. The largest and most prestigious group, the Stahlhelm, was a veterans’ association that stayed officially “above parties,” though in practice cooperated with those of the center-right. Other popular paramilitaries open to young male nationalists were the Wehrwolf, the Deutschvölkischer Schutz- und Trutz-Bund, Jungdeutscher Orden, Verband Hindenburg, and the Kyyfhäuser Bund. Some of these groups identified with a single political party while others did not, but, as Volker Berghahn described the Stahlhelm, “they were no democrats, and they hoped for the destruction of ‘the System.’” These paramilitaries also fought with each other almost as much as they battled their common Socialist and Communist enemies. The young SA was born into this environment, and it competed with all these groups for members. But in some cases, the SA lacked their advantages.

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44 NARA A3341 SA Karweit 039 Werner B.
45 NARA A3341 SA Karweit 206 Günther H.
47 Ibid. 7.
The DSTB, for instance, was an offshoot of the Pan-German League, while the Verband Hindenburg and Kyyhäuser Bund traded on connections to military leaders such as Hindenburg and Ludendorff. Many of the older generation saw the NSDAP as an upstart party not ready for a leadership role. Krebs’ patrons in the German Nationalist Workers Association (DHV), a conservative trade union, chuckled when he told them of his Nazi sympathies. One called the Party an “enfant terrible”, the well-intentioned but wild outburst of “confused youth,” whose immaturity had to be overcome before it could be taken seriously as a political force. Many other parties fit this description as well, both among the traditional right and the bourgeois liberals. Political movements had two ways to gain attention in Weimar’s system of myriad parties: either to unite around a universally admired military hero, which happened briefly with Hindenburg’s 1925 election, or to forge a new brand of politics whose forcefulness and aggression would draw members away from weaker-seeming groups.

The National Socialists’ creation of the SA signaled that the movement had embraced the latter path of violence. The choice was in part a reaction to the injection of violence into the politics of the postwar period, in which a general atmosphere of violence and uncertainty prevailed. The German army had been forcibly disbanded, the French had occupied the Rhineland, the Soviets and new Slavic states seemed to threaten Germany’s fragile eastern borders, and the KPD whipped up domestic

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49 Krebs, 5.

disturbances on a regular basis across the Republic. But violence entered local political life in a more prosaic and important way: the traditional sites of political life, the taverns where Vereine and parties conducted political business, became unsafe. This development created the need for violent defense of the meeting hall and precipitated the birth of the SA.

From Vereinsleben to Stormtrooper Violence: The Transformation of Nazi Politics, 1922-1924

The Hamburg chapter of the NSDAP was founded on January 24, 1922, by Joseph Klant, the elderly proprietor of a cigar store just down the street from the newly founded university in the upscale neighborhood of Rotherbaum. He and the other four initial members began to campaign by word of mouth. They enlisted friends, relatives, and acquaintances to join to party. Early events conformed to the Verein’s rituals of political meetings, which were located in the traditional setting of Hamburg politics. Taverns, public houses, and drinking clubs had throughout the 19th century hosted the Vereine that institutionalized Hamburg’s most common forms of political discourse. Taverns dominated Hamburg’s political life to such an extent that the city’s unusually active political police had long sent undercover agents to monitor the guests and record their views on imperial politics. In contrast to the beer halls and outdoor Biergärten of southern Germany and the informal “Schnapskasinos” in the Ruhr, Hamburg’s taverns

51 Arthur Böckenhuauer, 10 Jahre SA Hamburg in Bildern mit verbindendem Text. (Hamburg, 1932), 32.
52 Alfred, Bordihn, 10 Jahre Kreis Rotherbaum der NSDAP. (Hamburg: Paul Meyer, 1935), 5.
were unpretentious one- or two-room establishments with rough wooden tables and chairs. The typical tavern offered space for 15-20 customers, who purchased beer, schnapps, and simple food items. Most taverns possessed a second “club room” that allowed space for more formal meetings, lectures, and political discussions. The owner and his family, who ran the establishment, lived above or next to the tavern, while the customers comprised men who lived or worked in its neighborhood. The guests typically visited the pub on their way home from work, drank a few pints, and read aloud articles from the newspapers that the tavern-keeper made available. The choice of newspaper signaled the pub’s political affiliation, which was important to draw or repel customers. Tavern-owners tended to agree with – or cater to – the mood of the neighborhood. Pubs in working-class areas near the docks featured the socialist *Hamburger Echo*, while taverns in the wealthier areas around the Alster – Hoheluft, Eppendorf, and St Georg-Nord, for instance – carried liberal papers like the venerable *Hamburger Nachrichten* and *Hamburger Fremdenblatt*, or even radical antisemitic magazines. These publications formed the basis of discussions that, as the political police recognized, were often more loose-lipped for taking place in an alcoholic setting.

Formal meetings and lectures proceeded along traditional lines as well. Meetings often began with music or light patriotic entertainment: “German songs,” “German dances”, or readings from the German classics. Meetings then moved to formal speeches by local party activists. The political speech constituted the central element of this
associational ritual. An effective speaker had to address attention-grabbing national issues (such as the economic terms of the Versailles Treaty, or the French occupation of the Ruhr) in a forceful and organized manner that connected with the audience’s preeminent concern for local affairs (for example, the Treaty’s effect on Hamburg’s shipping industry, or the connection between the current French occupation of German soil and the Napoleonic army’s behavior in Hamburg). The best speakers were able to engage the active audience, who spontaneously interjected rebuttals and catcalls whenever their sensibilities were offended. Individuals unconvinced by a speaker’s point of view could also offer formal rebuttals. The bond between speaker and audience, as well as among the audience members, was strengthened by the consumption of alcohol before and during the event.

Hamburg’s taverns were politicized sites of strident disagreement. Yet they had not been violent places before the war. If a tavern-keeper’s politics ill-matched the political tenor of the neighborhood, the worst he could expect was a boycott of his trade. Customers expressed political conviction with their pocketbooks, and a tavern-keeper

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54 Roger Chickering, “Political Mobilization and Associational Life: Some Thoughts on the National Socialist German Workers Club (e.V.)” in Elections, Mass Politics, and Social Change in Modern Germany, Larry Eugene Jones and James Retallack, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 307-328. See 313-317 on the nature and meaning of tavern meetings as the central political ritual of the Nazis and other nationalist parties in the early Weimar years.

55 A vast anthropological and historical literature exists on the utility of alcohol in forming social bonds among unrelated men in northern Europe. James S. Roberts’s Drink, Temperance, and the Working Class in 19th Century Germany refuted the teetotalers’ stereotype of alcohol as a course of working class misery (Boston: George Allen & Unwin, 1984), while Ann Pinson’s study of Iceland framed alcohol as essential to creating “quasi-kin” networks of regular drinking partners, as well as lubricating social relationships with those outside the core network. “The Institution of Friendship and Drinking Patterns in Iceland.” Anthropological Quarterly, 58:2 (1985): 75-82. Hasso Spode’s Der Macht der Trunkenheit: Kultur- und Sozialgeschichte des Akohols in Deutschland presented similar claims, especially in his portrayal of earlier periods of German history in which massive drinking bouts (Gelage) raised social prestige and produced collective, quasi-religious ecstasies. (Opladen: Leske & Budrich, 1983)
who misjudged his neighborhood’s orientation soon closed shop. Violence and tavern-brawls - those, at least, that originated in political disagreements - were unusual. This changed in the Weimar years. The taverns’ political role remained unchanged: they hosted meetings and speeches of the neighborhood’s dominant faction. However, the political disruption of the war and revolution destabilized neighborhood politics. There were more parties now, and more competition for voters’ loyalty. Most importantly for the SA’s development, conflict over the loyalty of a tavern turned violent.

Like the national Party, the Hamburg NSDAP decided early to form a protection squad for meetings. Unlike Hitler’s Munich SA, the Hamburg group declined the euphemism “Sport-Abteilung” (“Sport-Division”) and called their group the “Saalschutz-Abteilung” (“Hall Protection Division”), or simply “Sturmmtrupp” (“Storm Troop”). In doing so, they were not taking orders directly from Munich, as would later have been the case. In the movement’s early phase, NSDAP cells outside of Munich remained relatively independent of the national party. The Hamburg Nazis formed their SA not because they were ordered to, but because they faced the same problem as their comrades in Munich: disruptions and attacks on their taverns by Socialist and Communist opponents.

The first SA units in Munich claimed a battle in the Hofbrauhaus as its founding moment. Versions of the myth varied, but all described an attack by socialists on a meeting at which Hitler was trying to speak. Hitler described the iconic conflict in Mein Kampf, socialist “enemies” arrived early at the Hofbrauhaus in order to claim strategic

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57 Böckenhauer, 4.
58 Werner, 50
places in the hall. This was not unusual, Hitler claimed, but it was the first meeting at which he organized a successful defense. He gathered a small “monitor troop” around himself and gave a short speech:

I made it clear to the lads that today probably for the first time they would have to show themselves loyal to the movement through thick and thin, and that not a man of us must leave the hall unless we were carried out dead; I myself would remain in the hall, and I did not believe that a single one of them would desert me… Then I called upon them to advance immediately at the slightest attempt to break up the meeting, and to bear in mind that the best defense lies in your own offensive.\(^\text{59}\)

Hitler’s speech began quietly, but after a time a socialist signaled the prearranged attack. As was usual in tavern brawls, the everyday objects of the drinking hall saw new service as missiles and bludgeons:

In a few seconds the whole hall was filled with a roaring, screaming crowd, over which, like howitzer shells, flew innumerable beer mugs, and in between the cracking of chair-legs, the crashing of the mugs, bawling, howling, screaming. … I should have liked to see a bourgeois meeting under such circumstances.\(^\text{60}\)

Hitler’s description of the brawl played up several of the central tropes of the SA’s tavern violence. The scene witnessed the eruption of war into a domestic space, during which the hordes of socialists prevented an upstanding, German discussion of political problems. But in this description, Hitler tried to have things both ways. On the one hand, he played to audience sympathy for traditional \textit{Verein}-values of discussion, debate, and the rule of reason over violence. But he also mocked the “bourgeois meeting” style he claimed to defend. In his jokes here and elsewhere in \textit{Mein Kampf} about the helplessness and futility of the “club mentality” [\textit{Vereinsmeierei}], he characterized the


\(^{60}\) Ibid, 505.
traditional style of politics as too mired in talk to act. The stormtroopers therefore embodied the militant defense of protocol, order, and reasoned political debate, even as they behaved like the shock-troops of the trenches from which they took their name:

For twenty minutes the hellish tumult lasted, but then our enemies, who must have numbered seven and eight hundred men, had for the most part been beaten out of the hall and chased down the stairs by my men numbering not even fifty. Only in the left rear corner of the hall a big group stood its ground and offered embittered resistance. Then suddenly two shots were fired from the hall entrance toward the platform, and wild shooting started. Your heart almost rejoiced at such a revival of old war experiences.

Who was shooting could not be distinguished from that point on; only one thing could be definitely established, that from this point on the fury of my bleeding boys exceeded all bounds and finally the last disturbers were overcome and driven out of the hall.

About twenty-five minutes had passed; the hall looked almost as if a shell had struck it. Many of my supporters were being bandaged; others had to be driven away, but we had remained masters of the situation. Hermann Esser, who had assumed the chair this evening, declared, “The meeting goes on. The speaker has the floor.” And then I spoke again.

Whether or not Hitler’s report was accurate in its specifics, it marked the Party’s desire to create a troop that could eject protestors without reliance on the police. Hitler and his stormtroopers could thereby pose as the defenders of bourgeois order against an increasingly aggressive and violent generation of socialists. But the stormtroopers themselves represented a political innovation, as became clear in the delight with which Hitler described the warlike elements of the Hofbrauhaus battle. Hamburg’s

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61 Chickering’s “Political Mobilization and Associational Life” contains a good summary of Hitler’s editorializing on this subject. 309-313. Chickering sees in Hitler’s comments “a call for a radical alternative” to the Vereine, which Hitler considered “the bedrock of a moribund political culture.” 310.
62 Hitler, 506. For the development and role of stormtrooper units in German army of the First World War, see Bruce Gudmundsson, Stormtroop Tactics: Innovation in the German Army 1914-1918 (Westport, CT: Praeger Paperback, 1995). Ian Drury’s German Stormtrooper, 1914-1918 (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 1995) contains a wealth of visual images on these units’ uniforms, weapons, and tactics.
63 Longerich, 23.
stormtroopers existed in particular paradox: they claimed that their warlike tendencies and pursuit of violent political struggle were necessary to defend a traditional way of life. But they decried the very values that way of life entailed: bourgeois standards of moderation, compromise, civility, and restraint that the stormtroopers decried as decadent weaknesses in the postwar era.

The very pleasure of battle attracted many stormtroopers to the SA, and consequently the NSDAP, over the myriad other parties of the right. The SA made a striking visual impression merely standing guard, before swinging into action. Conn described the first time he saw a Nazi meeting, in Wedel, where he sometimes traveled as a representative of his father’s business:

The mood was tumultuous. In the square before the Lokal was a gesticulating mob, quite openly Communist-led, which demonstrated against our event. But here was no young Bürgerverein; here one wasn’t for passive resistance like the German-nationals, but was active instead. In all entrances of the hall stood martial men [wehrhafte Männer], mostly from the Freikorps Raven, in closed formation, ready to beat back the expected attack on the tavern.64

That the Freikorps-men joined the NSDAP as a protection troop signified to Conn, who like many future Hamburg stormtroopers himself had served in a Freikorps unit (the Ehrhardt Brigade) and a citizens’ militia (the Bahrenfelder Zeitfreiwilligenkorps), that the party sought not only to represent nationalist causes but to do so in the most militant manner possible. Many other early stormtroopers held this view as well.65 They had joined various Wehrverbände as an expression of patriotism and to defend national and

64 FZG 11C 1 – Alfred Conn – Nachlass, 32. Conn’s use of “our” in this context is retroactive, as he had not yet joined the NSDAP at the time.
local stability. After the SA’s foundation, many of these men grew closer to the NSDAP.66 Sturmführer Schipper had first joined the Jungstahlhelm, which appeared to represent the broadest mass of the German nationalists. But he came to believe that the Stahlhelm and the other paramilitaries of the right were fractured and disunited. They represented symptoms of, not solutions to, the problems of democracy. Schipper converted to the SA after a Hitler speech that promised the unity of all Germans under a nationalist banner. Schipper put it in simple terms: “Unity brings strength.” [“Einigkeit macht stark.”]67 Unity demanded total commitment of those who would achieve it, and Schipper believed only the NSDAP and its SA offered this type of political style: “I am an SA-Mann because here I have the best chance actively to struggle with my entire being, to fight… in the front ranks of the struggle.”68 Another Sturmführer echoed Schipper’s positive feelings in many of the same words: “Why am I an SA-Mann? Because my very being demands that I stand as a fighter, and enter at the point of struggle with my entire being.”69

In the same way that the story of the Munich SA’s first battle in the Hofbrauhaus became part of the founding myths of the national party, the Hamburg SA’s first conflicts became local legends. Both police reports and the SA’s own accounts recorded confrontations with political opponents from the local Party’s earliest days. These conflicts were ensured by Klant’s decision to hold the first Party meetings in Tosbys, a famed socialist tavern decorated with portraits of Marx, Engels, and other leading

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66 StAH 614 - 2/5 B170  
67 StAH 614 - 2/5 B228  
68 StAH 614 - 2/5 B228  
69 StAH 614 - 2/5 B228
personalities of the left. After the first few meetings of the party, the other guests of the pub began to threaten the National Socialists, and Klant moved their meetings elsewhere. The party soon found, however, that the socialists followed them wherever they went. According to one later tribute,

It wasn’t long before the young local group [Ortsgruppe] had to stand its test of fire. On September 25 some 30 party members and guests found themselves in the first floor club room for a night of speeches. Suddenly it began: Socialists and Communists had snuck in and were attempting to blow up the meeting of the hated Nazis, in whom they instinctively saw the archenemy of their parties. The attempted disturbance soon developed into a brawl during which the red bully-brothers were shown the door. The noise drew the curious, and the fight broke out again, shots fell, and finally the police [Sipo] appeared, restoring the peace through the employment of their nightsticks. That was the first hall fight [Saalschlacht] the Hamburg Ortsgruppe faced.71

Nazi accounts of SA battles – either the incident in Tosbys or generally – cannot be trusted to depict without bias the events. But they nonetheless demonstrate the essential myths to which every stormtrooper clung. In this case, the Tosbys story argued that the NADAP’s attempts at political expression and honest debate were continually under attack by hordes of Marxist thugs:

This proved how necessary it was that the Ortsgruppe had gone on the attack in forming its own Stormtroop so quickly after its founding. The opponents of the NSDAP would not fight the new movement through spiritual weapons, but rather used violence and terror, and this brought the party to organize its own Stormtroop to defend against the brutal attacks and to keep order within its meetings.72

71 Recken and Krafft, 55.
72 Recken and Krafft, 55.
Additionally, the Nazis believed that the socialists had the aid of the state and police apparati, which were themselves biased against the National Socialists:

The experience showed that the police either came too late to the opponents’ attempts to disturb our meetings, or intervened only when forced to, and then not against the Marxist disturbers of the peace but against the hated National Socialists, who were worked over with nightsticks just for seeking to exercise their rights. In principle, the ruling system wanted the meetings of the NSDAP to end in brawls and tumult, with broken chairs and busted skulls. The guardians of order could then prove the conduct of the party to be disturbing to the peace and dangerous to the state, and they could then justify their bans to the public.73

In interviews conducted after the war, some socialists who fought the Nazis during the “time of struggle” admitted their role in seeking out tavern violence. They too saw these battles, which mainly took place in the border neighborhoods between bourgeois and working-class quarters, as defensive actions. Paul M. described his efforts in Eimsbüttel as an effort to keep out “National-Socialist strength, German-national, however you want to call them. … One tavern [the Von-der-Tan-Strasse] we attacked especially, quite often I must say. We broke in the doors or the windows, and then ran off.”74 Heinz Preiss, a Communist youth group member in the late 20s, bristled when an interviewer asked how his group had “provoked” the Nazis in St Georg, whether in the taverns themselves or on the streets:

Q: And how did one provoke the Nazis, for example during demonstrations? Were there specific techniques?
A: It would probably give a false impression to say it that way. But specific counter-actions of the [Communist] Party and its youth league were assured. Special groups were armed … Most of the time they were created for the protection of the Party. And the taverns and demonstrations. But the groups often ensured counter-

73 Recken and Krafft, 60.
74 Forschungsstelle für Zeitgeschichte – Werkstatt der Erinnerung – 123T
actions as well. That’s one aspect of it. The way things are talked about today, it would come close to terrorism. But it wasn’t.

A: The confrontations were certainly carried out in a very militant manner.

Q: Well, that’s different.\(^{75}\)

The NSDAP thus felt compelled to create the SA, as a practical defense against socialist disruption, as a shock troop to attack enemy taverns (though they claimed they never did so), and as a propaganda instrument to draw militant young men away from other rightist parties.

However, the young Party and its Storm-troop fell victim to broader national political developments before its first year had even passed. On November 20, 1922, following the lead of the Prussian state government, Hamburg’s political police banned the NSDAP and SA under the provisions of the Law for the Protection of the Republic. The police accused the NSDAP of conducting “antisemitic, anti-republican hatred” in coordination with other rightist groups, as well as exchanging suspicious regular correspondence with the Munich NSDAP headquarters in the aftermath of Foreign Minister Walter Rathenau’s murder at the hands of right-wing extremists.\(^{76}\) The police also singled out the SA in their rationale for the ban:

The reasons for the dissolution of the NSDAP in Prussia are valid for Hamburg as well. In particular, it has built a ‘Sturmtrupp’, which possesses a flag and demands from its members a loyalty oath upon this flag, that they will keep loyalty and obedience to their leaders until death, and to the flag loyalty and allegiance until victory in the final battle is celebrated.\(^{77}\)

\(^{75}\) Forschungsstelle für Zeitgeschichte – Werkstatt der Errinnerung – 247T
\(^{76}\) Bordihn, 10.
\(^{77}\) Ibid, 10
Both the party and SA responded to the ban by re-forming under an ever-shifting array of cover names. The Party portrayed itself as the more intellectual of the two. It refashioned itself along traditional lines of a scientific or charitable Verein, using such disguises as the “Club for Biology and Racial Science”, the “Ruhr-Aid” (Ruhrhilfe), and “German Building- and Economic League”.78 Many of these met in the homes of individual members. When they met in taverns, Klant – “indefatigable as the clever Odysseus,” as one official Nazi history later described him during the ban – found a variety of cover stories to camouflage Nazi meetings from the police. These schemes grew increasingly elaborate, especially when he hosted events in public. For one meeting during this period Klant managed to book Hamburg’s most popular meeting hall, Sagebiel. This allowed a larger audience than the usual living-room gatherings, but required a convoluted disguise lest it attract police attention. Klant masked the event as an engagement party. A young woman volunteered to be the bride, and Klant ordered a Party member to play the groom. Klant himself gave the toast to the bridal couple, a multi-hour speech that functioned as advertisement for National Socialism.79

Party accounts published after the Nazis’ rise to power claimed that the Party continued to thrive during this time, but other testimonies disagreed. Conn recalled a small group of 20-30 regular attendees at Nazi meetings, with a small increase over time.80 The secrecy and deception involved in these gatherings made it difficult for the

78 Böckenhauer, 4. Freudenthal lists these and several additional cover names, all of which follow traditional Vereine naming conventions, including the Verein für moderne Kultur- und Seelenlehre and the Verein für klassische Musik. 336. For general naming conventions of traditional clubs, see Freudenthal, 421-423.
79 Recken and Krafft, 58
80 FZG 11C1 - Alfred Conn - Nachlasse, 35
party to attract new members, and the loss of the SA as a visible symbol weakened the
would-be militant party’s attractiveness. Conn recalled one incident in which a friend
visiting him to learn more about politics resisted attending what was advertised as a night
of German song:

He was not very excited when I told him that I wanted to invite him to a
meeting of the Club for the Preservation of German Song, of which I was
a member. On the stage sat an old barrel organ on which a festive piano
piece was played by way of introduction. My acquaintance asked,
astonished, what was going on in here. Then Klant took the stage. He said
that German song must be promoted, that was what we were there for. But
it was necessary first to know what is German in the first place. And then
Klant opened fire with all registers of his speaking ability. Only then did
my acquaintance realize that the evening concerned forbidden topics. He
later gave an enthusiastic account of the meeting in Magdeburger circles.\textsuperscript{81}

In general, however, the Party remained trapped in a paradoxical situation in which the
more effectively it hid its true identity, the harder it was to spread its influence.

Conversely, the more openly the Nazis articulated their principles, the more attention
they drew from the police. In the end, political action under these circumstances was self-
defeating: If the Nazis’ guests – like Conn’s friend – could figure out the hidden message,
the police soon could as well. On July 8 1923, the police raided the party’s secret
headquarters in Klant’s Grindelallee cigar store. They found a stash of illegal propaganda
materials, as well as a cigar box full of membership cards that they forwarded to a court
in Leipzig for further investigation. Klant himself was immediately arrested and later
sentenced to four months’ jail and a fine of 500 RM.\textsuperscript{82}

\textsuperscript{81} FZG Ibid, 33
\textsuperscript{82} Bordihn, 6. He was released early, however, on September 12.
This ignominious episode cemented the lack of respect that many party members - and especially the young militants of the SA - had for Klant and his circle. Conn had never approved of Klant, whom he called “the old man.”\(^{83}\) Conn claimed that Klant’s “somewhat raw, blood-raising antisemitic tone” was an anachronism and that he had failed to grasp the progress that had been made in the younger generation’s understanding of völkisch ideology.\(^ {84}\) Joseph Goebbels called him “Vater Klant,” while the younger party members criticized his lack of interest in recruiting younger, more energetic members for the party.\(^ {85}\) Klant’s failure to hide incriminating party materials from the police – especially the damning membership cards, which brought all party members in legal jeopardy – was typical for his disorganized leadership. The political leadership of the party thus failed to survive the ban on the NSDAP. The remnants of the party eventually re-christened themselves the National Socialist Freedom Movement (NSFB) and joined a coalition of rightist groups called the Peoples’ Social Block (Volk-Soziale Block, VSB). The move further alienated many young stormtroopers, who saw it as a retreat into the fragmented “club mentality” [Vereinsmeierei] from which they had hoped the SA could rescue the nation.

The SA itself remained true to its origins and remade itself into as a sporting club, the “Blücher Gymnastic, Sport, and Hiking Club” (“Blücher Turn- Sport- und Wanderverein”). (Images 1.1 and 1.2) Arthur Böckenhauer, a 24 year-old former police officer who had been released from service because of his participation in anti-republican

\(^{83}\) FZG 11C1 - Alfred Conn - Nachlasse, 38.  
\(^{84}\) Ibid, 32  
\(^{85}\) Thomas Krause, Hamburg wird braun. Der Aufstieg der NSDAP von 1921-1933 (Hamburg: Ergebnisse Verlag, 1987), 76.
politics, had originally founded the club on February 12, 1923. The first four members – Paul Schlange, Erich Seiler, Walter Ballhorn, and Gustav Dahlhaus – became legendary at later SA rallies, where their names were read with honor before masses of assembled SA men during the first few years of the Third Reich. Yet, beyond being the first members, they played no prominent role in the organization. Böckenhauer remained among the prominent Hamburg Nazis. He held together and even grew the SA during the underground years. Other stormtroopers, including Conn, formed their own paramilitaries with varying connections to the underground National Socialist movement. Conn’s “Kameradschaft Conn,” formed with his former Wehrwolf comrades, cooperated loosely with Böckenhauer’s “Blücher” group and tried to attract members of Hamburg’s other paramilitaries.

Although the SA grew slightly during this period, it did not thrive. The Blücher club counted only 16 members in June 1923, and 18 that summer. It possessed no money for uniforms, and some of its members were too poor to afford their own, so it sought at least to

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86 Ibid. 50.
87 Recken and Krafft, 47, 62
88 Krebs, 42. Böckenhauer, 4.
Image 1.1:

Stormtroopers march back into Hamburg after a hike in the countryside to celebrate the anniversary of the NSDAP’s founding. February 22, 1925. (Source: 10 Jahre SA Hamburg im Bilder mit verbindeten Text.)

Image 1.2:

Stormtroopers train in gymnastics shortly after the movement’s return to legality, circa 1926-27. (Source: 10 Jahre SA Hamburg im Bilder mit verbindeten Text.)
keep its men in military jackets of the same color. Böckenhauer sought to make the undercover SA a training ground for military skills among young German men, and he used sports to inculcate discipline, self-reliance, duty, loyalty, persistence and comradeship. The Blücher club met weekly at the Gymnastics Hall of a boys’ school near Berliner Tor for gymnastics and free exercises. They sang nationalist and military songs before taking leave with a “Heil!” The club also held marches and gathered for other sporting activities. Members brought friends and associates to join the fun in the hopes that the comradely atmosphere would seduce them into regular participation, during which they would then be gradually politicized. The SA kept this model until its transformation into a mass paramilitary army in 1930, but it took some time for it to bear fruit. One official Nazi history later shared an embarrassing anecdote from the underground era, in which a new recruit arrived at the starting point for a march to find only one member in attendance.

An SA this weak could serve no useful role to the underground NSDAP, nor could the banned party help the SA build itself into a fighting force. Nor could they do anything but follow from afar Hitler’s putsch of November 1923. Böckenhauer and most of his stormtroopers had stayed up the whole night in a state of readiness, waiting for word from Munich of the uprising’s success. Such news never came. Conn claimed in retrospect that the uprising was doomed from the start, as “unripe fruit can’t be picked.” In any case, the national NSDAP soon joined the local Hamburg chapter in the political

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89 Recken and Krafft, 62
90 Recken and Krafft, 62
91 FZG 11C1 - Alfred Conn - Nachlasse, 33
wilderness of banned parties. The National Socialist mood in Hamburg remained sullen and defeated. Left with no political tasks and no party support at either the national or local level, the Blücher men tried to maintain their group coherence through social events. In December, they held a Christmas party at their local pub “Zur Post,” at which a Tannenbaum gleamed, small gifts were exchanged, the wives of married members were in attendance, and “good, German Christmas feeling reigned.”

The political wing of the NSDAP had failed miserably in the early 1920s, as attested by both their vote tallies and the reports of Hamburg’s political police. Yet this period of covert operation and endemic factionalism saw the key development that after 1929 drove the NSDAP to the front of the pack among Hamburg’s nationalist parties: the growth of a more activist SA. The new national socialist coalition (NSFB/VSB) held its first meeting in early April 1924, at a tavern in which the assembled Nazis “vanished totally within the teeming mass of enemy visitors.” The meeting degenerated into a predictable brawl between socialists and members of the underground SA, who fought each other until police arrived to clear the hall. Though the meeting was cut short, Conn proclaimed the stormtroopers “quite pleased with the results.” To the SA, the violent end to a meeting was itself a success.

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92 Recken and Krafft, 64
93 See especially police reports of April, May, and September 1924, during which the police observed factionalism and infighting among Klant, Gregor Strasser, and other political rivals within the National Socialist movement. StAH 331-3 / 1097
94 FZG 11C1 - Alfred Conn - Nachlasse, 35.
95 Ibid.
Between Böckenhauer’s “Blücher” Club and Conn’s “Kameradschaft Conn,” the NSFB possessed 30-40 men for hall protection.\textsuperscript{96} They also became more aggressive in their leafleting and poster-pasting, especially in socialist areas of the city. These actions materialized the ideological conflict with prominent physical evidence. Each night in the weeks heading up to the several elections in 1924, small groups of 3-5 men fanned out through the darkened city with posters, wheat paste, and other propaganda materials, often coming into conflict with opposing poster teams of other parties.\textsuperscript{97}

Photographic evidence from this period suggests the increasingly overt politicization of SA activity. The vast majority of early SA photographs portrayed the stormtroopers training in sports or marching in the countryside. During the elections of late 1924, however, SA photography showed the group’s increased emphasis on poster-hanging and guarding of meeting halls. One representative photograph from the commemorative book \textit{10 Jahre SA Hamburg} shows 6 SA men standing proudly in front of one lonely poster. (Image 1.3) In the coming years, SA poster columns covered the entire street with swastikas, slogans, and Hitler’s grim stare in a single night. Yet even these early efforts represented an important shift toward the public display of powerful visual symbols, especially in neighborhoods that turned out to vote for the Nazis in the Reichstag elections of May 4, 1924. (Image 1.4) In addition to its intensifying poster campaigns, the SA promoted itself as a symbol in its own right through an emphasis on

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{96} Ibid, 41-42. Recken and Krafft, 70.
  \item \textsuperscript{97} Böckenhauer, 7. Recken and Krafft, 70.
\end{itemize}
“SA-Klebkolone” (poster-hanging column) distributes election materials. Stormtroopers often ran afoul of police, property owners, and rival paramilitaries when postering buildings. The operations thus became the source of increasingly violent confrontations. (Source: 10 Jahre SA Hamburg in Bilder mit verbindeten Text)
uniforms, flags, and music squads. The SA was transforming itself into the public symbol of the NSDAP in Hamburg. While the group was not yet a major force in Hamburg’s political life, its influence within the National Socialist movement began to grow, and its leaders, especially the aggressive and manipulative Böckenhauer, began to play a decisive role in the power struggles surrounding the party’s re-founding.

“Boss System” vs. “Front-Soldier Spirit”:

The Re-Founded NSDAP and Rising SA, 1925-1929

In January 1925, Hamburg’s political police considered the local National Socialists divided and leaderless. “A mad confusion” ruled within the movement, their report said, which had splintered into many factions “to the point where the actual existence of the group can no longer be spoken of.” The police believed that the chaos stemmed from Hitler’s hesitation immediately to proclaim a new, unified party so soon after his release from prison on December 20. Yet none doubted that Hitler and the larger National Socialist movement eventually intended to re-unite as a single party. Heinrich Lohse, the SA leader in Schleswig-Holstein who controlled SA units in suburban Altona and Wandsbek, anticipated such an announcement when he ordered his entire Altona Ortsgruppe to join the NSDAP in late January, before the new party even existed. On February 13, Klant announced the Party’s formal resurrection to a crowd of 500 in

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99 StAH 331-3 / 1097, report of January 3, 1925.
100 Recken and Krafft, 74
Sagebiel’s main hall. Only Hitler, Klant claimed, could lead the völkisch movement in Germany. The police report on the rally declared the death of the NSFB and the inevitability of the NSDAP’s return.101

The re-founding of the Hamburg NSDAP, which was made official on March 5, raised Hamburg’s status to that of Gau and secured Klant’s position as Gauleiter.102 Not all members greeted the news with joy, especially those who had worked the hardest for the NSFB. Conn, for one, considered the last year-and-a-half’s work wasted: the energies put into the NSFB were lost, and the new NSDAP would begin with only a fraction of the prestige and influence it had possessed before the Hitler putsch. Additionally, he believed that Klant’s leadership in particular would be counterproductive to the National Socialists’ efforts to unify the völkisch parties.103 He and many like him, men of the front generation who had bounced around among various völkisch paramilitaries, declined at first to join the new NSDAP. The police interpreted these tensions to mean the movement’s deterioration. A report in April declared that “The völkisch-National Socialist movement here is currently without meaning.”104 At the end of the year, the police estimated the membership of the Hamburg NSDAP and the lame-duck NSFB together at no more than 500.105 Dissatisfaction with the leaders of the Nazi Party’s political wing continued for over a year, and it degenerated to crisis levels by the end of 1926. Police reports from the fall of that year contained a series of complaints against Klant from party members who were dissatisfied with his leadership style, his lethargic

101 StAH 331-3 / 1097, report of February 28, 1925.
102 Werner, 319
103 FZG 11C1 - Alfred Conn – Nachlasse, 43
104 StAH 331-3 / 1097, report of April 1, 1925.
105 StAH 331-3 / 1097, report of November 19, 1925.
collection of membership dues, and his continued appeals to Munich to quash dissent.\textsuperscript{106} In July, he had countered an attempt to remove him from office by having Munich eject his opponents from the party.\textsuperscript{107} Through the struggles over his leadership, Klant hoped that Hitler would come to Hamburg to express his support, but the police had forbidden Hitler, as a foreign citizen found guilty of treason, to enter the city.\textsuperscript{108}

Given Hitler’s inability to dominate the northern party cells, and considering the political wing’s miserable performance to date in Hamburg, local SA leaders emerged as the movement’s kingmakers. Böckenhauer had declared even before the official re-founding of the party that he would place his “Blücher” Club at the new party’s disposal.\textsuperscript{109} As soon as the ban on the NSDAP and its associated groups was lifted, the “Blücher” men ceased their masquerade and on March 31 declared their return to Hamburg with a torchlight parade to the giant Bismarck monument.\textsuperscript{110} The new SA wore its old, makeshift uniforms from the underground period, and counted around 60 men in its ranks at the time of the re-founding.\textsuperscript{111} These were overwhelmingly young people who had stuck with Böckenhauer and considered him their personal leader.\textsuperscript{112}

On the national level, however, the SA remained without centralized leadership, after its former leader Ernst Röhm resigned because of conflicts with Hitler over the SA’s independence and role. Röhm left the country for a position advising the Bolivian

\textsuperscript{106} StAH 331-3 / 1097, reports of September 4, October 12, October 19, and November 18, 1926.
\textsuperscript{107} StAH 331-3 / 1097, report of September 4, 1926.
\textsuperscript{108} StAH 331-3 / 1097, report of October 19, 1926.
\textsuperscript{109} FZG 922 SA, document of February 2, 1925.
\textsuperscript{110} Recken and Krafft, 74.
\textsuperscript{111} Böckenhauer, 12.
\textsuperscript{112} Krebs, 42.
army, and the SA, while officially subordinated to the party leadership, developed at the local level without interference from either the national or local party leadership. In January 1926, Hitler appointed Franz Pfeffer v. Salomon, an SA leader in the Ruhr and an experienced fighter against the French occupation, as highest SA leader (Oberste SA-Führer, OSAF). Pfeffer immediately solidified the inner organization of the SA and its relationship to the rest of the party, but did so in a way that reinforced the independence and vitality of the smallest organizational unit, then called the group (Gruppe). These were made up of 6 to 12 men, which Pfeffer instructed should be formed out of friends, neighbors, and schoolmates in order to better maintain the inner camaraderie and preparedness of the unit. The groups were then attached to larger units higher up the organizational chart, as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Number of Members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gruppe</td>
<td>6 to 12 men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trupp</td>
<td>5 to 8 Gruppen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sturm</td>
<td>2 to 4 Truppen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standarte</td>
<td>2 to 5 Stürme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brigade</td>
<td>2 to 5 Standarten</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Multiple Brigades in one region were joined together as a Gausturm. Though the SA later changed the names of many of these units – replacing groups (Gruppe) with bands

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113 In doing so, Röhm followed a long tradition of German military assistance to South American regimes, see: Jürgen Schaefer, Deutsche Militärhilfe an Südamerika: Militär- und Rüstungsinteressen in Argentinien, Bolivien, Chile vor 1914 (Düsseldorf: Bertelsmann Universitätsverlag, 1974); Frederick Nunn, “Effects of European Military Training in Latin America: The Origins and Nature of Professional Militarism in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Peru, 189-1940,” Military Affairs, 39:1 (1975): 1-7. A side effect of this training was to create politicized concepts of military service quite similar to those held by the Freikorps- and SA men. In 1936, a military leader of German descent took over Bolivia. See Herbert Klein’s “German Busch and the Era of ‘Military Socialism’ in Bolivia”, The Hispanic American Historical Review, 47:2 (1967): 166-184.
114 Werner, 217, 270.
115 Ibid, 356.
116 Ibid, 386.
(Schar) as the smallest unit, for example – the organizational principle remained. And all SA leaders emphasized the importance of the smallest unit, whose utility lay in its ability to mobilize personal bonds among its members. Stormtroopers with pre-existing emotional ties could be counted on “when attacked, to best work together for defense.”

As the official catechism of the SA described:

The Schar builds the basis and foundation for the entire operation and expansion of the SA. The entire organization of Truppen, Stürme, etc. builds itself outwards from the Schar. The Schar should be made up of comrades who have the same sensibilities and a common connection, founded on youth friendship, school camaraderie, or similar work experience. Geographical proximity is also desired, so that closeness proliferates and immediate collective action is possible.

Additionally, SA men were advised to limit their energies to forging personal bonds rather than spreading an ideological message. That was the party’s job. Pfeffer also declared a strict separation of tasks between the party and SA: the Party controlled the content of political propaganda, while the SA carried out propaganda actions.

Following Hitler’s wishes, Pfeffer also ordered that the SA only influence the Party through the OSAF and SA men who were also members of the Party.

Hitler and Pfeffer did not seek to rebuild the SA as a paramilitary organization for violent revolution, as it had been in Bavaria and had wished to be in Hamburg. Instead, Hitler designed the new SA as a sub-unit of the political party. Their initial orders signaled that while the group retained a strong sense of separate identity from the Party’s “civilian” ranks, the SA would still have to follow the commands and advance the agenda.

117 Quoted in Longerich, 58.
118 Draft document reprinted in SA education files of StAH B223. See also Longerich, 58-59.
119 StAH B223
120 Werner, 378.
of the political leadership. Yet in Hamburg, the symbolic power of the SA and its popularity among the younger members of the NSDAP gave it great influence over local political decisions in the context of the local group’s ongoing leadership crisis. Klant’s worst failings as a leader lay neither in his lackluster collection of membership dues nor in his dependence on the Munich leadership, but in his resistance to the buildup of the SA. According to the police, “Klant [had] fallen into disfavor among many members of his party for not being radical enough, and especially for resisting every expansion of the ‘Sturmabteilungen’ [sic]. He has recently expelled a great number of members from the party.”\textsuperscript{121} He also declined alliances with other \textit{Wehrverbände} that, while sympathetic to National Socialism, were officially independent.\textsuperscript{122} The police reported that Klant’s rank and file doubted whether he could rebuild the party: “In National Socialist circles the opinion reigns that Klant has harmed the further development of the National Socialist movement, especially through his handling of the SA, whose expansion he opposes. The SA, furthermore, seeks to protect its independence from the regional and local leadership (\textit{Gau- und Ortsgruppenleitung}).”\textsuperscript{123}

Böckenhauer further defied Klant when he founded Hamburg’s first SS unit in April 1926 – out of 50 former party members whom Klant had expelled. According to police reports on the conflict,

The \textit{Schutzstaffel} [SS] plans to remove Klant, who is not radical enough, at the party’s May-fest in Schwerin, and replace him with the current second in command, Dr. Helmuth Schranz… [The SS] drove together [to Schwerin] on a truck for this purpose, but were barred from all party

\textsuperscript{121} StAH 331-3 / 1097, report of December 17, 1926
\textsuperscript{122} StAH 331-3 / 1097, reports of August 18, 1925, September 15, 1925 and October 19, 1926.
\textsuperscript{123} StAH 331-3 / 1097, report of November 18, 1926.
functions and from any contact with Hitler. Under these circumstances no expansion of this Schutzstaffel can be expected.\textsuperscript{124}

Klant won this battle, in part because of his connections with the national Party leadership to whom any petitions to replace a distinct leader had to appeal, and he expelled the SS men from the party.\textsuperscript{125} Some of them found refuge in the Wandsbek section, which lay in Prussian territory, and others Klant agreed to re-admit “so long as their morals and character were unquestioned.”\textsuperscript{126} Böckenhauer escaped unscathed from the fight, but tensions escalated into the fall of 1926, when Böckenhauer’s SA refused to take orders from Klant or carry out its hall protection duties.\textsuperscript{127} This was an indictment of Klant’s leadership by the young, activist core of the movement, and it proved too much for him to overcome. Klant resigned as leader of the Hamburg NSDAP on November 4, 1926. Though he still held his elected office in the Hamburg parliament, he agreed to abstain from all activity within the Party.\textsuperscript{128} Lohse was given provisional command from Altona until a new local leader could be chosen. Böckenhauer’s 60 SA men controlled a majority at a membership meeting to decide this question, but he declined the leadership position for himself and claimed only to be interested in the SA’s organization and expansion.\textsuperscript{129} The Hamburg Party, downgraded from a Gau to a local group (Ortsgruppe), chose Albert Krebs as its new leader. He was 28 years old, and had been a member of nationalist youth movements, a dueling fraternity, and the Freikorps von Epp.

\textsuperscript{124} StAH 331-3 / 1097, report of April 16, 1926.
\textsuperscript{125} StAH 331-3 / 1097, report of June 15, 1926.
\textsuperscript{126} StAH 331-3 / 1097, report of September 4, 1926.
\textsuperscript{127} Jochmann, document 80, p 243.
\textsuperscript{128} StAH 331-3 / 1097, report of November 18, 1926.
\textsuperscript{129} StAH 331-3 / 1097, reports of November 18 and December 20, 1926.
This background and his relative youth indicated that the Party sought a leader who could work in the SA’s new spirit of politics.

At first it seemed that Böckenhauer and Krebs shared both goals and methods, and that both benefited from their partnership. Böckenhauer’s personal power increased in early 1927, when he was promoted to leader of SA-Gausturm “Nordmark.” This made him responsible not only for his home territory of Hamburg, but also for Lüneburg and its surrounding countryside, Lübeck, and all of Schleswig-Holstein. Krebs utilized the SA to its fullest. The police noticed this as early as January 1927, when a uniformed troop of SA men provided hall-protection for Krebs’ speech on “People without Space.” Krebs believed, and many party members agreed, that his new style contributed to the doubling of party membership, from 300 in 1927 to 600 the following year.

Part of the movement’s growth in 1927 came from poaching the members of other rightist paramilitaries. The SA and other Wehrverbände had worked together on occasions where their nationalism and militarism could overcome their petty differences – such as on religious holidays like Pentecost, which was traditionally a day of state celebrations, and during events that honored participation in the First World War. But the SA and other paramilitaries were still natural rivals, in that they all targeted the same young nationalist demographic. The NSDAP’s political leaders allowed joint demonstrations at first, but they soon discovered the power to be had in monopoly. In

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130 StAH 331-3 / 1097, reports of February 2 and 19, 1927. For information on the various Gaustürme of the SA and the territories they comprised, see Werner, 390.
131 StAH 331-3 / 1097, report of January 20, 1927.
132 Krebs, 61.
133 See, for example, the Werwolf-sponsored Pfingsten celebration described in StAH 331-3 / 1097 report of May 9, 1924, as well as the 30,000-strong celebration of Bismarck’s birthday described in the report of April 16, 1926.
1926, they decreed that no SA man could belong to other paramilitaries, and they threatened any party member who did not quit competing memberships with expulsion.\textsuperscript{134} The NSDAP, more than any other nationalist party, connected the immediate attractions of a paramilitary lifestyle with the long-term potential of a political party.

The strategy began to pay off in 1927. When the Verband Hindenburg, led by Paul Ellerhusen with Conn as his deputy, split early that year over the controversy of whether an officer married to a Jew could speak on racial questions, Ellerhusen and Conn led their men into the SA. Their choice reflected the wisdom of von Pfeffer’s restructuring, as Ellerhusen could be given a new Sturm of his own, Sturm 6, that would accommodate all the men willing to follow his defection.\textsuperscript{135} Conn summarized the importance of camaraderie and loyalty in his immediate reaction to the split in the Hindenburg Verband: “I stood at once on our boys’ side.”\textsuperscript{136} He also stated more generally that, even as he had “lost more and more feeling for this second NSDAP” itself, “my comrades were in the \textit{Wehrverbände}.”\textsuperscript{137} Conn stuck with his comrades, and his old Free Crops commander Ellerhusen. These men renounced their memberships in other paramilitaries so that they could to remain together under the SA’s banner. Many other SA recruits had behaved the same way, and they moved in packs between one paramilitary group and another. Every time a group of comrades felt organizationally marginalized or ideologically offended – an event that happened constantly within the dozens of competing \textit{völkisch} groups – Pfeffer’s new administrative structure allowed

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item StAH 331-3 / 1097, report of April 16, 1926.
\item This put the structure of the Hamburg SA, Standarte II, as consisting of three Stürme: 2, 6, and 11. Böckenhauer, 13.
\item FZG 11C1 - Alfred Conn - Nachlasse, 50.
\item Ibid, 52.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
them as a team to transfer to the SA. Pfeffer therefore enabled the SA to better utilize the ties of friendship and camaraderie that drove political allegiance at this time. The SA also reincorporated members who had previously broken off because of their dissatisfaction with Klant. By the middle of 1927, according to the police, the SA had through “intensive campaigning in the nationalist *Verbände*” doubled its strength to 350 members – over 200 of them from Ellerhusen and Conn’s Verband Hindenburg group.\footnote{StAH 331-3 / 1097, report of June 17, 1927.}

The SA won new members not only through wooing competing groups and their leaders, but also through intimidation and violence. The SA disrupted meetings of rightist groups whose ideology and style were closest to the NSDAP’s. Stormtroopers attacked other nationalists in order to ensure that the NSDAP remain the only party that advocated national socialism. The SA also enforced iron discipline within its own ranks, and it saved its harshest methods for those who had defected from the SA itself. By importing pre-existing groups of comrades into its ranks, the SA was vulnerable to organized internal opposition. During two consecutive summers – in June of 1926 and 1927 – groups of SA men attempted coups against Böckenhauer’s leadership. The first insurrection involved a group of war veterans who sought to take command based on their age and front experience, but it failed to resonate outside the mutineers’ own clique.\footnote{StAH 331-3 / 1097, reports of May 16 and June 15, 1926.} The second attempt the next year involved a different unit, but it also failed because of the group’s isolation within the larger SA. This time, about 20 would-be putschists left the SA altogether.\footnote{StAH 331-3 / 1097, reports of June 14 and October 24, 1927.} Yet in the balance, the SA’s numbers grew
throughout these years. The police estimated their ranks at around 500 by the end of 1927.\[^{141}\]

The NSDAP used its new stormtroopers to contest more vigorously the many elections of that year. But while every new election gave the party and SA chances to gain more exposure and win new members, they also imposed financial burdens – especially given the costs associated with major speeches by Hitler, who made his triumphant return to Hamburg in connection with the elections of October and December. Among the SA, whose members were generally younger and poorer than regular party members, the costs of electoral action proved particularly hard to bear. Though Krebs and Böckenhauer negotiated lower Party membership fees for SA men, the two had come to loggerheads by the end of the year. SA leaders had – by the design of the national party leadership in Munich – seen their independence from the political leadership decrease over the course of the year, especially in their complete dependence on the party for their finances.\[^{142}\] The SA relied on a 10-pfennig surcharge taken out of regular Party members’ dues, and as such was under constant threat that the political leadership could reduce or eliminate these subsidies. Though the political leaders had no interest in de-funding the SA, lest the Party lose its activist wing, they nevertheless used financial control to keep the SA from becoming too independent. As the SA grew throughout the late 1920s and early 1930s, it tried to liberate itself from economic dependency in a variety of ways. Stormtroopers undertook collection drives on street corners on in taverns, which often delivered positive results but also risked exposing the SA’s financial plight. They also

\[^{141}\] StAH 331-3 / 1097, report of December 21, 1927.
\[^{142}\] Krebs, 60 and 63.
sold licensed items such as “Storm Cigarettes,” with a portion of the proceeds landing in SA coffers.\textsuperscript{143} But both the SA and political leadership also found that the pursuit of donations in these ways distracted the SA from its purely political tasks. It drained the energies of individual stormtroopers, who began to focus on making money for the SA rather than winning converts for the movement, and it generated significant internal tensions over where the collections went.\textsuperscript{144} Pfeffer made plans to operate a series of formal financial ventures, of which the “Storm Cigarettes” factory in Dresden was the most successful and enduring example. But the others made little progress and were largely abandoned after 1930.\textsuperscript{145} Local SA units therefore sought instead to build relationships with nearby businesses. In some arrangements, dealers in uniforms, armbands, backpacks, boots, and other militaria offered discounts and coupons to individual stormtroopers so as to attract their custom. Others formed partnerships with the SA itself, in which the SA endorsed a product and the business donated some of the profits.\textsuperscript{146} None these arrangements had much impact on SA finances as a whole, even if they mitigated individual stormtroopers’ inability to afford uniforms and other equipment. The SA therefore remained a prisoner of the Party’s checkbook despite the ideological, bureaucratic, and personal tensions that often arose throughout the \textit{Kampfzeit}. 

\textsuperscript{144} Ibid, 100.
\textsuperscript{145} See Werner, 415-420, who notes that the SS later picked up Pfeffer’s ideas on a far grander scale. By 1945, the SS ran a far-flung economic empire including its own munitions factories, the productive branches of concentration camps, publishing houses, horse farms, mineral water bottling facilities, and even a porcelain factory. Gerhard Reitlinger’s \textit{SS: Alibi of a Nation} (Letchworth: Garden City Press, 1956), 1.
\textsuperscript{146} Grant, 101.
Institutional rivalries also caused problems between the SA and other Party factions. Such rivalries grew out of the chaotic growth and overlapping nature of early Party institutions, particularly the SA and SS. The SS had existed since 1925 in Munich, where they functioned as Hitler’s personal bodyguards. Other local Party chapters formed their own SS units in the following years. They were officially a sub-group of the SA, though many SS units were created as substitutes in areas that lacked an SA.\(^{147}\) In cities where both SA and SS existed, the bodyguard role brought the SS into automatic tension with its parent organization – the stormtroopers saw themselves as the sole guardians of Party events and personnel. Pfeffer’s 1926 reforms solidified formal questions of control by giving SA leaders both local and national control over SS units, and after that the SS was mainly used for small-group operations such as spying on other political parties.\(^{148}\) But Hitler founded a national SS, with Heinrich Himmler at its head, on January 9, 1929. While the new “elite troop” was initially still subordinate to the SA, it quickly assumed an independent role as the Party’s internal watchdogs.\(^{149}\) At first, this was largely informal, as at the Nuremberg Party Day rally of 1929. After the official rally, stormtroopers had fanned out through the city in order to get drunk, start fights, attack Jewish businesses, and create an atmosphere of general disorder that threatened the Nazis’ pretensions to respectability. The political leaders called out the SS, which corralled the SA back to its barracks and defused the situation. Pfeffer quickly ordered an


\(^{148}\) Koehl, 23-30. See also Reitlinger 25-26, and Longerich, 53.

\(^{149}\) See for example, Werner, 345-346, who describes Hitler as signaling to the SS that, despite its formal subordination, it was to play an independent role.
expansion of the SS so that it could play this role in the future.\textsuperscript{150} As SS duties evolved over time, the group received its own black shirt so as to stand apart from the SA’s brown, and Hitler formally assigned it the responsibility “to carry out police duties within the party.”\textsuperscript{151} Canny observers of intra-party politics inferred that Hitler wanted an independent force to keep an eye on the stormtroopers. The SS’s initial role as bodyguards for the Party’s political leaders had caused some amount of tension with the SA, even as Party leaders tried to differentiate between “personal protection” [\textit{Schutzdienst}] and “hall protection” [\textit{Saalschutz}], which was still the SA’s task. Worse conflict between the groups stemmed from the SS’s duties as a counter-intelligence corps [\textit{Abwehr- und Gegnerforschung}] and security service [\textit{Sicherheitsdienst}]. In this role, SS men not only monitored enemy parties and looked for spies within the NSDAP, but they also questioned SA men about their loyalties, searched them for weapons and confiscated any without permits, and carried out investigations of incidents in which SA men had threatened public order.\textsuperscript{152} SA men felt personally and organizationally threatened by these actions, as the SA had its own counter-intelligence agents to ensure internal loyalty, as well as an investigative body to discipline its members, the \textit{Untersuchungs- und Schlichtungsausschuss}, (USCHLA).\textsuperscript{153} The SS also continually poached recruits from the SA, including many of its most disciplined, most physically fit, and most “Aryan”

\textsuperscript{150} Koehl, 34.
\textsuperscript{151} Quoted in G.S. Graber, \textit{The History of the SS} (New York: David McKay Company, 1978), 43.
\textsuperscript{152} Koehl, 47.
\textsuperscript{153} See Werner, 402-403, on the formation of this body.
members, both in Hamburg and nationally.\textsuperscript{154} These usurpations of function and personnel created serious tensions between these two rival Party paramilitaries.

Personal rivalries also plagued the Hamburg SA’s relationships with other Party factions, especially the political leadership. Krebs claimed that the SA’s importance to the movement, without which the local group’s politics “could hardly have been carried out at all,” gave Böckenhauer the power to act as “a secret dictator in the Hamburg movement.”\textsuperscript{155} Böckenhauer, for his part, resented Krebs – as he had Klant, and, it seems, any other leader in Hamburg’s nationalist circles. Conn reported that Böckenhauer had spied on Krebs and sought to review, “in secret”, his every decision as Ortsgruppenleiter.\textsuperscript{156} Böckenhauer spread rumors that the poor financial condition of the party was caused by the corruption and incompetence of Krebs and his business manager, Edgar Brinkmann. Furthermore, Böckenhauer charged that the two had failed to turn over the proceeds from the Hitler rallies. He also declared that the party leadership had turned into a “boss system” ("Bonzenwirtschaft"), an attack aimed at subverting the very same younger and working-class youths whom Krebs sought to attract.\textsuperscript{157} When Krebs declined to remove Brinkmann from his post, Böckenhauer, as he had against Klant, ordered the SA to stop protecting meeting halls. The conflict came to the attention of the national leadership. Acting on Hitler’s orders, Gregor Strasser called a meeting with Krebs, Böckenhauer, and SA-Standartenführer Paul Ellerhusen, who had taken over leadership

\textsuperscript{154} Longerich, 57.
\textsuperscript{155} Krebs, 68.
\textsuperscript{156} FZG 11C1 - Alfred Conn - Nachlasse, 60.
\textsuperscript{157} StAH 331-3 / 1097 report of June 30, 1928 and Krebs, 65.
of the Hamburg SA after Böckenhauer’s promotion. Strasser declared Böckenhauer’s accusations unfounded and condemned his methods.\textsuperscript{158}

Pfeffer, who had in the meantime arrived in Hamburg to broker a solution, called a membership meeting for April 21, 1928 in the Wilhelm Gymnasium. Hamburg had just been raised to \textit{Gau} status, and Krebs’ promotion to \textit{Gauleiter} had to be confirmed by a vote of the Party members. Under other circumstances, this confirmation would have been almost automatic.\textsuperscript{159} But as the meeting opened, the Böckenhauer appeared with his followers. Neither Pfeffer nor Ellerhusen’s local SA intervened to stop Böckenhauer from again dominating a discussion of political leadership. Krebs, despite enjoying the national party leadership’s official backing, could not control the situation. Brinkmann, weakened and under suspicion after Böckenhauer’s accusations, resigned on April 30. His replacement, the ambitious and corrupt Wilhelm Hüttman, sided against Krebs despite their past cooperation. Krebs resigned his leadership position on May 1, though he remained in the Party until 1932 and continued to function as one of its most prominent public intellectuals in the region. Pfeffer rewarded Hüttman with effective leadership of the Hamburg party, though he was formally subordinated to Lohse, who again controlled the Hamburg NSDAP from Altona until a permanent resolution could be found.\textsuperscript{160}

Some Hamburg party members, Conn included, resented this interference from Pfeffer and Böckenhauer, the national and regional SA leaders.\textsuperscript{161} They also regretted the

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{158} FZG 11C1 - Alfred Conn - Nachlasse, 60.
\textsuperscript{159} Krebs, 61
\textsuperscript{160} Krebs 67 and FZG 11C1 - Alfred Conn - Nachlasse 60-61. Hüttman wielded great influence until his own eventual fall the next year. See StAH 331-3 / 1097, reports of June 30, 1928, September 2, 1928, and June 7, 1929 as well as Krebs, 66-67.
\textsuperscript{161} FZG 11C1 - Alfred Conn - Nachlasse, 61.
\end{footnotes}
effect on Party morale of the continual struggles for leadership. “Thanks to Böckenhauer’s work and Krebs’ failures,” Conn wrote in his memoirs, “the spirit of the party was shaken a short three weeks before the elections of May 20. It was a hard blow.”162 Yet this proved the final struggle for leadership of the Hamburg NSDAP, as well as Böckenhauer’s final act of interference in such conflicts. His unreliable, aggressive, and self-aggrandizing style, combined with a recent embarrassing conviction for assault, convinced the political leadership finally to expel him on May 8.163 The Party was thus spared his divisive influence for the near future.

While the party waited a year for a permanent replacement for Krebs, the result brought Hamburg its most effective National Socialist leader. Karl Kaufmann, who took charge on May 1, 1929, capitalized on his reputation as a member of the anti-French resistance in the occupied Ruhr to ingratiate himself with the local SA. He also broadened the party’s support among the middle classes, and – perhaps most importantly – he enjoyed the unqualified trust and support of one of the most prominent figures in the national party. Goebbels had considered Kaufmann his “good friend” while they were young nationalist activists in their home town of Elberfeld.164 Kaufmann brought for the first time stable and sustained leadership to the Hamburg party, and he remained in his post until Hamburg’s surrender to the British in 1945. The resolution of the NSDAP’s

162 Ibid.
163 The official reasons for this expulsion remain difficult to secure. Surviving records do not record it, and later party histories never mentioned Böckenhauer’s expulsion given his return to prominence in the NSDAP and SA in 1931.
near-permanent leadership crisis with the installation of a leader friendly to the SA, yet also able to control it, proved a crucial draw for new members in the coming years.

The leadership crisis’ resolution also inaugurated a more conciliatory attitude of the SA toward other nationalist *Wehrverbände*. Böckenhauer, whose assault conviction had come from a public attack he had led against an SA splinter group, had taken a combative approach that risked offending potential new members. Ellerhusen, who himself had come over from a rival group, was more restrained. This was a personal trait, but it was also a political choice that stemmed from his recognition of the SA’s continued identity as a young, upstart group. Under Ellerhusen, the SA avoided violent conflict with other nationalist groups. On June 3 1928, the Stahlhelm held a major rally in Hamburg attended by 138,000 people. Ellerhusen, fearing the opprobrium stormtroopers might earn by battling the preeminent veterans’ group, withdrew his 240-man *Standarte* from Hamburg by means of an all-day cruise down the Elbe with their wives and girlfriends. Any violence against the solid, respected members of the Stahlhelm by the young toughs of the SA would have been seen as patricide, and would have challenged the SA’s image as good sons of German fathers. The SA instead addressed Stahlhelmers through a series of articles in the *Hamburger Volksblatt*, the National Socialist weekly newspaper. Ellerhusen stressed the SA’s shared values with the

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165 The incident is recounted in vivid detail in witness testimonies, the sentencing report, and various other documents collected in FZG 922 SA.
166 Berghahn, 112. He reports that the Stahlhelmers received a “cool reception” in the Hansastadt.
167 FZG Alfred Conn memoirs, 62-63. Membership figures come from StAH 331-3 / 1097, which report 568 total stormtroopers in the Hamburg SA’s organizational structure.
Stahlhelm, especially the superiority of the “front-soldier spirit.”\textsuperscript{168} Ellerhusen, however, accused the Stahlhelm of falling short in its pursuit of these values, and he claimed that its political leadership had itself degenerated into “parliamentarism” and become the slave of “stateless forces [überstaatliche Mächte] of Jews, Jesuits, and Freemasons.” The principles were Ludendorff’s, though his articulation of them had become increasingly divisive by including the Christian churches within the ranks of Germany’s “stateless” enemies. The other alleged villains, however, were points of broad agreement among members of nationalist paramilitaries, and Ellerhusen insisted that the SA could resist them more successfully than could the extremist Ludendorff or the cautious Stahlhelm leadership. “If we, like the Stahlhelm,” Ellerhusen wrote, “had all the front soldiers in our ranks and could command the 140,000 Stahlhelmers who marched in Hamburg, we would have power over the state and the entire people behind us.”

While the police reported some gains from this propaganda offensive, the Nazis were still far from their goal of leading the völkisch parties and paramilitaries.\textsuperscript{169} The true breakthrough came that fall, when the national economic crash radicalized broad masses of young men. Just as the social and economic crisis of the early 1920s had created the first generation of stormtroopers, so too did the crisis years beginning in 1929 produce a second and larger generation of SA men. But the SA and its parent Party still had to attract these men away from competitors. The SA accomplished this task partially through the use of violence, a technique that stood at the beginning and the end of

\textsuperscript{168} No issues of the Hamburger Volksblatt for this year survive, but a summary of the articles and quotations of several passages can be found in StAH 331-3 / 1097, report of September 2, 1928.
\textsuperscript{169} StAH 331-1 / 1097, reports of June 30 and September 22, 1928.
stormtroopers’ personal and public identities. Violence against political enemies was the vital force that attracted and integrated the men of the SA, and it was the ultimate tool in a political environment that often seemed more like a civil war than a civil society. But the SA had to present its violence as productive rather than destructive, and patriotic rather than criminal. The challenge of founding a movement based on male warrior camaraderie, which at times risked seeming cliquish, exclusive, and even morally suspect, was to find a way to transform the stormtroopers’ continual acts of violence into positive deeds that would bring the renewal of their city. In the service of this end, the SA from 1929-1932 sought to demonstrate its soft side as well. Both rhetorically and in deed, the SA built structures and systems to protect and provide for its recruits, through which it could demonstrate the “socialism of the deed” that the National Socialists claimed to advocate. The SA also had to show that the it was not the private province of a small circle of comrades, but was instead connected to deep and enduring structures of family, religious, and civic life. These associations, along with the SA’s increasingly successful staging of public acts of violence that they then blamed on political enemies, could then be advertised in Nazi press organs as evidence of the stormtroopers’ ultimate morality.
CHAPTER II
THE BATTLE OF STERNSCHANZE: VIOLENCE AND SELF-REPRESENTATION IN THE HAMBURG MEDIA (1930)

The SA was founded for combat. Stormtroopers protected party speakers and events from violence, and they delivered violence to the movement’s political enemies. But not every stormtrooper action was violent. The vast majority of SA gatherings – whether meetings in their home taverns, the guarding of everyday Party meetings that did not feature prominent speakers, marches in the countryside and other sporting activities, or informal gatherings throughout the day – did not, despite the prevalence of bellicose rhetoric, come to physical conflict. Even the group’s entrances into the public sphere – leaflet and poster actions, newspaper sales and donation collection, and political marches through friendly neighborhoods – often concluded without incident. Yet violence simmered constantly under the surface, and it boiled over with regularity. The non-Nazi newspapers featured these violent occasions far more prominently than the majority of non-violent SA actions, which were not news except to the Nazis’ own publications. Hamburg’s newspaper-reading public thus encountered violent stormtroopers far more often than ones that fit the noble image SA men cultivated.

A political movement conscious of its public image in Hamburg – a bourgeois city that prided itself on respectability, propriety, and its tradition of rational political negotiation – had two options to avoid being tarred as a disruptive mob. The first option was to renounce violence and declare – as did the SPD, Catholic Center Party, the DVP, and the other members of the republican “Weimar Coalition” – that political violence was an unacceptable form of “terror” against state and society. The very existence of the SA
confirmed that the NSDAP had not chosen this path. The SA had been created to
“counter terror with terror.” Its path to victory, the stormtroopers believed, lay not in
renouncing violence but embracing it. The SA had in its early years used violence to keep
its own members in line. It still did so, but had now discovered that violence could also
attract and integrate new converts in its own right. Without violence, the SA’s ability to
compete for young men’s political loyalties would collapse.

The SA and NSDAP therefore had to choose a second, more challenging option. The SA could not renounce violence without losing its followers and its identity. But it
also could not – despite the demands of some of its more extreme members – lash out at
all targets of National Socialist rage. The SA instead had to re-fashion its violence in
ways compatible with Hanseatic, bourgeois respectability. Only by doing so could the
stormtroopers win followers for the political movement they served. And only by doing
so could they preserve their own self-image as martyr-heroes who defended their families
and nation with their own blood. The role had long been a powerful male archetype,
whose potency had been further strengthened by the myths that emerged from the First
World War. The stormtroopers’ growing strength came from their ability to interpret their
own violence not as aggression, but as vigilance against forces they believed sought to
destroy the German nation, economy, religion, and family. The stormtroopers sought out
situations in which SA violence could be called defensive rather than aggressive,
protective rather than destructive, and heroic rather than criminal. These incidents
bolstered their self-image, presented an acceptable face of violence to public
consciousness, and allowed the massive expansion of both the paramilitary and political wings of the movement.

“Storm Column”: The Nazi media in Hamburg, 1928-1930

Hamburg’s National Socialist newspapers were founded in a publishing environment as chaotic and unmoored as was the nation’s political life in general. In accordance with the proliferation of political parties, so too did the Republic generate a torrent of new papers – over 700 from 1923 to 1932 alone.¹ Almost half of these papers were officially linked to political parties, such as Hamburg’s Echo (SPD) and Volkszeitung (KPD), while others pursued consistent political philosophies without being bound to a single party. These papers were powerful voices for their parties’ political positions, and they were widely read even by members of other parties. The Fremdenblatt, with its party-independent promotion of “Hanseatic-mercantile interests,” was particularly well-read in German-speaking Europe and even America as a paper of record for the merchant class.² The possession of a dedicated party paper was thus a prerequisite for any political party or movement that hoped to win votes. Nazi papers had been slow in emerging because of financial constraints and organizational rivalries. A series of agreements at the 1928 Party congress established clear rules under which the national Party would give its stamp of approval to locally financed papers that met the

¹ Heinz-Dietrich Fischer, Handbuch der politischen Presse in Deutschland, 1480-1980 (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1981), 282.
central leadership’s standards of content. After this agreement, Nazi papers proliferated, led by titles produced in traditional German publishing centers such as Hamburg.

In 1928, Party member Hans Hesse founded the Hamburg NSDAP’s first newspaper, the Hamburger Volksblatt. In naming the paper, Party leaders had rejected Hesse’s more belligerent suggestions, including the “Storm Signal,” in favor of the recognizable title of a defunct Social Democratic paper. The Volksblatt operated by subscription to Gregor Strasser’s Combat Press in Berlin, which sold content to other National Socialist papers and thus functioned as a kind of unofficial Nazi wire service. Hamburg’s Party leaders were pleased with the Volksblatt at first, and they pledged to make up any debts it assumed to Strasser. But Hüttman rescinded this guarantee during his tenure as local Party leader. Hesse therefore filled the Volksblatt’s pages with increasingly sensational content that Krebs described as “something halfway between Der Stürmer and the Nachpost,” a tabloid that specialized in crime, sex, and scandal. Party leaders judged the content inappropriate on several levels: it was too lowbrow and disreputable to appeal to Hamburg’s respectable classes, it had no power to engage the newspapers of other parties in political debate, and by the end of its run it barely discussed politics at all. The Party tried to remedy this situation with a new paper, the Hanseatische Warte, on January 1, 1929. It almost immediately became known as the Party’s official paper, and Hesse’s Volksblatt went into financial free-fall. Krebs and

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5 Most wire services at the time were connected to a political party. The Nazis did not set up an official one until after their takeover of power. Krebs, 102.
6 Ibid, 89.
Brinkmann, who ran a publishing house of his own, bought him out and continued to publish until April, when the two papers merged under the Warte’s banner.\(^7\)

The Hanseatische Warte proved more successful than the irregular and unreliable Volksblatt. On the most basic level, it appeared regularly and presented itself in a more reputable style. While Krebs was often frustrated with the paper’s subordination to the political leadership and was at times criticized for the paper’s lack of “a cutting edge,” he generally trod carefully between extremes.\(^8\) His paper was intellectual and sought to present what he called a measured, “specifically ‘Hanseatic’ contribution to German politics,” while at the same time it spoke directly to the Party’s lower ranks as well.\(^9\) This he accomplished by featuring Stormtrooper reporters such as Hermann Okrass, who wrote the “Storm Column” page. Krebs also gave a regular column to a butcher who wrote in the local Plattdeutsch dialect under the pseudonym “Fietje.” The column (“Shut your trap and listen to Fietje”) mirrored a similar Berliner character in Goebbels’ Der Angriff, and it dealt with politics from an uncultured but affectionate standpoint that spoke to a particular local heritage. While the paper struggled through 1929, sales picked up in 1930 in the context of that summer’s political crises. Both foreign and domestic conflict (which in this period included the dissolution of the Reichstag, a ban on the SA, and heated protests against the Young Plan) increased interest in the Party’s perspective. Sales, subscriptions, and advertising revenues all increased. The paper moved to bigger

\(^7\) Ibid, 92-94. 
\(^8\) Ibid, 95. Krebs’ frustration with the Party’s interference had multiple causes. These included debates over ownership, operations, personnel, and profits (when such existed). Krebs chafed as well at having to navigate the political leadership’s own internal rivalries, which encouraged several different political leaders each to claim total control over the paper’s content. 98-100. 
\(^9\) Ibid, 96.
offices. Most importantly, more people read the Party’s perspective on political events and on the Nazis themselves. Even if these new readers were not yet ready to join the Party, they increasingly were interested in it, and they wanted to compare its perspective to that of the better-established parties.

Journalists of these other parties’ papers also read the new Nazi paper with increased interest. The Social Democratic Echo and Communist Volkszeitung naturally disputed almost everything they found in the Warte’s pages. But other papers, most notably the venerable liberal organs the Hamburger Fremdenblatt and Hamburger Nachrichten, began subtly to reflect elements of the Warte’s coverage. Ernst Baasch, a historian of Hamburg’s newspaper industry, noted in 1930 that papers “that support[ed] themselves on ‘tradition’” – especially those that held unbroken political or managerial continuity – enjoyed far more influence than upstart papers linked to new parties.10 Paradoxically, however, the venerable papers had often survived by adjusting their coverage to prevailing political forces.11 They now did so again, a tendency was particularly notable in the Hugenberg press’ DNVP-aligned papers. According to one historian, the “Verführung and Irreführung” of Hugenberg’s “bourgeois-nationalist press” in 1930 and afterwards led millions of voters to accept increasingly nationalist and

10 Ernst Baasch, Geschichte des Hamburgischen Zeitungswesens (Hamburg: Friederichsen de Gruyter & Co, 1930), 150. He considered a newspaper’s possession of an “intellectually sophisticated tradition” to be “a means of advertising [eine Propaganda] that is worth more than the modern, often questionable and intrusive methods of newspaper publicity.”

11 Baasch, 128. The label comes from criticism leveled by the Nachrichten’s rival, the Correspondent, which charged the Nachrichten with abandoning its traditional support of liberal policies often associated with England. Fromme wrote in a similar vein concerning the Frendenblatt’s “uncritical” coverage of imperial foreign policy.
militant narratives that sped their paths to Nazism.¹² The NSDAP across Germany came
to rely on these other papers, which repeated National Socialist claims to an audience that
might have resisted the same message from Nazi sources.¹³ In Hamburg, the dynamic
was on display already during the September 1930 elections, when the willingness of
many non-Nazi newspapers to pass along the Warte’s explanations for SA violence began
in to rehabilitate the stormtroopers.

The “neighborhood offensive:” SA Violence and Public Presence, 1925-1930

During the Weimar Republic’s final crisis years, SA violence in Hamburg came
largely in three varieties: organized marches on Sundays, unplanned attacks that
originated out of the rhythms of daily life, and deadly incidents in which either the deaths
of stormtroopers or of their opponents gripped public consciousness and defined the SA’s
reputation. These three types of events proceeded in cycles. Marches were to most
citizens the face of the National Socialist movement. Reichardt has identified the tactic as
the core element of the SA’s public activities, especially in so far as they showcased the
movement’s claims to discipline, order, and unity.¹⁴ They were part of a “neighborhood

Fischer (no relation) describes Hugenberg’s malign influence in similar fashion, adding as well that the
Hugenberg-controlled UFA newsreels conveyed Nazi sympathy to theatergoers. The Rise of the Nazis.
¹³ Fischer, Handbuch 284. See also Hale’s criticism of Fritz Schmidt’s Presse in Fesseln (1947), an
undocumented, error-prone, and self-exculpatory work that attempted to paint the nationalist press as
victims rather than enablers of Nazism. Hale, 337-341.
¹⁴ Reichardt, Faschistische Kampfbünde, 114-119. For a cross-factional perspective on the rise of
militarized political demonstrations (“festivals”) across Germany, see Dirk Schumann, Politische Gewalt in
der Weimarer Republik. Kampf um die Strasse und Furcht vor dem Bürgerkrieg. 1918-1933 (Essen:
Klartext Verlagsgesellschaft, 2001), 245-269.
offensive” designed to prove to residents of dangerous and depressed areas of the city that the Nazis could restore order and bring prosperity.15

SA marches most often began in safer neighborhoods, such as Conn’s home territory of Hoheluft. But the march always proceeded to neighboring areas in order to win converts in contested regions and thus extend Nazi strongholds to new areas. Nazi newspapers and pamphlets included first-person testimonies of these converts, who had been inspired to join by the imagery and emotional impact of a march. One such report came from a resident of a “knallrote Gegend” west of the Alster, who had “always held himself at a distance” to National Socialism. But, he wrote, “the disciplined behavior of the SA during the march, their stalwart bearing [stramme Haltung], and above all the lightning in the eyes of these youths ripened in me the decision to join as a Party member. And I’ve since found out that many more residents of our house joined the Party on the same day.”16 Winning converts in contested or “red” areas of the city was the typical rationale for the SA’s regular marches. For a march to fulfill this purpose, it had to proceed with discipline, police protection, and great emphasis on decorum. In this spirit, SA leaders repeatedly banned provocative or overtly antisemitic songs – such as one that included the infamous lyric “when Jewish blood sprays from our knives,” or another that exhorted the stormtroopers to “grab hold of the hand grenades.”17 But while the SA’s efforts at public restraint generally mitigated incidents of violence during the march

17 StAH B28 letter of Böckenhauer to HJ Gau Hamburg of January 6, 1933; see also StAH B105 Band 2 and B197.
itself, the tactic was by its nature provocative to non-Nazi residents of neighborhoods through which a closed SA column proceeded. Stormtroopers themselves asserted their right to the streets as a public forum open for the use of any citizen – in Conn’s words, “The streets belong to everyone, not just the ones who live on them.” The stormtroopers therefore thought themselves entitled to walk where they pleased, regardless of whether or not the residents of a street approved of their presence. But this view was myopic, naïve, and perhaps even disingenuous. Marches raised the temperature of political conduct, sometimes sparked scuffles between marchers and bystanders, and made incidents of violence more likely in the long run.

The proximate causes of violent political encounters usually lay in the rhythms of daily life. Most fights, beatings, ambushes, stone- or shingle-throwings, property damage, and other violent acts took place spontaneously. They emerged out of everyday encounters between stormtroopers and their political opponents. Encounters turned violent when an individual lost control and attacked, or when one side found itself in such numerical or tactical superiority that it could not resist letting loose. These everyday incidents and the Sunday marches both developed into the third and most notable type of political violence: fatal encounters, whether planned and unplanned. Fatalities created spectacular press accounts in the weeks that followed a death, during which a contest over the public representation of victims and aggressors played a key role in the development of Nazi politics.

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18 FZG 11C1 - Alfred Conn - Nachlasse, 67.
SA street politics rotated through these three forms of violence. Stormtroopers marched on Sundays, navigated a series of everyday encounters during the week, and nursed violent thoughts over months of low-level combat, until every six months or so tensions erupted into spontaneous or organized acts of fatal violence. This formula crystallized in the election campaign of September 1930, a breakthrough for the Nazis’ political fortunes. Months of low-level violence and public campaigning culminated in the “Battle of Sternschanze,” which became legend in the Hamburg SA and whose public interpretation formed the template for SA violence throughout the remainder of the Republic.

The Battle of Sternschanze: September 7, 1930

The confrontation came not by design, but by accident. It began with an SA march through the city – a normal event, if ambitious in its scale – that was meant to be the greatest display that Hamburg’s SA had shown to date. But the march ended in ambush, defeat, and the fatal stabbing of one of the group’s most powerful personalities, the Truppführer Heinrich Dreckmann. Even many Nazis initially considered it a humiliating defeat for the movement’s warrior ethos, an indictment of the Hamburg SA’s directionless leadership, and a practical setback for the NSDAP’s plans. Yet the public reception of the battle transformed tactical defeat into strategic victory. Hamburg’s newspapers – not only the Hanseatische Warte, but also the most prominent papers of the center-right – re-wrote the incident as a moral victory that demonstrated Communist
criminality and stormtrooper heroism. The story of Sternschanze was therefore not only the tale of a street fight, but also of a battle to define the incident. It is the story of the SA discovering its most powerful political narrative: the martyr’s public blood sacrifice that renews the political community.

The best account of the events of September 7, 1930 comes from Conn’s memoirs. Though written years after the fact, they present the detailed, personal testimony of an SA leader who both helped organize the march and then fought at the center of the melee. This perspective is absent from newspaper reports that, written in the immediate aftermath of the battle, lacked details of how the fight began or proceeded. Conn’s heroic posturing and general self-aggrandizement in this private testimony may or may not hold water; nevertheless, his criticism of SA leadership under his friend and old war comrade Ellerhusen appears genuine. Conn’s account is particularly valuable because, as an officer in the SA’s motorcycle squad, he had a wider picture than any other observer. The SA’s march stretched from east to west across the entire city, and the battle that ensued at the Sternschanze railroad station covered several city blocks. Conn’s mobile point of view gave him a clearer look than most others at a situation of utter chaos in the heart of Hamburg.

At its pre-election peak of activity, the Hamburg SA had been especially busy during the entire first week of September. It had marched in friendly Rotherbaum and in far-off Langenhorn. It had daily protected NSDAP meetings across the city in Rotherbaum, Eimsbüttel, St Pauli, Finkenwerder, and Gross Borstel. It had hosted and
protected a speech by Hitler himself. And it prepared for a September 7 propaganda
march during which the Brigade would for the first time march with over 1000 men,
complete with standardized uniforms, flags, a musician’s troop, and flatbed trucks. But
the Hamburg police had to approve the routes of political marches that were conducted in
closed formation or accompanied by vehicles. Though the police had granted approval
for smaller marches as recently as the previous week, in this instance they declined. The
SA’s request to hold its largest march yet posed too great a threat to public order. The
decision was to some extent influenced, as were many policies of the Hamburg police, by
the Prussian policy. That state had recently banned the brown shirt. Furthermore, as
Hamburg police captain Lothar Danner noted in his memoirs, the Prussian police warned
other agencies against the National Socialists’ “illegal political methods.” A police
circular of August 12 declared SA politics “of the type that led to the Hitler-putsch in
1923.”19 The Hamburg police therefore declined the request.

Yet only uniformed marches in closed formation or with vehicles came under
police jurisdiction. The SA could march without its uniforms or in open ranks without
prior police approval. Ellerhusen, the “old fighter” then in charge of the Hamburg SA,
decided that a march without uniforms would admit weakness and accomplish nothing.
The entire uniformed SA would therefore march in open formation, confined to the
sidewalks. The decision did not sit well with Conn, his second in command and old
comrade, who questioned whether the 1000 men of the brigade could be kept in contact
while arrayed in such an extended formation. As he later wrote,

19 Lothar Danner, Ordnungspolizei Hamburg. Betrachtungen zu ihrer Geschichte 1918-1933 (Hamburg:
Verlag Deutsche Polizei, 1958), 209.
I was not entirely comfortable with the decision [for an open formation], since how was one to hold an entire brigade in the hand through every sudden situation? Certainly one could with single *Truppen*, or with the *Stürme* operating as units, but this tactic only held for a certain distance – and not throughout an entire *Stadtgebeit* as Ellerhusen proposed.20

Conn suggested several alternate plans, but Ellerhusen was determined.

Around noon on the 7th, the SA began to assemble near Hamburg’s northeast border at the Wandsbeker Chaussee rail station. The march would take the form of a “walk” [*Spaziergang*], which consisted of around 500 men in uniform with an equal number of non-uniformed SA and Party members.21 They set out at 2 pm and proceeded via Lübeckerstrasse to the city center. (Image 2.1) The stormtroopers proceeded without incident through the center of Hamburg’s wealth, governance, and commerce at Möckebergstrasse, the Rathausmarkt, and Jungfernstieg. All the while, the loose columns of brownshirts became spread out, but lively and exuberant. Rather than one Brigade that marched in step through the center of the street, the group broke down into its constituent parts of *Stürme* and *Truppen*. Soon, the march resembled a long procession composed of hundreds of small groups. These men pushed their way over the sidewalks, sang battle songs, and enjoyed the feeling of emboldenment that the presence of a thousand fellow brownshirts engendered.

Conn motored through the streets to monitor the march’s progress. He returned to meet Ellerhusen at the head of the column around the time it reached Gänsemarkt. Here Conn made an unpleasant discovery: that Ellerhusen had only planned the march route up to Mönckebergstrasse. “He had proceeded,” Conn wrote, “in the conviction that the

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20 FZG 11C1 - Alfred Conn – Nachlasse, 93.
police would in any case move against us by that point. They hadn’t done so. And now no one knew where we should go next.”

Ellerhusen spontaneously decided that the march should proceed to the Wagner pub on Gabelsbergerstrasse, home to Sturm 2. Conn could not understand his reasoning

Image 2.1:
SA march route and battle zone, September 7, 1930


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22 Ibid, 94.
in this choice. The stormtroopers at the front of the column hailed from Barmbek and did not know well this area of the city. Nor did Ellerhusen. Sturm 2 itself marched near the end of the column and could not help guide them. And even if the brigade did arrive at Wagner’s, one pub could not hold 1000 men. Ellerhusen told Conn, who lived nearby and knew the streets, to lead the column west toward the Schanzenviertel, a working-class neighborhood heavily contested between the Nazis and Communists. Neither SA-Führer knew that the Communists had already assembled at the Neuen Pferdemarkt for a propaganda drive of their own.

The leading Sturm discovered the danger suddenly. Crossing the Feldstrasse bridge, it neared a police cordon behind which seemingly innumerable masses of Communists were loading up over 60 wagons, singing fighting songs, and waving red flags.\(^{23}\) The way through the Neuen Pferdemarkt was closed to the Nazis. The SA column again stalled, but this time they had few options of where to proceed. Their right flank was constrained by the Communist demonstration and its police protection. The police had closed off most of the small streets that led to the Pferdemarkt, and officers on balconies throughout the neighborhood monitored the situation from above. On the SA’s left, the Hamburg-Altona border at Schulterblatt formed an invisible yet impenetrable barrier: Altona was Prussian territory, where the brown shirt was illegal. To cross the street would subject them all to arrest. The Hamburg SA therefore had only one option: to march straight down Schanzenstrasse, then use the SA tavern at the Hotel Adler as a protective strongpoint that would allow a breakout to the rail station and the open streets.

\(^{23}\) “Zu den Wahlkampf-Schlägereien am Sonntag,” *Hamburger Fremdenblatt* of September 9, 1930.
to its north. Once there, they could leave behind the contested wards of the inner city for browner pastures of Eppendorf and Eimsbüttel. But until the Hotel Adler could be reached, the march route was narrow and ripe for ambush.

Ellerhusen’s lack of planning had left the SA with no choice but to run a gantlet of quick-tempered Communists and edgy policemen. Conn raced up and down the column, warning SA officers at every point of the danger ahead. He told them to keep their men as close together as possible while avoiding the illegal closed formation. The leaders also had to keep their men from responding to Communist provocations. Conn returned to the front of the column as it passed the Adler. The first Stürme had cleared the gantlet and now marched to the open north.

But Conn and his Motor-SA were not the only mounted units that day. The Communists had motorcycles of their own. As the SA was passing through the Schanzenstrasse gantlet, one Communist motorcyclist broke through the police cordon at Kampfstrasse. The cyclist buzzed the edges of the SA column and waved a red flag that he tried to keep just out of reach. Conn wondered how the police, “who had all the tools they needed to prevent it,” had allowed “such an obvious provocation.”24 When the stormtroopers caught the cyclist, tore his flag from him, and knocked him off his vehicle, the potential violence that had been building throughout the encounter finally broke loose.

Policemen drew their clubs and began to arrest the stormtroopers who had attacked the cyclist. SA men from the tail of the column rushed forward to protect their

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24 FZG 11C1 - Alfred Conn – Nachlasse, 95.
comrades from the police. Policemen linked arms in a vain attempt to keep Kampstrasse closed, but the Communists broke through and attacked. Conn and the Motor-SA sped to both ends of the extended column to summon reinforcements. The SA’s limited range of movement made the process slow, but the Communists’ flatbed trucks were not so restricted. They circled around into Altona in order to attack the SA’s exposed western flank. Within minutes the entire district had become a war zone: SA men battled both Communists and police, civilian sympathizers and party members added to the ranks of combatants, women and children were caught in the middle of the brawl or sought refuge in the houses and shops on Schanzenstrasse, and the police eventually gave up on making arrests and sought only to defend themselves.

Hamburg’s newspapers found it difficult to determine the details of the day’s “gruesome battle.” In the absence of central leadership, the riot comprised hundreds of small-scale conflicts among the police, Communists, and SA men. Even the combatants found it difficult to distinguish the factions. Conn noted that “Everything had fallen apart: no leader had his people, no people their leader, and in between it all party members and women and passers-by. Nobody listened any more to orders. The troop was fully divorced from its leadership, as much as it can even be called that.”

25 Ellerhusen and other leading SA officers had already reached as far as Christuskirche, where they could only direct fleeing SA men into the rail station and away from danger. Conn for his part steered stormtroopers in the heart of the melee to escape via the Sternschanze station or to safety in the Hotel Adler. Sturmführer Stäublin and several other SA men fled to

25 FZG 11C1 - Alfred Conn – Nachlasse, 95.
another pub and barricaded themselves inside. By the time most of the combatants dispersed and the police restored order, the scale of the SA’s defeat had become clear. At least 34 SA men had been arrested, dozens were wounded, and Dreckmann lay dead on the corner of Susannen and Sternschanzestrasse. The police banned the brown shirt the next day, without inflicting equal restrictions on the Communists. Local party leaders and SA rivals denigrated Ellerhusen as an incompetent and a drunk, deposed him as Brigadeführer, and set him on the margins of the movement. It was a humiliating defeat on the battlefield for National Socialism’s “political soldiers.”

But the SA recovered its pride by constructing a heroic narrative of the day’s events, in which they were innocent, outnumbered, persecuted, and ultimately martyred to forces of corruption and disorder that had assailed the peace of the Hansstadt. With their physical presence on the streets reduced, the SA labored instead to influence public perceptions of the battle – who had caused it, why the police had been unable or unwilling to prevent it, and what meaning the stormtroopers’ struggle held for the movement’s moral authority.

To the stormtroopers, at least, their march had been peaceful in purpose – an innocent Sunday stroll that had provoked unreasoned violence. The true villains of the story were the Communists, whose rage against the SA had been more powerful than the police’s ability to hinder it. But police failures and biases, the Nazis argued, gave the would-be forces of Republican order equal responsibility for the violence. The Hanseatische Warte asked the next day, “And the police?” What role had they played in

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the outbreak of violence? According to the Nazis, the Communists would not have dared attack had the police allowed a closed-column march. The police failed to keep Communist provocateurs from harassing innocent stormtroopers, then took the Communists’ side against the SA. This forced the stormtroopers to fight on two fronts, with reduced numbers, and against an emboldened foe. The SA was persuaded that they were victims of police cooperation with Communists. “Instead of controlling the situation,” Conn wrote, “[the police] went against the SA, arrested a whole mass of stormtroopers who were only defending themselves against the Communists, and drove them off in paddy wagons in the direction of [the police station at] Schlump.”

The police, according to the *Hanseatische Warte*, did nothing to prohibit 58 Communist wagons from triumphal drives through the streets, even as policemen held back SA medics from helping wounded comrades, arrested one who tried to examine Dreckmann’s body, and refused for days to release the corpse to his widow. They also kept 34 stormtroopers under arrest. The *Warte* complained:

> None of these have been set free, even though they are completely innocent. …. All 34 people will with 80 percent certainty lose work and bread. As our editors were cynically informed by the police, the men will be kept until next Sunday night. It is a terror, a chicanery, that one can’t even put into words.

In their own eyes, the SA was therefore subject both to physical assaults by the Communists and legal persecution by the police. But the portrayal of the police, who that day guarded a registered Communist rally in the same way they had often acted to shield

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27 “Und die Polizei?” *Hanseatische Warte* 2nd September Aufgabe, 1930.
28 FZG 11C1 - Alfred Conn – Nachlaße, 95.
Nazi meetings, was unfair. Even if departmental policy and city laws did afterwards target the SA as a special agent of violence, individual police officers on the day in question sought only to keep the two sides separate, break up fights, and arrest lawbreakers. Furthermore, even if the police had wished to target SA men for arrest, it is unclear how officers would have been able to do so given the stormtroopers’ civilian disguises that day. The 34 arrested stormtroopers most likely deserved their fate. Nevertheless, Nazi reports cast the SA as innocent, doubly wronged victims.

The Warte could not, however, portray SA men as weaklings. Nazi accounts of the battle thus had to make the outnumbered stormtroopers into heroes who stood alone or in small groups against larger forces that sought to destroy them. The enemy, according to this narrative, sought the stormtroopers’ destruction not only as men, but also as symbols of a political movement that worked for German renewal but was opposed by corrupted policemen and criminal Communists. The Warte emphasized individual stories of heroic resistance against overwhelming odds – two to three thousand Communists, the paper claimed. Its reportage of “How it Happened” gathered the stories of many different stormtroopers and used a testimonial motif – “I saw” – to strengthen group cohesion and to tie repeated themes into a unified whole. The unknown stormtroopers testified:

I saw how a troop of Communists, containing about 10 men armed with long iron staves, struck into the SA and police. One Communist had a pistol.

I saw how a Communist beat an SA man with a heavy iron cudgel. I saw how a Communist hit an SA man in the face with a large glass bottle. I believe that this was Truppführer Dreckmann.

30 Ibid.
I saw many knives among the Communists. Above all they had iron rods [Eisenstangen]. One Communist sought to throw a home-made bomb [eine Flasche mit Saltpetersäure] in the face of an SA man. During the throw he fell over – the bottle slipped – and he burned his own hand almost completely.  

The tone of this testimony emphasized the fine line between oral and written accounts of stormtroopers’ adventures. In this case and others, the first action reports were always carried by word of mouth, passed around the Sturmlokal, and carried into wider circulation in the Nazi movement. After important battles, Nazi journalists merged multiple accounts into an official narrative in the Party paper. The effort laid bare the work required to fashion the stormtroopers’ heroic self-images: they needed to fight, but they also needed to shape the resulting battle’s story into one that cast them in a favorable light.  

The warrior archetype favored by stormtroopers reached back to the Greek myth of Thermopylae, extended through the youthful sacrifice of Langemarck, and came to the SA via the fantasies of the Freikorps men. They were all the same story: a small group of iron men stood against a teeming mass of enemies who sought to breach the walls of civilization and wash away the Volk and its state. The SA shaped the Battle of Sternschanze into this narrative frame: a small, heroic group of stormtroopers had come under attack by superior numbers of enemies, whom they resisted long enough to save their comrades. But they could not always save themselves, and often fell in defense of comrades, Volk, and nation. These were the martyrs of National Socialism.

31 Ibid.
In its basic narrative, the myth of the fallen stormtrooper belonged to a thematic family that contained some of Germany’s most powerful founding narratives. Its general outlines placed it in the category Hayden White described as a Romance:

[A] drama of self-identification symbolized by the hero’s transcendence of the world of experience, his victory over it, and his final liberation from it – the sort of drama associated with the Grail legend or the story of the resurrection of Christ in Christian mythology. It is a drama of the triumph of good over evil, of virtue over vice, of light over darkness, and of the ultimate transcendence of man over the world in which he was imprisoned by the Fall.\(^{32}\)

Narratives of this form describe the journey of a hero whose innocence is, through a series of trials and adversities, transformed into maturity, strength, and an eventual, transcendent triumph. Pre-existing German myths of this type included the Parsifal story. In both in Wolfram von Eschenbach’s original epic poem and Wagner’s operatic revival, the myth described a young man raised by women who tried to prevent him from following his father’s path as a knight. But the boy’s natural longing for martial strength led him to join the Grail knights and fulfill his destiny as the finder of the Holy Grail and the redeemer of the wounded Fisher King. The stormtrooper romance also tracked the predominant strain of 19th century German historical writing, the “Prussian school” of history, which told the tale of a scattered and weakened German people redeemed by the rise of the Hohenzollern monarchs, whose foundation of the German Empire in 1871 represented the moral culmination of a centuries-long historical process.\(^{33}\) One of the


most vivid sub-myths in this tradition can be found in Treitschke’s account of the Teutonic knights, in which the Brotherhood’s blood sacrifice hallowed the Baltic lands for the German people and their future state. Myths in the romantic mode often featured such sacrifices. As Treitschke wrote, “A spell rises from the ground that was drenched with the noblest German blood in the fight on behalf of the name of Germany and the most sublime gifts of mankind.” The similarities of all these myths with the stormtroopers’ tale of self-sacrifice are clear. Stories of stormtrooper martyrs recalled a much deeper historical and mythic tradition. They portrayed the SA’s struggle as the latest chapter of an eternal spiritual-historical crusade fought by such luminaries as the Teutonic Knights, Parsifal, and even Christ himself.

Just as letters written during the final days of early martyrs were circulated to strengthen the early Christian community, Nazi newspapers wrote about Dreckmann’s death to bolster their political community. Goebbels had drawn on Christian myths of “resurrection and return” in his lionization of the “martyred” Horst Wessel earlier that year. Now, the Hamburg Nazis had their own fallen stormtrooper to cast as a sacrificial savior. In the Warte’s account of the battle, Dreckmann led his small Schar back into the thick of the fighting in order to stave off a flood of Communist reinforcements that came

down Susannenstrasse from the west. Dreckmann and Sturmführer Paschke fought to keep the men around them in a tight formation. But a few became separated from the SA phalanx and came under attack. The Warte described how Dreckmann leapt to their defense, and it described his final heroic moments:

With senseless fury [his] empty hands grappled through swinging iron clubs and naked knives. The Commune broke into wild flight. The comrades were free. But in this moment some 500 Communists came from the flank and from behind… Eyewitnesses report that he held out long. But he was struck with a knife through his throat, while almost simultaneously a sledgehammer smashed in his head. As his body fell, it was further stuck with numerous stabs. He was trampled almost to unrecognizability.38

The Nazi warrior had protected his comrades among a sea of enemies, and could only be struck down by superior numbers and multiple blows from all quarters. Both immediate and later Nazi accounts embellished the melodrama of Dreckmann’s story. His initial obituary described how, during the ceremonies that surrounded Hitler’s speech the previous week, Dreckmann had “looked his Führer Adolf Hitler in the eyes and allowed himself to be honored by him, and then a day later had to seal his oath of loyalty with death.”39 It noted his happy home life with his wife and 16-year old daughter, as well as his doomed farewell to them on the eve of the march. When his wife complained because he would not stay home, Dreckmann responded like the iron soldier whom the SA had fashioned: “It can’t be changed. Dienst is Dienst. Maybe in the coming Germany it will

38 SA men and articles in the Tageblatt often used the derisive term “Commune” to mean Communists, Socialists, and undifferentiated political enemies of the left. “Wie unser Kamerad fiel,” Hanseatische Warte 2nd September Aufgabe, 1930.
be better. But until then you must master yourself. We don’t live for ourselves alone.”

Later books that lauded the Hamburg SA added to these maudlin details. The martyr message and sense of a persecuted SA found great resonance within the movement. But the Nazis still lacked the publishing capacity to propagandize Dreckmann’s death outside their own circles. The *Hanseatische Warte* appeared but once a week, so the NSDAP could only provide one round of reporting on Dreckmann’s death before the crucial election the next week. Therefore, the true test of their narrative’s efficacy came not in how many Nazis read and believed the Party’s story, but rather in the extent to which the SA narrative was absorbed and reproduced by non-Nazi papers. Their framing could then spread to new audiences. The most important transmitter in this respect was the *Hamburger Fremdenblatt*, the venerable national-liberal organ of Hamburg’s business and bourgeois communities, whose anticommunism led it to swallow many Nazi tropes. They thus functioned as a “transmitter” for Nazi arguments even if they otherwise sought to strengthen the “bourgeois middle” based on liberal principles.

Before Sternschanze, the *Fremdenblatt* had previously ignored news of stormtrooper deaths. In March 1930, Paul Kessler’s death had gone unremarked in its pages. An article titled “Communists attack Nazis” said only that 12 Nazis had been

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40 Ibid.
41 As in Okrass, 209.
42 David Neiwert, a journalist who has studied neo-Nazi paramilitaries and rightist movements in the United States, has used the term “transmitter” to describe individuals, groups, or institutions that “straddle both the mainstream and extremist sectors of the right” and lend the extremist positions “a veneer of legitimacy that they would otherwise utterly lack.” David Neiwert, “Rush, Newspeak, and Fascism: An Exegesis,” part VIII Official Transmitters, [http://www.cursor.org/stories/fascismviii.php](http://www.cursor.org/stories/fascismviii.php) (accessed December 12, 2008).
43 Fromme, 81.
injured in the attack; a follow-up story in the evening addition cited police sources to say that “although deadly weapons must have been used, the injuries were not of a serious nature.” It was not clear whether this was even the same attack as the one in which Kessler died. In any case, the Fremdenblatt never mentioned his death.

This was not the case for Dreckmann’s much more high-profile demise. “Bloody election battles in Hamburg’s streets!” blared the Fremdenblatt on September 8. “Communist attack on Hitler-demonstrators – 1 dead and 10 seriously wounded.” The story did not absolve the Nazis of blame for the incident, which it described as a product of the “radicalism” of both extremes and the Nazis’ failure to register their route march with police. But the narrative emphasized several Nazi claims. The battle included “brutal acts of barbarism by the Communists” [viehische Roheitsakte der Kommunisten], during which “One Communist repeatedly screamed ‘Kill them all!’” The Nazis, for their part, were described as hopelessly outnumbered and quickly driven to flight. Meanwhile, the account reported that the police could barely defend themselves against the Communist mob. In this context, the Fremdenblatt’s warnings against political violence sounded similar to Nazi rhetoric:

State authorities must use all their means to prevent in all cases the repetition of yesterday’s proceedings. Sentimental hindsight does not suit a place where life and health are at risk even more than is the authority of the state. [Sentimentale Rücksicht ist nicht mehr am Platz, wo es um Leben und Gesundheit geht, mehr noch, um die Autorität des Staates.]

Only then can yesterday’s events have a positive outcome: if the voters of Hamburg use it as proof that no land and no Volk, no Bürger, no worker, no public official, no merchant, neither woman nor man can found

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45 “Blutige Wahlkämpfe in Hamburgs Strassen,” Hamburger Fremdenblatt, September 8, 1930.
46 Ibid.
the future of their Volk or the well-being of their family on a party that only preaches hate and self-slaughter [Selbstzerfleischung], and with raw brutality of the fist seeks to trample spiritual and moral principles.  

These words were addressed to both Communists and Nazis, but the language of bourgeois respectability was also Nazi language. The desire to protect “spiritual and moral principles” against a Communist party that preached “hate” and “self-slaughter” was the stormtrooper’s professed goal. Public disturbances of the scale and deadliness as the Battle of Sternschanze increased a bourgeois sense of besiegement and led to calls for stricter action by the state. These calls played into Nazi hands, as did the Fremdenblatt’s willingness later that month to cover the Berlin trial of Horst Wessel’s murderers. In the aftermath of Dreckmann’s death, which had solidified in Hamburg the trope of the murdered Nazi luminary, such stories sold. But they also had consequences. The Hamburgischer Correspondent, a less influential liberal paper that held Nazism at a distance, noted the implicit danger of such a dynamic in its story about the new composition of the Reichstag. “National Socialism,” it declared, “draws its best strength from the pessimism of the Bürger.”

Bourgeois pessimism featured prominently in the pages of the Fremdenblatt, Correspondent, and other leading local papers. They only haltingly supported the period’s governing coalitions, which they saw as an ideologically incoherent and politically untrustworthy defensive alliance against rising radicalism. The Fremdenblatt in particular was rapidly losing hope that a “bourgeois alliance” [bürgerliche Sammlung] could re-take political power, govern with traditional restraint, and defend liberal

47 Ibid.
48 “Der Deutsche Reichstag radikalisirt!” Hamburgischer Correspondent, September 15, 1930.
business interests. Another bourgeois paper - the prestigious, national-liberal, and DNVP-sympathetic *Hamburger Nachrichten* - reported positively on Hitler’s election speeches and took space to debunk reports of Nazi treason issued by the Interior Minister shortly before the election. A few days before the vote, the *Nachrichten* grouped the NSDAP with the DNVP, DVP, and other rightist parties as responsible options that shared broad agreement on national questions. “All six of these parties are trustworthy and nationalist,” it wrote. “[They] struggle against the internationalist Marxist parties, the Social Democrats and Communists, who would destroy people and nation, family and German spirit.”

Many traditional newspapers thus shared – for reasons of their own and with some consciousness of the dangers involved – some sympathy with the Nazi self-image. These papers did not dismiss SA violence, which offended their bourgeois sensibilities. Generally, they trusted police accounts of violent incidents, refused to ignore or play down cases of stormtrooper violence, and mocked the SA when opportunities arose. But they also played a crucial role in legitimizing the stormtroopers’ self-image among broader bourgeois circles, especially at a time when the Nazis lacked a daily paper of their own. The bourgeois papers had particularly compromised their integrity by lending approval to the NSDAP’s activism against the Young Plan in the summer of 1930.

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49 Fromme, 100. For the *Fremdenblatt*’s political stances after the election of September 1930, see 82-100.
50 See Hamilton, 123-128 on the role of Hamburg’s bourgeois press in promoting National Socialist respectability. He identified the *Nachrichten* and *Hamburger Anzeiger* as particularly culpable in this respect. 127.
51 The *Hanseatische Warte*, for instance, decried the *Fremdenblatt*’s handling of the Wessel trial as downplaying the political elements in favor of a salacious story of personal jealousy. *Hanseatische Warte*, 4th September Edition. 1930.
52 STAH 10977 report of 29.11.1930; see also Werner Jochmann, *Die Welt* 2.10.61.
Their support now moved beyond targeted sympathy for Nazi foreign policy goals and toward the use of Nazi rhetoric to describe the political scene. As the Social Democratic Hamburger Echo complained in October, the “Nazi-friendly Fremdenblatt” and other organs of “the bourgeois press” were increasingly writing reports “based on Nazi sources.” These papers’ coverage thus proved crucial as the election campaign continued in the week after the Battle of Sternschanze.

During this time, the SA – with many of its members in jail and its symbols forbidden for public display – issued no new provocations. Its most visible presence was at Dreckmann’s grave, where the Hamburg NSDAP engineered for the first time a funerary spectacle in which the martyr’s death was turned into an act of communal renewal. The effort to write Dreckmann’s death as heroic martyrdom proceeded both in word and in deed. The funeral itself attracted hundreds to the Ohlsdorf cemetery, in whose chapel only a small number of intimates could gather. Outside, the Hamburg SA and other Party members stood under gray skies. The Hanseatische Warte described a strong wind that blew “brown leaves” to the ground – an image meant to naturalize the fallen brownshirt as part of a holy German landscape. The Nazi defense attorney, Korn, had freed five of the arrested stormtroopers in time to attend, which bolstered the morale of the movement’s warrior core. A Pastor Koopmann gave the funeral oration, in which he highlighted Dreckmann’s war service, his 21-year marriage to a loving wife, and his self-sacrifice for Volk and Vaterland. He claimed that Dreckmann had died to “give us

53 “Das nazifreundliche Fremdenblatt,” Hamburger Echo, October 7 1930.
55 FZG 991 SA Opposition – Korn to Uschla 4 February 1931
this day our daily bread,” and he encouraged the assembled SA to consider similar acts of breadwinning self-sacrifice in the future.\(^{56}\) Gauleiter Kaufmann brought forth the grieving widow and daughter. He promised the fallen Dreckmann that “We will take over the protection of your family!”\(^{57}\) At the end of the funeral the SA changed the words of the Horst Wessel Lied to highlight the “burning rage in our hearts” and promise Dreckmann: “Kamerad, your red blood was not spilled in vain!”\(^{58}\)

If the bourgeois papers declined to cover Dreckmann’s funeral in such sympathetic rhetoric, they nevertheless endorsed the other side of the Nazi narrative: Communist criminality during the “bloody Sunday” of Sternschanze. The *Fremdenblatt* reprinted the “bloodthirsty” words of the Communist *Volkszeitung*, which had crowed that “Yesterday’s Sunday was a day of triumph for Hamburg, a sign of the will that shall help the KPD to victory. The next Sunday will be yet more arduous [anstrengender], but in the fulfillment of their revolutionary duty the red election helpers will go to work.”\(^{59}\) The bourgeois papers played up Communist statements that were most likely to scare the staid citizens of the Hansastadt. The papers meant to repudiate all radicalism – hence the *Fremdenblatt*’s September 13 exhortation to “vote the liberal middle!”\(^{60}\) – yet the effect was to weaken the parties of the center by heightening a sense of emergency and threat.

Dreckmann’s funeral was choreographed by the SA, narrated by the *Hanseatische Warte* and bourgeois-liberal papers, and interpreted by the public in general as a political gathering. It was an act of necromancy that used Dreckmann’s corpse to bind together the

\(^{57}\) Ibid.
\(^{58}\) Ibid.
\(^{60}\) “Geht zur Wahl – der Stadt seid Ihr!” *Hamburger Fremdenblatt*, September 13, 1930.
disparate elements of the movement while fracturing its bourgeois rivals and leftist enemies. The band of SA warriors, the political leaders, the nuclear families, and the religious leaders who participated in the funeral thus emerged from their struggle with strengthened resolve.

The next day, Hamburg went to the polls. The *Fremdenblatt* reported the results as a “victory of the extremists.” Moderate conservative parties, like the DNVP and DVP, lost much of their strength to the rising National Socialists. (Image 2.2) The Hamburg NSDAP had only 1,659 members at the time, but the Party gained an astonishing 145,000 votes. Historian Ursula Büttnner has called the result “a monstrous increase” in the Nazi vote, the moment the Party finally won significant notice outside its own circles. The election also cemented the Nazis’ neighborhood ties in the upscale areas that bordered mixed middle-class/working class neighborhoods near the Elbe. (Image 2.3) These new Nazi strongholds forced the Senate to fight a strong anti-Republican party not only from the left, but from the right as well.

In the months after the defeat at Sternschanze and subsequent election victory, the Nazi media portrayed the SA as quiet but resolved, protective of its home territories but not seeking battle unless attacked. In the *Warte*’s final issue of September, Okrass described the stormtroopers’ return to the streets as they set out to provide protection for a meeting at Sagebiel. Their march to the hall was not stopped, he wrote,

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62 Böttcher, 17.
**Image 2.2: Reichstag election results in Hamburg, 1924-1930**

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<td>4.1</td>
<td>80.1</td>
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<td>September 14, 1930</td>
<td>31.8</td>
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<td>18.7</td>
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<td>19.0</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>84.6</td>
</tr>
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Image 2.3:

**NSDAP support by electoral district, September 14, 1930**

by police, by Marxists, or by the cold and rain. The election had shown that the SA would only benefit from public display, despite the physical dangers involved. Any other choice, Okrass wrote, would be “moral suicide.” The SA had to stay active in order to keep its members interest and energy intact. But it could not appear too aggressive. Therefore, when the Warte proclaimed in October that “the quiet pause after the election has ended,” the SA focused its energies outside Hamburg. They still protected meetings in the city, but their public projections of strength thrust outward to neighboring towns such as Altengamme, Bergedorf, Dübner, Elbstadt, Geesthacht, Halstenbek, and Reinbek. All these cities saw large-scale SA marches in the early weeks of October, some of which led to confrontations with Communists. But the distance from the far-flung country towns to the city center was large, and skirmishes in the towns often went un- or under-reported in Hamburg’s media. The Echo alone continued to draw attention to SA violence, though the only local cases it could find were small-scale incidents that arose from personal disagreements, not political strife.

Through the events that surrounded the September 1930 elections, the NSDAP and SA in Hamburg discovered a powerful formula that the Party afterwards sought to perfect. In December 1930, Krebs - who had retained his editorial role at the Party paper despite his removal from political leadership - replaced the Hanseatische Warte with a new daily paper, the Hamburger Tageblatt. A daily paper was a significant step forward

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67 As in the Echo’s report of October 3, “Nationalsozialistische Rache,” in which a group of stormtroopers marching to a Wandsbek campsite was hit by a truck, stormed the vehicle, and beat the occupants.
that could more effectively and immediately influence political debate over SA its violence. To expand, Krebs used 5,000 marks that that Warte had built up in reserve. He was now able to rent larger offices, hire more staff, and, after a rocky start, deliver a more technically sophisticated product. To Krebs’ dismay, however, the Gau now exercised far more control over the paper’s content than it had previously done. Whereas the Warte’s staff had taken pride in its independence, Krebs had to place the new Tageblatt more firmly into the larger constellation of the National Socialist press operation. The paper was one of 36 Nazi dailies, whose total circulation neared half a million per day. Its reporters and editors now relied on wire copy and Party press releases for its most important stories, which were then adapted for local relevance. A page or two of Hamburg news covered strictly local events. Other page-long features addressed core Nazi constituencies such as students, sailors, and the stormtroopers themselves, whom the Tageblatt reliably depicted in the images of heroic martyrdom developed in the context of Sternschanze. As an episode in the intellectual and regional history of National Socialism, the limits and control imposed on the Tageblatt signaled the movement’s increasing centralization and ability to impose authoritarian discipline outside the Munich inner circle. These trends eventually led to the alienation from the movement of Krebs, Strasser, and a number of other independent-minded national socialists. Nevertheless, the founding of a more disciplined daily paper was an unqualified boon to the movement as a whole, which could now quickly mobilize its rhetoric of respectability in response to

68 Krebs, 98.
69 Hale, 59. The Tageblatt began its life with around 5,000 subscribers, though it grew steadily as the Party’s fortunes further improved. Krebs, 101.
incidents of political violence. It also heavily promoted the SA’s ties to family, church, and the city in order to make the SA men seem still more respectable. In 1932, the Party also established a national newspaper for the stormtroopers, called Der SA Mann. This weekly paper had important national functions as a forum through which the SA leadership could promote a coherent group identity in the face of larger ideological rifts within the Nazi movement.\(^{70}\) It was also written by the stormtroopers themselves, based on their own experiences and in their own voices.\(^{71}\) Between these two new papers, the stormtroopers’ powers to shape their own images, to influence coverage from neutral or sympathetic papers, and to translate this into increased numbers for the movement thus grew immeasurably. From 1930-1933, the SA combined its two labors of representation – the public events themselves, and the effort to cast these events into a sympathetic and heroic narrative – to convince many of Hamburg’s citizens that National Socialism could rescue the political community from factional violence.

\(^{71}\) Victor Lutze, SA-Gruppenführer for the northern region, put out a call to the Hamburg Untergruppe for such “men educated in journalism would could be deft contributors”. The Untergruppe recommended Okrass, who was already an experienced journalist with the *Warte* and *Tageblatt*. He became one of the most prominent stormtrooper-journalists. See StAH B220 Lutze to Untergruppe Hamburg letter of 9 November 1931.
CHAPTER III

RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY IN THE SA (1930-1932)

Dreckmann’s funeral helped forge the NSDAP and SA in mutual defense of a fallen comrade. It also afforded the movement a chance to enlist figures of spiritual authority in the movement’s public performances of respectability. Pastors who presided over SA funerals lent a sacred aura to the stormtroopers’ activities. The NSDAP, whether in the Protestant north or Catholic south, loudly proclaimed that it sought alliance with religious authorities. The Nazis claimed to seek a renewed partnership between church and state, which would work to both spheres’ mutual benefit. In pursuing this hoped-for cooperation with religious institutions and movements, the Party could choose from several traditions in Hamburg and its countryside. They never considered Judaism, for obvious reasons, which left three other confessions with which to seek alliance: Catholics, Lutherans, and members of the pagan revival movement loosely called the German Belief Movement [Deutsche Glaubensbewegung].

The National Socialists in Hamburg never factored Catholics as a group into their calculations. This church, after being driven out of the city during the Reformation, had only re-established itself there toward the end of the 19th century. Even in the 20th, its members consisted mostly of diaspora Catholics drawn from other regions by economic opportunities. During the Weimar Republic, these never numbered more than around 13,000 – about 5% of Hamburg’s population.¹ The Catholic community was also poor,

relatively isolated from the city’s formal and informal power structures, and - despite a high rate of intermarriage - socially marginalized by a Lutheran majority who saw them as incomplete citizens of mixed loyalties and immature democratic consciousness.²

In support of this charge, Lutheran critics cited the Catholics’ faithful backing of the Center party, which had been created in 1870 to defend Catholic minority rights and constitutional government. Catholics in Hamburg, as elsewhere, saw the Center Party as their natural political representative, and they proved remarkably resistant to conversion by other parties. Throughout the Weimar era, Catholic constancy gave the Center Party two reliable seats in the Hamburg parliament, where it worked as a coalition partner with the SPD and bourgeois-conservative parties.³ Center Party officials and the Catholic priesthood both denounced the NSDAP’s hostility to church principles, especially after 1930, when a priest in Mainz ordered the denial of sacraments to Catholic Nazis in his parish. This act and the ensuing political controversy prompted Catholic priests across Germany to seek advice from the Church hierarchy about how to grapple with the NSDAP. In one such letter, the bishop of Hamburg gave his priests the following advice:

The Catholic members of the National Socialist party must become clear whether they accept and promote exaggerated nationalism and a ‘Christian religion of the Germanic race’ that is incompatible with Catholic belief. If that is the case, their conduct goes against Church principles. The Church must ensure that a Catholic who wishes to partake in the Sacraments… works to promote the Catholic religion, and cannot tolerate a Catholic who works against the Church, openly or secretly, directly or indirectly.⁴

³ Ibid, 34.
⁴ quoted in Ibid, 54.
Statements such as these, though hardly a blanket condemnation of Nazism, showed the
basic unsuitability of the Catholic Church as a spiritual partner of Nazism. The Church
possessed the type of unchallengeable institutional authority that the Nazis sought in a
religious alliance, yet it used this authority to back different ideological projects. Catholic
institutions also remained impenetrable to Nazi influence. While individual Catholics did
join the party – reassured perhaps by the presence of Gauleiter Kaufmann and other high-
ranking Catholic transplants in the Nazi leadership – these political converts were only
individuals, and they could not help the party make inroads among the Catholic
community at large.⁵

The NSDAP’s two best prospects for mobilizing pre-existing religious networks
were therefore the Lutheran Church and the movement to revive pagan beliefs. Both
Lutheran and pagan ideologies advocated a specifically “German church,” an idea that
appealed to the Nazis’ longing for cultural unity and religiously ordained politics.
Lutherans and pagans, however, disagreed on what the content of such a church should
look like, and the Nazis thus had to approach them in different ways.

The pagan revival movement had first appeared in the late 19th century as an
expression of spiritual and cultural nationalism. The movement used works of art, music,
literature, and folklore in an attempt to reconstruct religious practices and individual
virtues supposedly present in pre-Christian Germanic tribes. Its advocacy of spiritual
strength, masculine heroism, and defiance of outside control increasingly influenced
German culture and politics, even if many sympathizers still retained their Christian

⁵ Ibid, 19.
practices. The movement for “German belief” as a replacement for Christianity coalesced only slowly. Advocates of renewed paganism were individualists, resistant to principles of universality, and opposed to institutionalized expressions of religion. Many of the earliest formal associations, which appeared in the final years before the First World War, were secret societies dedicated to closed, occultist practices that called to mind the worst stereotypes about the Freemasons and Templars. Yet the adherents of these various groups kept in touch through a network of letters, pamphlets, and intellectual associations. They conducted vigorous intellectual disputes about spiritual matters, arranged contacts in both Hamburg and the countryside to spread their new beliefs, and participated in formal religious observances – most importantly, at the summer solstice. Such festivals grew increasingly common throughout the 1920s, especially among youth groups and völkisch paramilitaries, and they spread the appeal of a pagan revival outside the circles of closed elites. The new groups and societies that appeared in the 1920s, with names like the “German belief movement” [Deutsche Glaubensbewegung] or “German-believing community” [deutschglaubige Gemeinschaft], advocated more openly their religion and its political consequences.

“German believers” sympathized with the Nazis’ worldview and social program almost from the start. General Erich Ludendorff, a figure of national fame and great influence, and Ernst Graf zu Reventlow, one of the Pan-German League’s most prominent public intellectuals and the publisher of a paganist newspaper, enjoyed great

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7 Goodrick-Clarke, 258.
prominence in northern Germany. They often spoke or led meetings in Hamburg. From 1923 to 1925, when Hitler was in prison, they were among the most famous members of the National Socialist substitute party, the National Socialist Freedom Movement (NSFB).\(^8\) Even after Hitler’s return to public life in 1925 diminished the roles of Ludendorff and Reventlow, as a whole the “German believers” flocked increasingly to the Nazi banner. Conn was a particularly important figure to bridge the two movements: He was a high-ranking SA leader as well as one of seven national councilmen for the “German-believing Community.”\(^9\)

From 1923 to 1930, pagans became among the most active and fervent stormtroopers. These men were never great in number.\(^10\) In Hamburg, they cannot have numbered more than a few dozen. As in the 19th century, aspects of the pagans’ ideological influence spread even among those who retained formal Christianity, especially in a Nazi movement that sought a useful and heroic German past. But pagan influence was also fraught with conflict and paradox. “German believers” could be the most ardent National Socialists, but they were also willful, unruly, and resistant to ideological influence. They also disagreed wildly amongst themselves on the traits of the “Nordic religion” they promoted, the degree of its enmity with Christianity, and whether


\(^{9}\) FZG 662-8 Deutsche Glaubensbewegung - Minutes of 11 May 1927.

\(^{10}\) One report from the German Belief Movement in 1937 claimed that it possessed “40,000 full members” and “30,000 sympathizers” who had not yet quit their church. The numbers in the previous decade would have been even smaller. Doris Bergen, *Twisted Cross: The German Christian Movement in the Third Reich* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 14.
or not Jesus could be claimed as an Aryan culture hero. At the most extreme, pagan advocates rejected any Christian influence on the German *Volk*. The internal quarrels within the pagan movement thus combined with its relatively small numbers to make pagans difficult spiritual partners of Nazism, even if their intellectual and political views often matched closely the nationalist and racist elements of the Nazi program.

Within the state-sponsored Lutheran church, the stormtroopers found a strong, stable, and widespread set of connections. This network made the church more difficult for the Nazis to infiltrate, yet it provided a greater potential reward. The Lutheran Church in Germany had always existed under the protection of the state. In exchange for the state’s endorsement and financing, pastors generally preached obedience to the king. The end of monarchy in 1918 thus threatened the Church’s stability and prompted it to seek a new patron who would continue the partnership of secular and spiritual authority, which together would combat the rising tides of secularism and socialism. The movement of “German Christians” – which had emerged in the late imperial period to proclaim German superiority in the eyes of God, a leading role for Germans in the development of Christianity, and a divine justification for the Kaiser’s imperial ambitions – gained new strength under the supposed threat. The church’s identity as a bulwark of tradition and an ally of the state meant that its ranks teemed with pastors sympathetic to *völkisch* and

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11 Steigmann-Gall’s discussion of pagan leaders in the NSDAP well illustrates the movement’s variance on these points and others. It also echoes the difficulties in determining how many subscribed to these movements – Steigmann-Gall does not even attempt an accounting of membership, focusing instead on the most prominent pagan intellectuals of the Nazi movement. 86-113. 12 See Hans Tiefel, “The German Lutheran Church and the Rise of National Socialism,” *Church History*, 41:3 (1972): 329-330. 13 For the 19th and early 20th century background to the movement, see Anton Grabner-Haider and Peter Strasser, *Hitler’s mythische Religion. Theologische Denklinien und NS-Ideologie* (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2007), 105-118.
conservative viewpoints – even in traditionally liberal Hamburg. Many of these pastors were members of the NSFB and VSB (Völkisch-Soziale Bloc) before the NSDAP re-formed. Some of these men believed in the racist and nationalist elements of the \textit{völkisch} program, but all held that the \textit{Volk} could only remain strong through continued allegiance to Christianity. In some regions of Germany, adherents sought a supra-confessional alliance of Catholic and Protestant, but most in the north were exclusively loyal to Protestantism, which they believed was a more authentic representation of German culture and a superior bulwark of a German state.\textsuperscript{14} The new elements of \textit{völkisch} ideology – which emphasized mass political participation and increasingly pseudoscientific concepts of racism – often seemed at odds with these pastors’ otherwise conservative ideologies. But some otherwise conservative pastors saw new political forms as tactical innovations necessary to secure venerable principles. These men hoped to use their respected positions in the pulpit to channel the masses’ unleashed energy in directions that would support reactionary concepts of state and society.\textsuperscript{15} The NSDAP believed that the pastors could deliver substantial spiritual and institutional support to a political movement they judged compatible with their conservative religious ideology. Many Lutheran pastors thus flocked to the Nazi banner. After the German Christian

\textsuperscript{14} Steigmann-Gall, 52-58.
\textsuperscript{15} In this way, they are similar to the scientists and technicians described in Jeffrey Herf’s \textit{Reactionary Modernism}, who “combined political reaction with technological advance” (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984, 2). Lutheran pastors, in this analogy, combined spiritual reaction with political advance in order to re-create an idealized past with modern means. The effect is similar to the political style Fritz Stern called \textit{The Politics of Cultural Despair} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), in which a religious and soteriological tone persisted in the German political culture even as its content became increasingly distanced from traditional Christian principles.
movement was founded in 1932, many joined its ranks and became “storm-troopers of Christ.”

It is difficult to determine how many stormtroopers belonged to either of these religious communities, as the SA kept no systematic records on the matter. But the party published a great deal on the general issue of National Socialism’s religious affiliations. Articles asserting the compatibility of the movement with both Christian and pagan influences appeared regularly in both in the *Hamburger Tageblatt* and *Der SA Mann*, as well as in the stormtroopers’ own semi-fictionalized accounts of their struggles. Additional evidence of the Hamburg SA’s ideological relationship with religion can be found in the voluminous publications of its two most influential spiritual leaders – SA-Brigadeführer Conn, an outspoken pagan, and Bishop Franz Tügel, who became known as the SA’s pastor and who was the key figure connecting the city’s National Socialists and Lutherans. Both men proselytized their religion within their political families while simultaneously advocating their politics within their religious communities. Their successes and failures, as well as their eventual fates within the Nazi movement, demonstrated how the stormtroopers’ religious consciousness evolved as they strove for power.

**Alfred Conn: Stormtrooper General and Pagan Intellectual**

Conn had preached paganism even as a child. He did not, however, learn this creed from his parents; his mother was a strict Lutheran who, he admitted in his memoirs,

16 Bergen, 7.
“held fast to Christianity.”¹⁷ His national-liberal father and grandfather, who were both larger presences in his life and memoirs, were members of the Lutheran church but cared little for Christianity. The two supported Conn when he founded “a religious club with Odin at its head” among his fellow schoolboys.¹⁸ Conn’s pagan spirituality was no transient artifact of youthful enthusiasm. As he matured, so did it, partially through contact with other völkisch radicals during the military and paramilitary adventures of his young adulthood. He and his fellow officers exchanged journals and newsletters with titles such as “Der Volkserzieher” and “Neues Leben.”¹⁹ The latter, a publication of the Deutschgläubige Gemeinschaft, impressed him so much that he immediately joined the group. “To do this,” he wrote in his memoirs, “I had to be formally free of the [established] church, which I hadn’t been able to manage during the war despite many efforts. Only after being let out of my unit in early January 1919 could I leave the Landeskirche, citing reasons of changed belief.”²⁰ Conn’s paramilitary comrades had strengthened his youthful pagan sympathies to the point where he left his church. His formal conversion made him the Deutschgläubigen’s only member in Hamburg. He soon became an impassioned advocate who sought to recruit more adherents using the same means by which he himself had been converted.

When Conn found a stable political home in 1923, he chose the NSDAP because of the youthful strength he saw embodied in its SA. But in the “martial men” of SA, he

¹⁷ FZG 11C1 - Alfred Conn - Nachlasse, 3.
¹⁸ Ibid, 3.
¹⁹ Ibid, 97.
²⁰ Ibid, 97.
also saw a chance to spread his *völkisch* beliefs to a receptive audience.\(^{21}\) He believed that the young stormtroopers would be more sympathetic to the new religious life that he preached than would members of the conservative parties, which men like his father and grandfather supported. He joined the NSDAP, therefore, only partially to push the Nazi agenda. “The Party didn’t convince me or win me over,” he wrote in his memoirs, “nor would they ever bring me around to their view of *völkisch* questions. Instead, I felt far ahead of them. I decided that I would help them on the *völkisch* path, in my own small and unknown way.”\(^{22}\)

His efforts, however, were hardly small or unknown. Disappointed by the lack of attention by Party speakers to *völkisch*-spiritual issues, Conn almost immediately took on the role himself.\(^{23}\) He later claimed that he never recruited the stormtroopers to join the *Deutschgläubige Gemeinschaft*, but merely made his beliefs known so that interested comrades could approach him.\(^{24}\) Yet he so publicized his views, both in speech and in print, that he never needed to use open pressure. Instead, he advertised his belief system through a series of publications that encouraged his men to define in paganism the spiritual foundation of the party. In 1924 and 1928, he published exegeses of the epic myths, the Eddas, which he called “the German Bible.”\(^{25}\) The first of these exegeses, entitled simply *Myths of the Edda*, argued that the collected stories of Germanic myth should be the primary spiritual influence in the German nation. The second, *The Illusion of a Völkisch State on Christian Principles*, reproduced the analysis of myth found in his

\(^{21}\) Ibid, 33.  
\(^{22}\) Ibid, 31.  
\(^{23}\) Ibid, 35, 49.  
\(^{24}\) Ibid, 97.  
first book but added an explicitly political argument aimed at members of nationalist parties. The timing of both works indicates that he hoped – despite his later protestations – to convince the stormtroopers of his belief system. *Myths of the Edda* appeared in 1924, just one year after he joined the SA. He re-edited it in 1928, the year he assumed command of his own a *Sturm* and established himself as a rising star within the SA. Together, these twin books presented Conn’s spiritual-political case to his stormtrooper subordinates, and best represent the kind of spiritual foundation on which his SA would have been based.

Conn’s *Myths of the Edda* purported to explain the financial and physical misery of the interwar era. The experience of such misery, he wrote, prompted Germans to ask about the causes – and the blame. Conn admitted that the target of reproach varied depending on whom one asked. To him, this circular assignment of blame was part of the problem:

> Who is guilty of it [the miserable state of the country]? The Jews and their Communist protection troop, say the *Völkischen*; the militarists and industrialists who prolonged the war, say the Socialists; the mutineers who betrayed us to the enemy and forced us to lay down our weapons, say others; and we all blame the profiteers and the black marketers. Everyone, everyone is guilty – except for ourselves, the ones being asked.²⁶

Conn rejected assigning blame for the Germans’ misery to outsiders. In his mind, the Germans had brought their troubles on themselves:

> We complain about the Jews. But haven’t we ourselves bought out in their department stores, read their newspapers, attended their theaters? Haven’t we voted in their parliament? And the worst – haven’t we learned ourselves to think Jewish? It’s our fault! Because we aren’t German anymore, because we don’t know our own ways and even laugh at them…

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²⁶ Conn, *Edda*. 1
because we are ashamed of our German brothers. We all, without exception, are guilty. We ourselves, without exception, bear the blame…. because we ourselves no longer believed, and could only blather on [fabelten] about the positive effects of godliness [Gottesfurcht] on the Volk and on children. We have become a fatherland-less and godless people – and we wonder why it goes so badly for us?27

The cause of the present German misery, Conn believed, was the spiritual barrenness of the German people itself – specifically, its distance from its ancient, pre-Christian religious heritage. Conn thus preached a religious and spiritual revival as the solution for Germany’s woes. This revival would create a race more like its heroic and powerful forefathers, who “considered themselves proud sons of the gods, who held their people to be a people of God. Out of this firm belief they found the power to live an un-despairing, heroic life.”28

Conn wrote forceful summations of the Eddic sagas. He sought above all to recapture the sense of the heroic in the old tales and to instill this heroism in his readers. Yet the bleak tone of the source material also injected a paranoid element. The necessary corollary to equating the ancient gods and heroes with modern Germans was to connect the gods’ legendary adversaries to modern political enemies. The line of thought was clearest in Conn’s discussion of the Midgaard Serpent, one of three monstrous children of the trickster god Loki:

27 Conn, Edda, 1.
28 Conn, Edda, 2. Conn’s use of the singular “God” in some instances begs for explanation, considering his adherence to a pantheistic Norse system. As he explained in Illusion, he understood God as the unitary, unknowable entity of which Odin and the other old German gods were but one incarnation:
Of God himself we know nothing, and can therefore say nothing about him. Odin and the Asgardians are an embodiment of God’s spirit in this imperfect world – not God, but of godly origins.
Conn therefore used “God” to refer to a primal, unitary entity that was present at the origin of the universe, but which after the creation remained forever distant from the fragments of itself that constituted gods and men. Alfred Conn. Der Wahn vom völkischen Staat auf Christlicher Grundlage, (Hamburg: self-published, 1928), 47.
These three creatures would destroy the light of the gods’ creation and overthrow their power. The gods, for the first time fearful for the destiny of themselves and their creation, sought to master these enemies… [T]he Serpent they cast into the ocean, where it circles creation and bites its own tail until the last destructive battle, when it finally unleashes its gigantic power against the sunlit throne of the gods.

The comparison is forceful. The earth surrounded by the Serpent of primal evil, which waits until the moment when it can destroy its hated enemies. How true is this picture! Are we not at all times encircled by evil and hate and jealousy and base meanness? … And has not the evil, the base, the ungodly climbed inside our own hearts, so that we shy away from defending ourselves, that we think we must fall victim to it and do not wrestle ourselves free?²⁹

Conn’s metaphor of the Serpent echoed the nationalist rhetoric of encirclement that had been popular even before the First World War, which claimed that Germany was surrounded by its enemies and had to fight its way clear. While its first attempt to do so had only worsened the situation, Conn never gave in to despair. He reminded his audience that “when the moment of need is at its greatest, when salvation appears no longer possible, a god will sacrifice himself” to conquer the all-encompassing enemy.³⁰

Thus, he called on his readers to become themselves heroic, semi-divine savior-martyrs – and he gave them this opportunity in the SA.

Conn devoted an entire chapter of his *Edda* to Balder, the Norse embodiment of messianic death and redemption. Of all the gods, only Balder received such extended attention. To Conn, Balder inspired all heroic action, all struggle for the victory of light in a world dominated by the forces of evil. Balder was “the light of god in the world… into whose hall nothing impure could enter.”³¹ But Balder was eventually killed, falling

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victim to a plot engineered by Loki – who was not himself of the race of the gods, but a giant who had ingratiated himself among them and now sowed discord in their ranks. The parallels with the Dolchstoss legend were transparent. For Conn and the other pagan revivalists, the German defeat in the First World War was, like Balder’s death, the point during “the eternal struggle between good and evil” where the darkness overpowered the light. In the Eddic sagas, Balder’s murder proved the final act of Loki’s long and treacherous history, after which the gods exiled and imprisoned him. Loki’s escape from bondage and his vengeful return to Asgard would begin the final cataclysm of Ragnarok, which would destroy the gods and their works. Balder’s death thus inaugurated a destructive and evil epoch in world history. Yet it also provided reason for hope. For as the dead Balder lay on his bier, his father Odin whispered to him the secret runic knowledge that would later raise him from the dead. This resurrection would save not only Balder himself, but the world as well. After the final battle of Ragnarok, Balder would rise again to begin a new cycle of creation. Conn encouraged his stormtroopers to follow this example, and he called them warriors who fought for Balder’s renewed order:

Our part on this earth is the fight for Balder, for his return. And when it appears to us that all evil and meanness grows stronger, this should not dishearten and discourage us. Since we know – experience teaches us, and the Edda says it clearly – that it must get ever worse before the outbreak of Götterdämmerung. Then the Wolf breaks loose, the Heaven’s Bridge breaks, the end nears. But we – so far as we on this earth have fought and struggled for the light – will then be raised to another plane for the last battle. If then through the employment of our last strength evil is finally overcome, then Balder will come free from his chains to reign over a good and completed creation.

32 Conn, Edda, 22.
33 Conn, Edda, 22.
Conn’s description of the epic battle at the end of the world was a political
prescription for the young men of Hamburg, who, he argued, should not be afraid to die
for the renewal of their people. The heroes of this struggle, he wrote, “will go consciously
down into death; but through this self-sacrifice in the service of the light they will redeem
the universe, for in death they will drag the evil forces down with them.”34 In invoking
Balder and Ragnarok, Conn embraced self-sacrifice and martyrdom as the resolution of
the political and spiritual struggles he saw around him. His exegeses of the Edda and his
speeches on the subject in stormtrooper taverns inculcated these ideas into his younger
comrades, whom he encouraged to see themselves as semi-divine warriors who battled
for the spiritual redemption of their people. “Thus,” he wrote, “we all die for eternal life.”
[So sterben wir alle zum ewigen Leben]35

Conn’s proposals for spiritual renewal were punctuated by violent, antisemitic,
and racist passages. His unpublished memoirs contained several anecdotes in which his
family refused to have any dealings with Jews, actions that illustrated the casual
antisemitism common to Hamburg’s merchant class.36 Conn absorbed this bias at a young
age, and it ran through his published writings. His völksich racism led him to claim “that
the equality of all men is a lie,” a statement that he claimed was proven by the world war
and by simple observations of daily life.37 But while Conn was an admitted and ardent
racist, he recognized the possibility for both good and evil within all men:

Since this struggle between good and evil must be fought by every man,
since the misleading attack of the anti-godly breaks out against the light in

34 Conn, Edda, 23.
35 Conn, Edda, 23.
36 FZG 11C1 - Alfred Conn - Nachlasse, 3.
37 Conn, Edda, 3.
our own hearts, since we partake in both the godly as well as the ungodly – so does the heavenly bridge that divides good and evil arch through our own human hearts.  

Therefore, while Conn saw the Jews as an alien element that manipulated and oppressed the Germans, his solutions to this problem lay in the German heart. Elimination of the Jews would not purge the “ungodly” within the Germans. Antisemitism, he wrote, played an important role in the revival of the Volk not by concentrating evil in the person of the Jew, but by prompting the Volk to live up to its own positive ideals – to move “from rejection to affirmation.” [von der Verneinung zur Bejahung.] When Conn cast blame, he blamed the Germans themselves for not living up to their heroic past. He emphasized spiritual revival: a sense of personal responsibility, a connection to honored forefathers, and a uniquely German strength that could be gained “by seeking our God in the German way.”  

“We live in this world,” he summarized in 1928, “not just to enjoy ourselves, but also to do good… We are challenged and expected to be heroic in our self-behavior, joyful and conscious in our self-sacrifice.” The heroic sacrifice he advocated was, he claimed, unlike Christian concepts in which Jesus’ singular sacrifice worked salvation for all mankind. Instead, it would be an individual action that set a worldly example: “a general sacrifice in the daily seclusion of life, like an illuminated model brought wordlessly to us by the quiet, silent heroism of the ‘unknown soldier.’”  

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38 Conn, Illusion, 42  
39 Ibid, 4  
40 Conn, Edda, 3.  
41 Conn, Illusion, 48  
42 Ibid, 49
stormtroopers that they must be ready to sacrifice themselves at any time, “and be able to
die laughing.”

Such heroic posturing implied a measure of aggression. Yet as a self-styled
servant of the good and godly, Conn rejected the use of violence against his enemies.
Here he claimed to take his lessons from the gods’ behavior toward the Fenris wolf,
another monstrous enemy sired by Loki. From the moment of its birth, the wolf had
grown larger and more powerful by the day, and the gods soon agreed that he must be
somehow contained. Yet, as Conn quoted the Edda, they never considered killing this
dangerous beast:

‘The gods so highly valued their holiness and love for peace that they did
not want to be stained with the wolf’s blood, even if the prophecies had
proclaimed that he would one day be Odin’s murderer.’ So, although they
knew what fate lay in store, they would rather suffer this than stain all
creation with evil blood.

The gods’ solution involved chaining the wolf with fetters constructed from a variety of
impossible materials, such as the roots of a mountain, the beard of a woman, and the
breath of a fish. To Conn, the tale conveyed the futility of applying physical solutions to
metaphysical problems. He wrote,

No earthly chains can keep evil at bay. The unrestrained effects of god-
hating evil can only be hindered on the spiritual, immaterial plane. These
impossible fetters therefore demonstrate the power of that good spirit that
God during the creation set up to oppose the giants’ substance – matter.

He wrote less metaphorically in 1928, when he advocated the removal of Jews from
economic life as a protective measure for the health of the German family and race. Yet

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43 Ibid, 50
44 Conn, Edda, 8-9.
even then he rejected violence as a means to this end. He hoped for a policy that “would economically restrain all the alien elements in our people,” “promote the Nordic man,” and bring “economic recovery and social freedom” to Germans. But, he also claimed, “Physical violence need play no role in this.”

Conn’s emphasis on the spiritual over the physical seems incongruous at best, and disingenuous at worst. It also seems strange, given the pervasive violence of his source material. He believed, however, that while physical tactics could secure temporary victories at best, a spiritual revolution could permanently renew morality, law, politics, and society. “German belief,” he wrote, “is inseparable from freedom of conscience, which alone grants nobility to men…. So may the Deutschgläubige Bewegung, if it gains strength, achieve its goal to unite again the German people with God, and so lead to both inner and outer freedom.” In other words, Conn directed his stormtrooper followers to focus inward – to develop a heightened sense of their own spiritual power, self-confidence, and individual agency. They would then transform this private, spiritual revolution into a public, political renewal.

Conn gained a significant following among the Hamburg stormtroopers. Many of these followers then joined the Deutschgläubige Bewegung, and his Sturm 2 became known by the nickname the “deutschgläubige Sturm.” It was among the fastest-growing in Hamburg, and it doubled in size in the year after he took over. While it is impossible to tell how many of these new followers actually read Conn’s books, his intellectual

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46 Conn, Illusion, 6
47 Ibid, 11
48 Conn, Edda, 25
49 FZG 11C1 - Alfred Conn - Nachlaß, 97.
50 FZG 922 – Gau Hamburg I. Sturm 2 grew from 52 men in May 1928 to 107 by July 1929
influence raised his popularity both within his own unit and throughout Hamburg’s National Socialist movement. When Ellerhusen lost his post after Sternschanze, Conn leveraged his authority and personal connections to become Hamburg’s SA-

Brigadeführer.

His leadership was, however, short-lived. While his outspoken pagan views and his emphasis on spiritual struggle won him great affection among his own troops, these positions had always caused tension between him and other stormtrooper leaders. Worse, they brought him into conflict with the Hamburg NSDAP’s Catholic leaders – first Klant, whom Conn had helped oust, then Krebs, and finally Kaufmann. That the national leadership of the party repeatedly called upon Catholics to lead the great northern city galled Conn.  

He had left the Ehrhardt Brigade partly because it was led by a Catholic; Conn claimed that Ehrhardt’s Catholicism drove him to “a separate agenda” from the one sought by true Germans. He thought the same of Kaufmann and his circle, one of whom he called “less a German than a Bavarian-Catholic activist.” Conn even distrusted Hitler. Although he was unsure if Hitler subscribed to Catholicism’s religious or moral tenets, he believed Hitler to be tainted by a supposedly Catholic adherence to hierarchy and authoritarianism. Throughout Conn’s time in the party, he hoped that Hitler would come north to escape this pernicious influence. To Conn, Catholics could never be trusted to lead a völkisch party. He vented his frustrations in Myths of the Edda, when he blamed “the Catholic south” for creating in the German mind a derisive vision of the

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51 Although Krebs was a native Hamburger, his family had originally come from Bavaria.
52 FZG 11C1 - Alfred Conn - Nachlasse, 53.
53 Ibid, 40.
54 Ibid, 42.
“Odin-seeking North” – a tactic used by the south to prevent the north from challenging southern domination of the nation’s spirituality and culture.\textsuperscript{55} Conn’s enmity for Catholicism thus chafed prominent Catholics within the party. But his opinions did not embarrass the movement as a whole – for a significant segment of Hamburg’s Lutherans agreed with him.

Conn’s generalized anti-Christianity, however, did threaten a breach with the Lutheran majority. As the title of his 1928 re-issue of the Eddas showed, Conn thought any form of Christian belief incompatible with\textit{ völkisch} politics. Any attempt, he proclaimed, to incorporate Christianity into National Socialism would be an “illusion.” Conn’s writings of the 1920s simmered with resentment against Christianity, which, he believed, had appropriated the religious traditions of ancient Germans in order to convert them to a foreign way of thought.\textsuperscript{56} Once the church had established itself in the north, Conn claimed, it overturned the family values and high morals that Tacitus had praised.\textsuperscript{57}

In a later work, \textit{German-believing or Christian-Marxist?}, he blamed Christianity for almost everything that had gone wrong in German history since the 700s:

The idea of the Roman-oriental absolute monarchy and the divine state (the \textit{civitas dei}) infiltrated us through Christian-oriental teachings and beliefs. So, ever since Karl the Great German-slayer, all political, legal, and spiritual circumstances were poisoned from the ground up.\textsuperscript{58}

\textsuperscript{55} Conn, \textit{Edda}, 3.
\textsuperscript{56} An early section of his \textit{Edda} describes at length the origins of the Christmas tree - for which “we would search the Bible in vain” - as stemming from the World Tree of the German pagans. The symbolic core of the Christmas festival was therefore an appropriation from German tradition. \textit{Eddas}, 3-6. Similarly, he called Jesus a poor imitation of Odin - both of whom hung on a tree to redeem humanity. \textit{Eddas}, 15.
\textsuperscript{57} Conn, \textit{Illusion}, 9-10.
\textsuperscript{58} Alfred Conn, \textit{Deutschgläubig oder Christlich-Marxistisch?} (Hamburg: self-published, undated), 6. While no date appears on the book, a citation of a 1933 work determines it to be of that year or later.
Conn blamed Christianity for “the enslavement [Verknechtung] of once-free German farmers.”⁵⁹ He cursed Luther for siding against these farmers’ “spiritual liberation” in the Peasants’ War of 1525. To Conn, Luther’s actions proved that Christianity itself, not just the Roman Church, was incompatible with German aspirations. Any attempt to fix the Christian system, as Luther had, would only lead to more problems – such as the “bloody strife between Christians” of the Thirty Years’ War, which “brought death and extermination to the entire Volk.”⁶⁰

Christianity therefore had to be replaced as the spiritual basis of German politics. “If we want to free ourselves to build in a völkisch way,” Conn wrote in 1928, “so must we first free ourselves from the alien beliefs of today and recognize a local confession.”⁶¹ The Christians’ insistence on the universality of their doctrine, claimed Conn, encouraged international thinking and moves toward global government – “the Christian world-state, the universal Kingdom of God on Earth, that Rome has always sought.”⁶² Conn insisted that just as no Christian state could be built using völkisch principles, so too could no völkisch state be built on Christian principles. Conn denied that a person could subscribe to both systems of belief: “He who is Christian is not völkisch; he who is völkisch is not Christian. The two exclude each other.”⁶³

Conn’s attack on völkisch Christians was more coherent than the Christians’ justifications for nationalist racism. The tenets of a universal religion fit poorly with militant nationalism, in theory if not in practice. Nevertheless, Christians made up the

⁵⁹ Ibid, 6.
⁶⁰ Ibid, 7.
⁶¹ Conn, Illusion, 16-17.
⁶² Ibid, 12.
⁶³ Ibid, 12.
majority of the Nazi Party. While many were not devoted, they still resented Conn’s attempt to oppose their religious and political creeds. Conn’s anti-Christianity was especially objectionable because he attempted to convert the stormtroopers into a pagan band. If this happened without a corresponding paganization of the Party, which was unlikely, it would exacerbate the already significant tensions between the political and paramilitary wings of the movement. Conn prompted his stormtrooper followers to liken Christianity to Marxism and Judaism. He conjoined these enemies in various rhetorical combinations: “Christian-Jewish ways of thought,”64 the “totalitarian standpoint of both the Marxist state and the Christian God,”65 or even simply “the Collective.”66 Similarly, he played to stormtroopers’ prejudices by portraying “German belief” as a religion of struggle and heroism, while Christianity was a system of submission and control. The German belief was, Conn wrote, only for the strong:

[A] confessional mode of teaching, which gives one a black and white worldview that one can neatly carry home, does not exist. This belief must be experienced and fought for. He who is not bound to his blood and who does not seek to gain the fruits of his own struggle – he cannot be made to understand, and cannot be himself understood.67

Christianity, therefore, turned its adherents into subjects. It gave them a ready-made morality and a system of rules to follow. It eliminated individual conscience and initiative in favor of a universal code of laws. It made simple and unchallenging a spiritual journey that should be difficult and rewarding. Such a belief, Conn wrote, could never ennoble its

64 Ibid, 18.
65 Conn, Detuschgläubig, 61.
66 Ibid, 39.
67 Conn, Illusion, 19.
practitioners. It instead kept them in a state of submissive, helpless, and ultimately irresponsible longing for salvation:

In Christianity, the reigning emotion is of one’s own sinfulness and unworthiness, one’s own impotence, out of which one hopes for the merciful help of God – the yearning to be saved through the sacrifice of another – in general, a passive and lowly attitude.⁶⁸

German belief, on the other hand, encouraged the kind of powerful, heroic striving that the SA claimed to embody:

The old Germanic belief promotes the exercise of one’s own power; the promotion of an heroic values; the worship of God in one’s own affairs through an uninterrupted struggle for the godly here on earth. Surely these are God’s mercifully chosen elect on the battlefield of life, selected for their already-proven heroism and their will to redeem God from his enslavement… rather than to redeem themselves. In total, [Germanic belief promotes] an heroic and manly conduct.⁶⁹

This line of argument appealed to Conn’s stormtroopers as powerfully as it offended many of the Party’s political leaders. His increasing prominence risked embarrassing the civilian leadership with the Lutheran citizens whom they were trying to recruit, and it played into the hands of socialists who painted the Nazis as an anti-Christian, backward-looking party of pagan savages. Furthermore, Conn’s emphasis on individual conscience and resistance to authoritarianism in any form marked him as dangerous among Party leaders who were concerned to rein in the undisciplined SA. Conn told his stormtroopers to rebel against institutional authority and to conduct their own personal struggles. He attacked Christianity as a system that allowed only “one way, one form, one dogma.”⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Ibid, 49.
⁶⁹ Ibid, 49.
⁷⁰ Conn, Deutschgläubig, 48.
What were his stormtroopers to think when asked to follow a political party that used the slogan, “one *Volk*, one *Reich*, one *Führer*”?  

The conflict simmered until 1930, when Conn took over temporary leadership of the Hamburg SA after Ellerhusen’s fall. As Ellerhusen’s top deputy and the leader of the fastest-growing and most active *Standarte*, Conn stepped easily into the role. But the prospect that he might become the permanent leader frightened his rivals in both the SA and the Party. They expelled Conn from the Party altogether in November 1930, not two months after he had assumed command.  

Conn refused to quietly accept his fate, but months of negotiations with his antagonists accomplished nothing. In Easter 1931 – in a signal perhaps of hopes for his resurrection from political death – he published a pamphlet in his own defense: “To the SA-Comrades of Hamburg!” Here he revealed the extent of the conspiracy against him. The “Catholic- and Jesuit-infested leadership” of the Party had stabbed him in the back when it sent a rival SA leader to Hitler to accuse Conn of heresy.  

The man had allegedly brought with him a copy of Conn’s *Illusion*, which convinced Hitler to declare Conn’s ejection. In his address to his former comrades, Conn noted that this book had been in print for three years, and that it had been “bought and read by many party member without my hearing a single case of someone finding something unfit in it.”  

Conn took the opportunity to advertise anew for his beliefs. But the bulk of the resulting pamphlet reprinted letters that he had exchanged over the past months with party and SA leaders. These exposed the cabal against him, but more importantly it gave new evidence

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72 Ibid, 2.
for his accusations that Christians could not be trusted to conduct the SA’s business. In true stormtrooper fashion, Conn fought his oppressors and embraced a martyr’s role:

I have no intention of falling victim to this Catholic action. Perhaps new lies will follow these. In that case I am resolved to fight them with all my strength. I will figure out the ways and means to do so. I have already managed the expulsion of one Christian-Catholic leader from the party [Klant], just as he thought he had the Gau firmly in hand. We don’t want Christian zealots but rather freedom of conscience. And in so far as I defend my honor here, I defend at the same time the moral uprightness [Anständigkeit] of the party.73

Conn’s public airing of these letters confirmed to his stormtroopers that his honor had been insulted. The letters relayed rumors Conn’s enemies spread about his personal financial irresponsibility, which included the charge that he had been funneling SA money to a Jewish shooting club. The accusation strained credulity. “Lies and slander,” Conn wrote, “are the weapons used against me.”74 Conn portrayed himself as an upright figure who hoped only for a chance to face his accusers. “If you have something against me,” he wrote to his enemies, “then be a man and say it to my face; you can be sure that I will not leave you lacking answer.”75 Conn also revealed that the party leaders had colluded to harm the SA’s collective security. During the campaign against Conn, civilian Party leaders also closed and gutted two SA-Homes that he had opened, an act that put many stormtroopers out on the street and which saddled the SA with over 1000 marks in penalties for breaking the lease. While the SA remained leaderless, Conn alleged, the party cut off the stormtroopers’ insurance plans; lawyers who had assisted stormtroopers with their defense against political crimes suspended their services, and the Altona SA,

74 Ibid, 14.
75 Ibid, 7.
which was temporarily in charge of the Hamburg units, plundered further amounts of money for its own use.  
The series of events, Conn wrote, was “truly sad”: the Christians’ coup had destroyed networks vital to the survival of the rank-and-file stormtroopers. “And all so that there would be no German-believing Brigadeführer!”

To Conn, the events surrounding his downfall proved him correct from the start. Christians generally – and Catholics specifically – could not be trusted to lead a völkisch party. As he concluded:

He who conducts himself dishonorably has no right to be ‘outraged’ at others. I ask each SA-Man: why was the SA-Heim founded? Why did I sign my name on the lease? Not for me but for the honor and the feeling of shared destiny I have with my SA-men. How irresponsible and outrageous are the mean-spirited and insulting Winkelzüge of the Obf and the Gau! Such fresh-baked and greatly overpaid leaders will never have the unceasing trust of the SA-men stationed under them, despite their fine phrases. I ask everyone: where is the honesty and uprightness that belong to true national socialism? .... I spit on such true national socialists! [Ein Pfui über solche wahren Nationalsozialisten!]”

Conn’s expulsion from the SA showed the limits of “German belief” as a spiritual basis for the SA. Although he and his fellow enthusiasts had been among the party’s most natural early constituencies, they became over time less appealing to the political leadership. As the SA transformed itself into a mass organization after 1929, it became more concerned with integrating larger numbers of young men, many of whom were not radical in spiritual matters. Leaders in the political party and other sections of the Hamburg SA felt that pagan radicals at the top of the organization would scare off these potential recruits. They also feared the effect of Conn’s iconoclastic belief system on a

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76 Ibid, 12-14.
77 Ibid, 13.
paramilitary organization that had always been unruly and was now expanding at an unprecedented rate. Party leaders sought for the SA a spiritual leadership that would attract and integrate new recruits, not one that preached independence and iconoclasm. A more institutional and hierarchical religion would better match the party’s own authoritarianism. Such a religion lay close at hand in Lutheranism. Within this church, one bishop in particular had for years been working for an accommodation between his religion and the völkisch parties of the right. At the same time as Conn and his pagan rebels were being chased out of the SA, Pastor Franz Tügel and his flock were being lured in.

**Franz Tügel: Pastor to the Stormtroopers**

Franz Tügel was among the earliest and most enthusiastic clerical advocates of Nazism. As one biographer claimed, “his name is like no other connected to the history of Hamburg’s Lutheran church during the Nazi era.” He was not the only Lutheran pastor in Hamburg who embraced National Socialism – many Lutheran pastors sooner or later found some level of comfort with Nazism, whether out of genuine sympathy or enforced cooperation. Tügel was the most prominent and influential member of this group. He actively sought the synergy of party and church, and his greatest enemies – besides the Communists – were liberal pastors who resisted this end. Through sermons, speeches, and publications, Tügel led his congregants, his fellow pastors, and eventually

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his parish and Church into the Nazi embrace. For this dedication, he was named Bishop of Hamburg in 1934 and afterwards worked to replace the church’s traditional federal structure in favor of unity under the National Socialist Führerprinzip. In secular matters as much as spiritual, Tügel was a true believer. Although not himself a stormtrooper, he was their foremost spiritual advisor. He ministered to the stormtroopers, delivered sermons at their funerals, and eventually – once the Nazi takeover removed all obstacles – he wore the brown shirt.

Part of Tügel’s kinship with the SA came from his identification with their backgrounds and motivations. Tügel followed a path to Nazism that has already been described as one of the two typical stormtrooper types: the good son who attempted to salvage his dead father’s legacy. His most important contribution to Hamburg’s Nazi party was his conflation of – in one of his favorite formulations – a human father with a heavenly father. The Revolution of 1918 and the social developments of the following fourteen years convinced him that these fathers’ political and spiritual legacies were under attack. He thus threw himself into National Socialist politics as the only way to honor his fathers and to uphold their principles. Tügel hoped to unite the worldly and the divine, so that each would gain strength from the other. His success brought Nazis into the church and churchmen into Nazism.

Franz Tügel’s earliest childhood memory was of bearded, helmeted firemen who burst into his apartment building and put out a fire on a neighbor’s balcony.80 The scene echoed the family obsessions of his stormtroopers: it recalled a threatened domestic

environment in which women and children waited to be saved by the intervention of powerful, assertive men. In Tügel’s case, as with many of his stormtrooper followers, yearning for such heroism stemmed from the early loss of a father, a respected and successful merchant. August Christian Wilhelm Ludwig Tügel had been named as if he were to be worshipped: all four of his given names alluded to secular or religious might. Life in the Tügel household revolved around the patriarch, but he was an absent figure who was often away from the home and always distant from his young children. Only when Franz, the eldest, was twelve years old did the father allow him to come to church and join his Sunday strolls. Father Tügel – “wisely,” in the words of his son – had decided that proper religious education could not take place before this age. 

Young Franz was therefore thrilled when he was finally allowed to follow his father’s Sunday path. He expected that participation in his father’s religion would bring the pair physically and spiritually closer over the coming decades.

In 1904, however, his father died. Franz was just 16 years old. Tügel’s biographers have suggested that the early loss of his father inculcated fears of loss in the boy that pushed him into ever-more militant and authoritarian forms of religion and politics. 

One biographer theorized that, as the eldest son, Franz’s assumption of his father’s place in the family accustomed him as a youth to the dynamics of command and obedience. 

In any case, Tügel attributed religious significance to this childhood trauma. As he wrote in his autobiography:

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81 Ibid, 8.
83 Hering, 53.
The death of my father changed my life. And again I saw God’s hand over me, in a way I had not seen it since the impressive pictures in the Biblical history book of my first school years. And it pointed powerfully into the future of the land He would show me. This experience I later came to see as the most valuable experience given to us by our father, who was torn away so early.  

Tügel’s distant father never spoke much with his sons about his own life and background; he evidently thought them too young. Franz therefore pursued religion and the pastorate as a way to learn more about his father, to lessen the pain of his loss, and to take up the father’s spiritual mantle so that the beliefs for which he fought would not be lost.

After years of study in the seminary, Tügel was ordained a Lutheran pastor on April 19, 1914 – his father’s birthday, and the ten-year anniversary of the man’s death. The dead father influenced not only Franz’s choice of profession, but also the content of his religious beliefs. “I thank my father,” he wrote in his autobiography, “for teaching me to understand sin: as guilt, as something that separates us from God, and as our enemy.”

His father also taught him to loathe Catholicism. He forbade his children to set foot in a Catholic church. The resentment of father and son against Catholicism carried a strongly gendered critique. Franz called it “a woman’s church [Frauenkirche].” He claimed that it embodied “the motherly, womanly, and virginal,” in opposition to the Lutheran church’s sobriety, realism, and honesty. But most of all, the Lutheran church to him possessed a “male structure” [männlicher Struktur] that existed “to serve a fatherly

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84 Tügel, Mein Weg, 35.
85 Ibid, 29.
86 Ibid, 111.
87 Ibid, 14.
88 Hering, 52.
Because of this, he thought, the Lutheran church was more effective when put to political uses. This aspect revealed the strong political dimension of Tügel’s religious heritage. The Tügels rejected the liberal view that religion existed apart from the state, which Franz called a “dangerous worldview” that mistakenly taught that family and religious matters were personal matters, not state concerns. The Tügels’ Lutheranism instead connected a people’s religion to its secular fortunes:

He who privatizes the church buries the tribe and the state. He undermines the Volk-life’s eternal basis and prepares the way for culture-destroying Bolshevism or culture-incapable Americanism. He is a helper of international Judaism and its plans for world domination. Like my father, I am a vigorous opponent of these powers, which seek to promote this decomposing process [Auflösungsprozess] within the Volk. His [my father’s] healthy opinions came early into my flesh and blood.

Tügel’s encounter with liberal theology at seminary confused and dismayed him. The difference between its tenets and those he had learned from his father left him unable to pray, a spiritual crisis that was not resolved until he returned to his father’s conservative theology. In his final school years, he decided that “God and Vaterland belong together.” Tügel proudly called himself “an arch-conservative,” a stance that was, “from my parents’ house and my youth, as self-explanatory as daily bread. Everything that looked like revolution or revolt was high treason in my eyes.” Revolution was treason not only against the state, but against “fatherly heritage [väterlichen Erbe].”

As one of his biographers explained,

89 Tügel, Mein Weg, 127.
90 Ibid. 40.
91 Ibid. 40.
92 Ruoff, 34-35 and Hering, 56.
93 Tügel, Mein Weg, 115.
94 Ibid, 218.
Franz Tügel seems to have believed that he owed it to his dead father not to betray him, and to act in his way. Honor and loyalty, which he thought he owed but couldn’t directly prove, instilled in the fatherless youth a fixation on the legacy of the fathers, the recognition of the fathers, the belief of the fathers, the church of the fathers, the land of the fathers.  

The outbreak of the First World War shortly after Tügel’s ordination gave him an opportunity to put these beliefs into practice. He greeted the war with jubilation, as a vehicle through which “spiritual and religious movements became elevated.” But war also gave him the chance to shore up his sense of masculinity, which had been wounded by his rejection from military service in 1912. “It ate at me,” he wrote, “not to be allowed to become a soldier like almost all my friends… But that’s how it supposedly had to be.” The First World War gave him a second chance. At first, he stayed with his Hamburg congregation and conducted military services to bless soldiers and regiments as they left for battle. But he eventually arranged to serve as a chaplain in Hamburg’s Infantry Regiment 76. Tügel thus finally joined what he called the “male church of war” [Männerkirche des Krieges] (Image 3.1) He felt it important to serve in this way, not only because it fulfilled his personal longing for military camaraderie, but also because it fulfilled what he saw as the church’s true calling. “The church,” he wrote, “must in truth

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95 Ruoff, 26.  
96 Tügel, Mein Weg, 116.  
97 Ibid, 105.  
98 Ibid, 135.
A uniformed Franz Tügel and his wife sit for a photograph shortly before he left Hamburg to join “the male church of war” and serve “beside the field-gray men of the Front.” (Source; StAH 662-1 Familie Tügel)
be a manly church, [serving] out with the fighting host, beside the field-gray men of the Front.”99

Tügel’s wartime experiences exacerbated his tendency to preach political obedience and authoritarian values. Many of his sermons sought to disprove rumors from the home front that could undermine the soldiers’ trust in their leaders, which he called “bottomless depravity” that offended “the German sense of male honor.”100 Tügel tried to draw in soldiers by appealing to their sense of masculine honor, but he also no qualms about preaching to captive audiences. In late 1918, as the German army fell back across the entire western front, the division pastor announced that Tügel would be holding a voluntary communion service. Any men interested should step forward. Before they had a chance to register their opinion, a General on the scene barked out, “All will participate! [Nehmen alle teil!]” As Tügel recalled, “None dared stay back, and I found this absolutely in Ordnung.”101 The phrase was telling. Tügel’s primary concern was the maintenance of spiritual and political order, the heritage of his two fathers that seemed more fragile than ever. The more threatened it became, the more he put his preaching in the service of authoritarian political forces that could command the masses to accept his god.

When Tügel gave his first combat funeral in Romania, the woods in which it took place were peaceful, and the sound of gunfire distant and muted. By his final one in 1918, the fighting was “fanatically wild;” artillery shells exploded so close by and with such

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99 Ibid, 127.
100 Ibid, 134.
regularity that he had to shout to make himself heard. The German army had collapsed. During the breakdown of order, Tügel tried to keep up morale. He shamed soldiers who spoke ill of the Kaiser and berated those who mentioned that “everyone at home” said that Wilhelm had to go. But this was just another losing battle – even fellow chaplains, he recalled, “began to howl with the wolves.” The mob had taken over. The experience shattered him as much as it had the men who became Freikorps fighters and the first generation of stormtroopers.

   Like the paramilitaries who defended their conception of German political order in the postwar years, Tügel returned to the church to defend its spiritual order. It was no easy work. “Now that the monarchy had fallen and there was no throne to storm,” he wrote, “they [the revolutionaries] set as their goal to tread on the altar.” But if the monarchy had surrendered to the socialist mobs, Tügel’s church would not. Thus began Tügel’s decade-long battle with the political left, a conflict that drove him to support increasingly authoritarian and violent forms of political activity. But much to Tügel’s dismay, his socialist enemies did not only exist outside the church. In fact, he admitted that the majority of the population considered themselves both Christians and socialists, a situation that left he and his allies like “officers without soldiers.” Even worse, socialists and liberals also counted among his fellow pastors. These men could not be accused of hoping to eradicate Christianity, but they did seek to transform it along progressive lines. Tügel concluded that socialist moles in the church sought to overturn

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102 Ibid, 144.
103 Ibid, 144.
104 Ibid, 144.
105 Ibid, 149.
106 Ibid, 151
god’s ordained moral order. He expressed these fears primarily by warning of socialism’s consequences to traditional gender roles and family life, which had been created by God as the only acceptable way of organizing individual and social life. Socialism, Tügel believed, sought their destruction. By 1926, Tügel saw a creeping socialist gender aesthetic within the church itself: A local parish in Hamburg’s suburb of Fuhlsbüttel had recently voted – during Holy Week – to ordain a certain Sophie Kunert. Tügel railed against the decision in his regular column in *Das evangelische Hamburg*. He connected the timing of “the experiment with female ordination” to the new democratic form of government, and he asked “why here and now the woman is suddenly seen as an administer of the necessary sacraments, after things went fine for 1900 years without her.”

107 To Tügel, it was no coincidence that this break with tradition would come during a time of Social-Democratic rule. He hoped that the Synod would find “a manly answer” to this question, “while it still is a Synod of men.”

108 For Tügel, the issue transcended specifics of church administrative tradition. Female ordination threatened “the eternal order of God, who placed the highest office in the world on the strong shoulders of men.”

109 Tügel believed that Socialists and democrats had displaced masculine leadership to the shoulders of women and weaklings, an act that would damage individual morality, family stability, and state order.

Tügel thus concluded that the 1918 revolution represented “a revolution against God.”

107 StAH 622-1 Familie Tügel II.4 *Das evangelische Hamburg*, 1927, 46.
108 StAH 622-1 Familie Tügel II.4 *Das evangelische Hamburg*, 1927, 47.
109 Ibid., 47.
110 StAH 622-1 Familie Tügel II.4 *Das evangelische Hamburg*, 1931, p36.
socialism’s challenge lay in the creation of a *Volkskirche*: a “‘new church,’ that was apolitical but socially conscious, ur-Christian and near to the people.”

Tügel did not know at first which of the many political parties could help accomplish this goal, but he was clear about which would not. In their sermons and published writings, Tügel and the conservative pastors instructed their flocks that they should feel free to choose any political party – except socialist ones. The pastors felt that any vote for a *deutsch-national* party would uphold Christian principles, and Tügel voted this way himself.

But did not become involved in party-political life until 1930, when a visit to a fellow pastor in Bad Oeyenhausen convinced him to attend an NSDAP meeting. He described it in his memoirs as a powerful experience that demonstrated the godly underpinnings of the movement:

> The hall was tightly packed with men of all classes and ages: next to the workers of the forest sat the burghers of the city, very young people perched on wooden benches, and even a pair of sick people in wheelchairs were not left out. Just like in the church! – was my first thought.

The speech was given by Wilhelm Kube, the Nazi religious expert and “German Christian” whose later brutality as the General-Kommissar for White Russia earned him the name “the butcher of Belarus.” In the early years, Kube was one of the Party’s most effective ambassadors to religious audiences. In this meeting, his argument for state funding of parochial schools – not only Catholic, but Lutheran as well – moved Tügel, who rejoiced that a Nazi speaker would take the “correct” position on religious questions. Tügel also celebrated that a Nazi audience greeted such views with thunderous applause:

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111 Tügel, *Mein Weg*, 150.
112 Ibid, 218. He does not say which of the German-national parties he voted for.
113 Ibid, 219
I listened especially intently to his warm-hearted acceptance of the confessional schools, to which the evangelical parents had just as much right as the Catholic population. The sustained applause that this part of the speech received gave me a world of wonderful hope and confidence in Germany’s future.\footnote{Ibid.}

It was “a powerful avowal” [ein mächtigen Bekenntnis] by the Party members, and it led to Tügel’s political conversion.\footnote{Ibid, 221. Tügel was not immune to literary touches in his autobiography: on the way to the speech, stormclouds had poured rain onto Tügel and his companion. On the way home, the heavens cleared.} As for Kube, his star rose based on successes like these. He rose through the ranks of the SS and the East-Prussian government, until his final appointment as General-Kommissar for White Russia brought him infamy as the “butcher of Belarus.” He was killed by a partisan bomb in 1943.

After this experience, Tügel began attending meetings, reading Nazi publications, and devouring information on his new political philosophy. His mother bought him a copy of Mein Kampf for his next birthday. He read it avidly, and marked enthusiastic comments in the margins where Hitler had alluded to Christian principles or used Christian rhetoric.\footnote{StAH 662-1 Familie Tügel III.7 Mein Kampf, 1930 edition.} Yet he wrestled with his conscience for months before finally joining the Party – a crisis, he claimed, that centered on whether the pastor of a church should join a mass-political movement and risk becoming its pawn.\footnote{Tügel, Mein Weg, 220.} It was a prescient concern, which he overcame through belief in Point 24 of the Party Platform, which promoted freedom of conscience for all confessions, so long as they were not deemed morally detrimental to the state. As he later confessed: “I had great expectations for this
movement, and I don’t hide that I hoped that under its flag our Evangelical church would no longer stand like a Cinderella in the corner, as it did under the then-current regime.”

Once Tügel joined the NSDAP, his pastoral style appealed to the stormtroopers. His psychological background attuned him to the SA’s brawling masculinity. As he had during the war, Tügel found comfort in associating himself with male warriors. Even if he himself faced no physical danger, he compared his sacrifices to theirs:

The party itself didn’t expect a Pastor to hang posters and fight in tavern fights. Others sacrificed more for the movement, in that they put their health and lives on the line every day. My sacrifice was a commitment of the heart, which also demanded strength and time. Only later did I recognize that I too gave things near and dear [Gaben und Güter], which included painful losses. The rest of my health and a part of my churchly work I gave up for the cause of Adolf Hitler, and I, a glowing idealist in the future of National Socialism, never regretted it.

Tügel adopted the stormtroopers’ language. He called his pastoral position “a total office.” His favorite word for his work was the one stormtroopers used to describe their labors for the party – “Dienst,” or service. He claimed that service could be enriched through religious experience, that “the more strongly and deeply we live in the church year, the richer and more blessed is our Dienst.”

He also well understood the ways in which stormtroopers justified their acts of violence, and he furnished them with religious rhetoric with which to excuse their misdeeds. Tügel’s Wer bist Du? Fragen der Kirche an den Nationalsozialisten, which he published in 1932, portrayed the stormtroopers in a Christian light. Their violence and combativeness were not directed against the church, but rather in its interests. “I’m not

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118 Ibid, 217.
119 Ibid, 221.
120 Ibid, 164.
among those whom I call Illusionists,” he wrote, “who think that the church can protect itself.”\textsuperscript{121} The church, he told the stormtroopers, needed the SA. Marxists had declared war upon the German church, just as they had in Russia, and only the stormtroopers had “with their blood and sacrifice” prevented its destruction.\textsuperscript{122} He cited the Nazis’ slogan that “Terror can only be broken through terror,” and claimed that only the SA’s violence could preserve spiritual development:

The \textit{Führer} of National Socialism has recognized that, and his movement has acted accordingly. Where spiritual weapons fail, must the way must be made free again for their employment! We Christians shouldn’t view this with suspicion, but should see it as totally \textit{in Ordnung}.\textsuperscript{123}

Tügel told his parishioners that those who accused stormtroopers of immorality, of brutality, and of anti-Christian behavior were too shortsighted or paranoid to recognize the Bolshevist threat. He reminded civilians and stormtroopers alike of supposedly anti-Christian actions of the revolution’s early years, and he asserted that without the SA the situation would only have grown worse in the intervening time.\textsuperscript{124} He cited recent disturbances during a period of the SA’s illegality to prove that its presence kept the “Bolsheviks” in check:

When the defenders of these unjust and incomprehensible actions [against the SA] say that without the SA we would again have peace and order, one must respond that without them we would have long ago had Bolshevism in the land. … I refer once again to the facts: immediately after the ban [of

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\item[\textsuperscript{121}] Franz Tügel, \textit{Wer bist Du? Fragen der Kirche an den Nationalsozialismus} (Hamburg: Rauhen Haus, 1932), 31. Conn used the same language (“illusion”) to decry links between National Socialism and Christianity.
\item[\textsuperscript{122}] Tügel, \textit{Wer bist Du?} 32.
\item[\textsuperscript{123}] Ibid 21.
\item[\textsuperscript{124}] Tügel cited as the revolution’s offenses against Christianity: the banning of Christmas celebrations in Prussia, the cessation of religious teaching in Hamburg and Bremen schools, and the supposed links between German Marxist parties and Russian Bolsheviks. See Gordon, 428-429 and Tügel, \textit{Mein Weg}, 56 and 150.
\end{itemize}
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the SA], the red terror renewed and intensified, and it was to me a tangible sign of the times that on the next Sunday our house of god was again overrun by the unhindered Communist horde, who disturbed the our church service’s tranquility.\footnote{Tügel, \textit{Wer bist Du?} 33. No reference to the alleged attack appears in Hamburg newspapers from the time – even the Tageblatt, which would surely have publicized such an affront had it occurred.}

In his sermons and publications, Tügel highlighted stories from around the Reich in which the SA protected the church. In one southern town, the members of “a certain party” had desecrated a crucifix. The stormtroopers restored it to its place of honor.\footnote{Ibid 32.}

With the SA, Tügel played the same role he had in wartime. He armed his soldiers with the spiritual strength to sacrifice themselves for the common good and the nation’s renewal. He saw the party – and his role in it – as giving self-confidence and pride to the lowly fighters:

Even the ordinary man [\textit{der kleine Mann}] marching as an unknown soldier of the movement could feel secure that he too served a part of the whole, and that he was inseparable from the winning of political power in the state. This gave a self-confidence, but not an arrogance, that even the unemployed could feel that his \textit{Volkstum} was his true worth.\footnote{Tügel, \textit{Mein Weg}, 222.}

To Tügel, Nazism represented a healthy impulse to rescue morality and godliness from socialist decay. Stormtroopers, not the socialists or liberals, were the true Christians:

Not the will to power moved the masses of the Volk, but rather the belief in the good. From there came the urge to win all others to the cause. Here I am overcome with the similarity to the ur-Christians, which could not of course have been anything other than unique, but also the ur-powerful movement of Christ as painted in the Apostles’ gospels.\footnote{Ibid 222.}

Tügel’s ideology was of one mind with the stormtroopers’ own sense of embattled heroism and denigrated virtue, and his church, the Gnadenkirche in St Pauli, was

\footnote{Tügel, \textit{Wer bist Du?} 33. No reference to the alleged attack appears in Hamburg newspapers from the time – even the Tageblatt, which would surely have publicized such an affront had it occurred.}

\footnote{Ibid 32.}

\footnote{Tügel, \textit{Mein Weg}, 222.}

\footnote{Ibid, 222.}
especially suited to provide a refuge for SA men. A heavy, neo-Roman building meant to recall a Carolingian fortress-church, its central tower cast its heavy shadow over the Heiligengeistfeld, a market and fairgrounds that became a site of recurrent political conflict, especially when the Christmas carnival was in season. Tügel thus fashioned his Gnadenkirche as a physical and ideological refuge for stormtroopers in a heavily contested neighborhood. The stormtroopers faithfully attended his services. They thanked him outside the church for his sermons, pursued further discussion, and sought his spiritual council. Tügel also made the church and his parsonage available for NSDAP events, particularly those of the Frauenschaft or BDM, which provided social services. A Christmas collection drive for the SA in 1932 further enhanced the stormtroopers allegiance.\footnote{Ibid, 223.}

The experiences tightened bonds among the party members and the SA, and between these groups and the church. “Within this army of faithful followers,” he wrote, “was a true readiness to believe, a nearness to Christianity and the Church that always gripped me…. The healthy mood observed here signaled a new readiness for belief and for a homecoming to the old church.”\footnote{Ibid, 223.}

Tügel sought to build a bond between the NSDAP and the Lutheran church, so the members of both communities felt comfortable with one another. He did so in the service of winning souls for each. Yet while the stormtroopers embraced his preaching, some congregants in his church resisted conversion to Nazi politics. Some complained about the political content of his sermons, and a few even left his church over it.\footnote{Ibid, 153.} Yet many
others were open to persuasion, especially when Tügel came down from the pulpit to apply a personal touch. Often, he used weddings, funerals, and other family sacraments to his own political purposes. One favorite tactic was to use wedding sermons to describe how National Socialism strove to create a Germany in which a young married couple could build their lives in peace and security. He would also corner individual guests at wedding receptions in order to proselytize Nazism, not Christianity. In these environments, Tügel preached party gospel to neutral congregants, and when he saw an opening he pushed sympathetic targets toward a full embrace of the NSDAP.132

Many of Tügel’s fellow conservative pastors, who supported his efforts in word and deed, pursued their own links with the SA. Pastor Wehrmann in Eilsbek hosted Sunday services for the local SA-Storms, who marched in closed formation to the steps of his Friedenskirche and attended services in uniform.133 (Image 3.2) Pastor Asmussen of Altona hoped to enlist the Party in a “fighting Christianity” that could win “the fight against personal conceptions of God [persönlicher Gottesgedanken].”134 Pastor R. Stuewewer was also an early supporter of the Nazis’ religious and secular plans, and he later played a key role during the takeover of power in assuring residents of the Altstadt that the National Socialists would “clean up” its crime-ridden slums.135 St Georg was home to several pastors with National Socialist sympathies, including the young Pastor Kappesser, who gave fiery sermons at the SA and SS funerals and whose own funeral at the Heiligen

132 Ibid, 217.
133 “Kirchgang Eilbecker SA-Stürme,” Hamburger Tageblatt, October 20, 1932. The juxtaposition of the “Peace-church” with pastor Wehrmann and his SA is jarring.
Dreieinigkeitskirche in 1932 was attended by “a great number” of stormtroopers. At his request, SS pallbearers carried his coffin and laid swastika wreaths on his grave. These men had strong ties to the NSDAP and SA – politically, spiritually, and personally. In return, some pastors grew so close to the SA as to provide material aid for its campaigns of violence.

The biggest obstacle to these pastors’ political proselytizing was a sense among many Christians that the Nazis merely feigned common interest with the church – that any cooperation by the NSDAP part “was all calculation and propaganda, that actually the Party used the church as a means to an end.” Tügel denied this charge. He claimed that he “saw deep into the hearts of these people [in the party]. And there was true sensibility and real readiness to listen!… No, this was no deception: in the movement lived true religion!” Tügel’s 1932 book Wer bist Du? represented his most public attempt to vindicate Nazism in the eyes of his churchmen. In its closing passages, he admitted that the party was not perfectly Christian, nor would it create a perfectly Christian state. No earthly political movement could be fully in touch with the divine. This fact, Tügel claimed, should not dissuade Christians from joining the NSDAP. Instead, the disconnect mandated Christian participation, so that they could ensure the party held as close as possible to godly ideals. In doing so, Christians would honor both

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137 One such case reported closely in Hamburg concerned a pastor who had provided explosives to a Franconian stormtrooper tavern. “SA-Pastor Fuchs verhaftet,” Hamburger Echo, December 8, 1932.
138 Tügel, Mein Weg, 223.
139 See for example his description in Mein Weg (223) of a wedding reception in which he subtly found out the political allegiances of a group of military officers, whom he then successfully encouraged to join the NSDAP.
Uniformed stormtroopers attend church services. (Source: Heinrich Hoffmann. Das Braune Heer. 100 Bilddokumente: Leben, Kampf, und Sieg der SA und SS. Berlin: Zeitgeschichte. 1932.)
their heavenly father and his political kingdom on earth:

Christ alone is the nation’s salvation. Even the Third Reich will not be God’s Reich, and nobody should think so. We wait in the belief of an eternal Reich, to come after the Reichs of this world. But the [the Nazis’] new Germany will stand openly in the spirit of the Lord, and will be a more illuminated Heimat than the country of yesterday and today. This we foresee, this we believe in, and this we pray for; it is our great struggle. May the Lord be merciful and bless this struggle! May the Lord bless our Führer and his Volk!¹⁴⁰

Such an open political confession was exactly what the Nazis hoped to gain from their allied pastors. A figure of religious authority used religious language to praise their political movement. The approach bolstered their public image and drew in converts. More importantly, it strengthened the party’s internal bonds and its grounding in the local community.

By 1931 the Hamburg NSDAP’s religious allegiances had solidified along Christian lines. The pagan activists who had formed a significant part of the early SA had either been driven from the party or encouraged to quiet their proselytizing. In their place, the party had brought in respected and established members of the conservative Hamburg pastorate. This development helped both religious and political leaders strengthen social ties within their movement. Conservative churches allied well with the bastions of home and family around which the NSDAP based its rhetorical and practical recruitment. During the final years of the drive to power, the Nazis’ family and religious foundations emerged from their private chambers and entered the public square in an increasingly powerful way.

¹⁴⁰ Tügel, Wer bist Du? 68.
CHAPTER IV

FATHERS, SONS, COMRADES, AND LOVERS: THE MEN OF THE SA (1930-1932)

In November 1930, as the Battle of Sternschanze’s aftermath was reshaping local SA leadership, the SA also received a new national leader. Hitler reinstated Ernst Röhm, the Bavarian paramilitary organizer and logistician who had more than anyone else built the early SA in its early southern-German strongholds. Although he had resigned his position in 1929 and gone to Bolivia as a military adviser, he retained Hitler’s trust in both his professional abilities and personal loyalty. Röhm was thus the perfect figure to take over the SA during a time when its local leaders were often either incompetent, as in Hamburg, or self-aggrandizing and power-hungry, as in Berlin. Röhm, Hitler hoped, could manage an expanding SA. He was to centralize and standardize the organization while keeping the membership under control through his personal leadership style, his emphasis on caring for the enlisted ranks, and his ability to advocate the SA’s interests in a way that did not challenge Hitler’s authority. Röhm also enjoyed unimpeachable credentials as a fighter in the First World War. His face bore the scars of combat, and he loudly advocated the personal benefits of military experience and the moral superiority of men who fought on behalf of their country. He was in background, personality, and physical presence the ultimate example of the fighting men the SA hoped to attract as its “political soldiers.”

Röhm was not just a practitioner of military masculinity – he was also a theorist. Röhm argued that political authority should be based on principles of military virtue, and that a state should consequently be built on men alone. Röhm claimed that the Weimar

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1 Longerich, 45-51.
Republic and democracy had destroyed masculine values in favor of feminine ones, and that this had led to the country’s decline. The solution, he said, could only be found through the re-embrace of military masculinity. In his ironically titled autobiography, *Story of a Traitor* [*Geschichte eines HochverrÄinters*], he wrote that

> Times of state power and greatness, eras of struggle, have never tolerated a leading position for the female sex. It is unimaginable that Alexander the Great or Frederick the Great, Caesar or Napoleon, Prince Eugene [of Savoy] or Charles XII of Sweden would have bowed to feminine influences. They were of course the greatest commanders of all time, shining examples and leaders of their people, but still only rough war heroes.²

Röhm’s fixation on male virtues as a foundation of politics fit well with the conceptions held by the rank-and-file SA. Stormtroopers understood themselves as heroic warriors who defended their comrades, their political allies, their families, and their neighborhoods by means of their own physical prowess and self-sacrifice. The identity had deep roots in powerful and enduring archetypes of male behavior, which its advocates saw as sources of continual renewal. As a continuing feature in *Der SA-Mann*, “SA-Spirit”, explained in March 1932:

> The organized will, the power, and the masculine, German, mentality of our brown army [are] the undefeatable source of strength from which leader and man continually reap new motivation, new confidence, and new will to victory.³

The connection of masculinity to concepts of disciplined, organized power stemmed from an ideal of male soldierhood [*Soldatentum*] whose legacy was central to the stormtroopers’ political practices. As a January 1932 issue of *Der SA-Mann* described “The Nature of the SA”:


³ “SA-Geist,” *Der SA-Mann*, March 1, 1932, p2.
He who holds as the highest ideal the avoidance of every disturbance in his comfortable lifestyle, who avoids every difficulty, who runs from every obstacle in his way, who puts himself before everything else, is no soldier – and in the end, not even a real man. As every real man is by nature a soldier.4

Stormtroopers throughout the hierarchy were obsessed with their status as men. They admired the military heroes, national martyrs, and dominant men of prior eras, and they hoped to model their own lives on these past greats. But Röhm himself had additional reasons to admire the hyper-masculine warriors Alexander and Frederick – Ernst Röhm was also homosexual.

Röhm come to terms with his sexual orientation in 1924, and was open about it afterwards with certain members of the party leadership circle in Munich, including Hitler himself.5 But Röhm’s sexuality was a troublesome paradox: a source of simultaneous anxiety and mockery from his opponents, a point of inconsequence or irritation to his peers, and a threatening presence to both homo- and heterosexual subordinates who dreaded any association with homosexuality. The great threat many stormtroopers felt at being labeled homosexual contrasted with their professed desire for homosocial environments and their advocacy of close emotional ties between comrades. The paradox made homosexuality a central terrain on which stormtroopers contested their masculinity, which they strove to prove according to modes they saw as dominant but threatened under the current state of German society. The more the stormtroopers could establish themselves as powerful, masculine figures, the more political power they believed they deserved.

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5 Eleanor Hancock, “Ernst Röhm and the Experience of World War I,” 57.
“An essentially healthy society”: Masculinity and German politics to 1918

The SA men valued strength, willpower, and the capacity for violence alongside close emotional ties between fighting men. This set of ideals created men who used violence in order to secure their nation’s interests – but also their own economic positions, social status, and personal authority. Stormtroopers overlooked the selfishness inherent in this project by appealing to a sense of common good, which they argued would be better served with men such as them in charge. They were hardly alone in making such arguments.\(^6\) Many others – men and women, Germans and non-Germans – also accepted the behavioral traits and political consequences of this masculine form. As Mosse wrote of European masculinity: “The urge to serve in a cause higher than the individual, to put manliness in the service of an ideal, has been part of the definition of masculinity from the very beginning.”\(^7\) Stormtroopers understood their activities in just such a timeless way: as embodiments of “an essentially healthy society” that resisted social change.\(^8\) But, as Mosse and many other scholars have by now observed, the content of masculinity and the practices it entailed were hardly as timeless and self-evident as the stormtroopers wanted to believe.

Stormtrooper manhood was a more extreme version of hegemonic European masculinity, which was challenged by the physical and moral devastation of the First World War, the forced demilitarization of the Versailles Treaty, the social upheaval of the Weimar Republic, and the rise of alternative visions of masculinity since the late 19\(^{th}\)

\(^7\) Mosse, *Image of Man*, 109.
\(^8\) Ibid, 133.
century. All these trends combined in Germany to create a sense of crisis for supposedly timeless gender norms, in whose defense the stormtroopers created even more radical and violent versions of traditional forms. The symbols the SA men used in this effort, especially their characterization of Jewish men as negative counter-examples and their desperate efforts to combat allegations of homosexuality, are thus inexplicable without reference to the gender orders of the late imperial period and the First World War.

Hamburg’s earliest stormtroopers were born in the late 19th century, and they saw their masculine identities in that era’s dominant terms. The hegemonic masculinity of the 19th century had itself grown out of the 16th-18th century’s enshrinement of landed gentry as lynchpins of state and society. Gentry males had claimed on the basis of their property and their marital status a central role in market capitalism, a dominant position in the kinship networks that controlled political life, the control of women and a license to sexual libertinism, and a violent authority over agricultural workers and racial minorities. In Hamburg, the merchant families and “notables” occupied the same position. Their power, unlike that of the landed gentry, grew after 1800 as market capitalism and commercial imperialism increased the size, wealth, and influence of the Atlantic trading cities and the elites who managed them.

But the metropolitan environment also created challenges for its reigning men. Increased opportunities for wealth and status available in cities drew vast numbers of new residents, who joined the lower ranks of the city’s social and economic hierarchy and thus directly and indirectly served elite interests. The swelling urban population,

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10 In this way, Hamburg’s notables were similar to their counterparts across the English Channel, where “gentlemen leaders” guided politics even during an era of growing acceptance of working-class political activism. See John Belchem and James Epstein, “The Nineteenth-Century Gentleman Leader Revisited,” *Social History*, 22:2 (1997): 174-193.
however, also bred increasingly coherent and visible subcultures that challenged the
gendered constructions of social and economic power enjoyed by urban merchant men.
The history of European (and American) hegemonic masculinity from 1700-1900 was
thus, according to Connell, “the splitting of gentry masculinity, its gradual displacement
by new hegemonic forms, and the emergence of an array of subordinated and
marginalized masculinities.”¹¹ Near the end of this period, three subcultures in particular
– Jews, workers, and homosexuals – came to represent the threats posed to the racial,
economic, and gender orders that supported urban merchant male hegemony. The lack of
full citizenship imposed on these subordinated groups was often justified in gendered
terms. Such justifications included stereotypes about soft Jewish men who avoided or
were incapable of military service,¹² the insistence of Hamburg’s bourgeois liberal
newspapers on the workers’ sexual immorality and failed families,¹³ and the panic
displayed at the rising visibility of homosexual subcultures in cities from London to
Venice.¹⁴ The dominant concept of German – and European – masculinity thus came
under fire in the late 19th century, with fears of decadence and feminization becoming
especially prominent in the 1890s.¹⁵

¹¹ Connell, Masculinities, 191.
¹² Sander Gillman’s chapter on “The Jewish Foot” is particularly illustrative of the stereotypes opposing
Jewish men and military service in 19th and 20th century Europe. The Jew’s Body (New York: Routledge,
against the workers in the late 19th were explained with reference to their imtemperance, drunkenness,
and violence. These alleged sins were connected to the poor family conditions of the working class.
¹⁴ In Hamburg itself, these subcultures began only near the end of the 19th century – 100 years later than
London’s “molly houses” or the similar establishments in other trading cities. Jakob Michelsen, “Von
¹⁵ As described in John Fouls’s “Sexual Politics in Wilhelmine Germany: The Male Gender Crisis, Moral
Purity, and Homophobia” in Forbidden History, The State, Society, and the Regulation of Sexuality in
Modern Europe, John Fout, ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 259-292., as well as Mosse,
Image of Man, 77-106.
Beginning in this period, issues of masculinity, gender, and sexuality were studied and discussed in an increasingly open manner. Social scientists like Richard Krafft-Ebing, whose 1886 *Psychopathia Sexualis* broke new ground, Magnus Hirschfeld, and Sigmund Freud begun to establish sexuality as a permissible, if controversial, subject for study. Their work promoted wider discussion of sexual behavior and stirred debate about its connection to an individual’s personal and public identities. Their studies were often in dialogue with the era’s social movements, which included socialism, feminism, and the nascent gay rights movement.16 Discussions of sexuality were thus explicitly politicized, especially in urban environments whose mass media became increasingly obsessed with sexual topics in connection to political figures.

After the turn of the 20th century, scandal stories and “revelations” [*Enthüllungen*] of political leaders’ sexual sins became regular features of the German media landscape. These further reinforced ideas that political movements could be judged according to their members’ conformity to gender norms. German papers, especially in the northern cities, were in some respects influenced by English scandals of the 1890s. Sensational cases like those of Charles Stuart Parnell and Oscar Wilde were reported in Hamburg as well as London, and they acted as, in one scholar’s formulation, agents of “cultural transfer” that encouraged German media to follow the same discourse.17 Parnell’s case, an affair with a married woman that is lesser known today than Wilde’s famous conviction for “gross indecency”, was in fact more important in its creation of a script for future political sex scandals. Parnell’s political opponents had failed to quell his

increasingly powerful movement for Irish nationalism, and turned instead to sexual allegations. In 1890, news of his lover’s divorce case shocked Parnell’s Catholic supporters, mobilized portions of the priesthood against him, caused his Liberal Party allies to turn on him, and eventually split Parnell’s party in two. Parnell himself, only 45 years old but with his health broken by the scandal, died a year later. Irish nationalism was set back a generation. The Parnell case showed that sex stories about prominent public figures developed not out of apolitical tabloid presses, but instead out of the political process itself. Wilde’s experience in 1895 showed that such allegations were increasingly difficult to fight. Those who spread “libelous” rumors about a person’s sexuality could no longer be silenced through the threat of lawsuits, as Wilde had attempted. His resistance only generated increased scrutiny, exposure, and even criminal sanctions against him. Wilde – only 46 years old, but broken by prison labor, poverty, and self-imposed exile – died three years after his conviction for “gross indecency.” His ordeal was not just a personal tragedy. It was also what one scholar has called a “labeling process” that brought into public light the new sense that same-sex relations were not just actions, but also identities. Homosexuals – a word that was not printed in English before 1897 – were by the turn of the century understood to hide in all segments of society. But, both in England and in Germany, they supposedly lurked in great numbers within elite cultural and governing circles.

The Parnell and Wilde cases thus generated a gendered pattern of political debate that spread to German news media, which then embraced it to an even greater degree. Scandals typically began with the revelation of a technical violation of law – most often,

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homosexuality, adultery, or miscegenation of colonial officials with native women – that then provided the excuse for news media to investigate every aspect of the accused’s personal life and to explore at length the most salacious aspects of the taboo at issue.¹⁹ Journalists loudly proclaimed their political neutrality and lack of agenda, even while admitting that they could not assess whether the information with which they polluted the political realm was even accurate.²⁰ News reports then circulated through taverns, where they provided grist for emotional discussions of political matters in which public figures could be judged on moralistic grounds rather than on their actual records. Scandal stories gave everyone the ability to judge political matters, regardless of their class, education, or background. Shifting the debate to sexual and moralist realms was thus part of a calculated strategy of Social Democrats, liberals, and other insurgent political movements to weaken and defeat traditional governing elites.²¹ Revelations implied that a politician’s admired public face hid secret and shameful behavior whose exposure should cause his supporters to question their allegiance. Among the most damaging revelations that could be made was the accusation of homosexuality. By the turn of the century, revelations of homosexuality became the primary basis of German scandal politics. They brought word *Homosexualität* into public consciousness for the first time. And they generated a discursive link between homosexuality and imperial governance that turned on its head traditional respect for military camaraderie and male bonding, which now began to be seen as conspiratorial, self-serving, corrupt, and sinful.

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¹⁹ Bösch sees the colonial setting as particularly key to the growing culture of sex scandals, since it was easier to imagine distant administrators as corrupted by an exotic, imaginary colonial landscape. 792.
²⁰ See the 1906 statement of the *Nationalzeitung* that, on the subject of rumors it reported about a colonial officer, “We are not in the position to say whether these are true or untrue.” Ibid.
²¹ Ibid, 786-788.
The first signs of the coming trend came in 1898, when the Social Democrat August Bebel claimed on the floor of the Reichstag that many prominent citizens of Berlin could be found on city police’s “pink list.” In 1902, the Social Democrats conducted a systematic outing campaign against political enemies they accused of militarism and colonialism. Friedrich Alfred Krupp – captain of industry, friend to the Kaiser, and Germany’s richest person – killed himself after he was outing in Vorwärts, the widely read Social Democratic newspaper. Though the SPD often argued for the acceptance of homosexuality, it had no qualms exposing political enemies in high circles, whom it now habitually outing to bolster the party’s claims that capitalist society was decadent and corrupt. By 1906 all sides of the political spectrum used scandal politics against their enemies. The tactic culminated in revelations that Count Philipp zu Eulenburg; the military commander of Berlin, Kuno von Moltke; and a number of other high-ranking military and diplomatic officers in the Kaiser’s circle were secret homosexuals. Conservative journalists decried the men as decadent influences on the Kaiser and hounded them from public life. But Social Democrats, who had themselves long promoted an association of aristocratic and military elites with homosexuality, energetically fuelled the fires. Scientists and activists in the burgeoning homosexual emancipation movement played along as well. Hirschfeld injected himself into the trial as an expert witness, where he testified that Moltke was “effeminate” enough to be labeled a homosexual even if he had never had sex with a man. This testimony promoted on a

22 James W. Jones, *We of the Third Sex*: Literary Representations of Homosexuality in Wilhelmine Germany (New York and Frankfurt: Lang, 1990), 101-103. Jones notes explicitly that “the party’s double standard on the topic reappeared… in respect to Ernst Röhm in the early 1930s.” 103.

23 Jones, 104-108; Steakley, 36-40. Jones called the testimony “ill-advised” (272), while Steakley considered it “an amazing tactical blunder, especially in light of the [Scientific-Humanitarian] Committee’s resolve not to take the ‘path over corpses.’” (38)
national stage Hirschfeld’s own research and perspective, but it was a setback for the emancipation movement and an insult to many homosexual men. Hirschfeld’s testimony reinforced public fears that homosexuals lurked undetected within political institutions, as well as homosexuals’ own fears that they would be outed against their will and used as pawns in political movements - the “path over corpses” that homosexual-rights leaders had previously abjured.24 Hirschfeld’s theories themselves also fractured the ranks of homosexual men through his insistence that all possessed effeminate traits - that they were women in men’s bodies, and members of an intermediate or “third sex.” Gay men of nationalist or military natures bitterly resented this claim, since it undercut their essential masculinity and further distanced them from any claims to political power based on gendered systems of authority. These men preferred instead the ideas of Adolf Brand, who had split with Hirschfeld’s wing of the movement over the question of homosexuals’ masculinity. Brand and his followers instead claimed male homosexuality to be a celebration of male beauty, a legacy of ancient Greek warriors, and a general embodiment of masculinity’s best traits and highest social functions. The personal and political differences between Hirschfeld and Brand were not as great as might have seemed – both participated in the outing campaigns surrounding Eulenburg, and both later cooperated in attempts to repeal Paragraph 175 – but the ideological divide over the question of masculinity and effeminacy became a recurring point of contention within the ranks of homosexual men. Nor was this issue a mere academic distinction: many homosexuals with aspirations to political and military leadership concluded that the homosexual emancipation movement was not a friend who would help them gain public

24 Steakley, 33.
acceptance, but rather an enemy who would demean their honor and destroy their public lives.

The more prominent an outing case became, the more powerful grew the linkage of sexual, political, and moral scandal. Print reporting even brought in elements of the occult. This media climate rolled back public acceptance of homosexuality and increased police persecution. Arrests under Paragraph 175 doubled in Germany from 1907 to 1912. The actions of Social Democrats, Liberals, and social scientists in outing cases thus showed that their modern reputation as progressive advocates of tolerance for homosexuality was not yet part of their politics. Instead, they used accusations of homosexuality as a weapon to destroy political enemies, which thereby legitimized and strengthened homophobia in their own circles and in German society generally.

Politicians and prominent public intellectuals reacted to the climate of scandal by seeking increased openness with the press. If politicians could not fight rumors with traditional means of intimidation and legal threats, they could instead stage encounters with journalists to show off their family credentials. The illustrated weeklies in particular ran prominent stories of politicians at home or on vacation with their wives and children. But rather than mitigate the culture of sex scandals, this defensive strategy merely legitimized it. After 1900, few argued that public figures were entitled to any privacy at all. After 1918, when the Republic invited all German men and women to become publicly responsible citizens of a democracy, the culture of sex scandals

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26 Jones, We of the Third Sex, 107.
27 Bösch, 799-800.
threatened to make every politically active person a victim of disreputable “revelations” of their private behavior. Sex scandals had been used in the imperial era to challenge the social standing of traditional elites by revealing their violations of gender norms. This then undermined their political authority and paved the way for the increased influence of politicized masses that began in the 1880s. But these changes, by giving ordinary people more political influence, also increasingly made them legitimate subjects of sexual scandal. The stormtroopers, who chose to wear a party uniform and become the public symbol of their political movement, felt acutely this political development, which encouraged their enemies to speculate in print about the SA men’s sexual identities in order to undercut their claims to hegemonic masculinity and political authority.

The presentation of political conflict as a contest of hegemonic masculinity, as well as the importance of outing in this contest, also proved troublesome to the stormtroopers because of their tight connection with idealized, homosocial Soldatentum. By the 19th century, state violence had become linked to masculinity itself through the rise of standing armies and the professional officer corps. Membership in a standing army confirmed a man’s hegemonic status in society while at the same time marking as marginal those men who were not allowed to serve. Yet it also at times physically and emotionally isolated soldiers from the society they protected. Camaraderie filled the emotional void that wartime conditions created. Close ties of affection between fellow soldiers also encouraged group loyalty and motivated fighting men to feats of heroism.

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28 Connell, *Masculinities*, 192. For the German case, see Karen Hagemann’s “Mannlicher Muth und Teutsche Ehre.”

29 See Patricia Anne Simpson’s *The Erotics of War in German Romanticism* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press. 2006), which studies literary representations of early 19th century soldiers psychologically estranged from the nation-states they served, rejected by women and bourgeois society, and longing for new wars so they may again participate in a “fantasy of manhood.” 15-19, 76.
Camaraderie was thus an essential component that sustained European social and political structures, especially in the German lands where the ideal rose to central importance in the definition of normative masculinity.\textsuperscript{30} Once military camaraderie became so enshrined, however, it further alienated men from the very family structures that the state and its wars claimed to protect.

To some, this was a positive development. The homoeroticism of the Wilhelmine military, schools, and associational forms of life had been openly praised by both Germans and non-Germans alike. The gay American artist Marsden Hartley traveled to Berlin in March 1914, where he painted works in praise of the “essentially masculine” country.\textsuperscript{31} Along with Adolf Brand, the most important German theorist of homosocial masculine bonds and their political implications was Hans Blüher, whose \textit{The Role of the Erotic in Male Society} claimed in 1917 that erotic bonds between men were a force for social and political cohesion superior to that of the heterosexual family.\textsuperscript{32} Blüher wrote that:

> Besides the social principle of the family, which is fed by the source of male-female Eros, there is in humanity still a second, the “male community” [“\textit{männliche Gesellschaft}”], which thanks male-male Eros for its existence, and is expressed in the \textit{Männerbunden}.\textsuperscript{33}

The \textit{männliche Gesellschaft} already existed in state institutions like the army, military academies and male-only boarding schools, sporting clubs, and many youth groups.

\textsuperscript{30} See Kühne, \textit{Kameradschaft}.
\textsuperscript{31} Hartley’s letters praising imperial German masculinity to his gay friends back in America are extensively quoted in Patricia McDonnell’s “‘Essentially Masculine’: Marsden Hartley, Gay Identity, and the Wilhelmine German Military.” \textit{Art Journal}. 56(2): 1997. 62-68.
\textsuperscript{32} See Hancock’s excellent study of Röhm’s mentality in the context of Blüher and other similar works, in “‘Only the Real, the True, the Masculine Held Its Value’: Ernst Röhm, Masculinity, and Male Homosexuality” in \textit{Journal of the History of Sexuality}. 8(4): 1998. 616-641.
These institutions, which segregated women or denied them access altogether, formed the basis of the imperial state. Scholars in recent years have greatly illuminated our understanding of how emotional bonds between men played a key role in German politics of the 19th and early 20th centuries. But Blüher also claimed that these bonds were not just social or emotional, but necessarily erotic. Blüher and his fellows hoped for a more fully instituted Männerstaat, which would further solidify a division between public (male) spheres and private (female) ones, and would in fact base its legitimacy on this demarcation. The resulting homoerotic society would then prompt an outpouring of cultural, patriotic, political, and military advances.

The brand of hypermasculine, politicized idealism that Blüher described reached its peak in the First World War, which many combatants viewed as a transcendent male experience. Nationalist literary responses to the war from authors such as Ernst Jünger and Ernst von Salomon, who later became a high-ranking SA officer, claimed that the men who survived combat had been forged into an elite fraternity whose allegiances to outside groups paled in comparison to their obligations to their comrades. Just how estranged such men were from their wives, children, and other family members can be seen in Klaus Theweleit’s classic psychoanalysis of the diaries and letters written by the men who joined the Freikrops. Many of these men wrote about the women in their lives only rarely, or did so only to lament their lack of true understanding. “How can women

understand us,” asked one, “when they gave nothing, when they shared nothing of our experiences during those years of torment [in the First World War]?\(^{36}\)

The close association of masculinity and warfare created the risk that a defeat in warfare would become a defeat not just for individual men, but for the masculine ideals themselves and for any political system based upon them.\(^{37}\) This is precisely what happened after the First World War, whose depersonalized and industrial nature mocked assertions of traditional valor, showed the physical frailty of the male body, and proved the helplessness of masculine political and military organizations.\(^{38}\) Scholars have recently begun to recognize that the sense of embattled masculinity was less monolithic among the men of the Weimar Republic than is often believed.\(^{39}\) Yet none dispute that German nationalists - and especially the stormtroopers - still believed in an aggressive masculine paradigm. After the war, traditions of camaraderie were a powerful draw for young nationalists who respected the imperial period and longed for its unabashed celebration of militant masculinity, which they hoped to replicate in their own lives. They saw the postwar Republic as feminized and weak, and they hoped to redeem Germany’s martial honor by elevating militarized masculine virtues and ties of male affection.

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\(^{36}\) Theweleit, *Male Fantasies* vol 1, 61.

\(^{37}\) Sociologist Jerry Lembcke made this point in his study of the myths of post-Vietnam America, which he placed as the latest example of a European pattern that blames women and effeminacy for the lost war and the offense to collective male honor. “Gender, Betrayal, and Public Memory: America’s Defeat in Vietnam,” presented at the American Sociological Association, Montreal, 2006.

\(^{38}\) Kargen Hagemann discusses the importance of industrialized “total war” for the crises of 20th century gender norms, in which traditional male martial virtues lost their utility while women simultaneously found wartime roles. “The Military, Violence, and Gender Relations in the Age of the World Wars” in Hagemann and Schüler-Springorum, eds., 4-41, especially 5-12

\(^{39}\) Birthe Kundrus’s “The First World War and the Construction of Gender Relations in the Weimar Republic” in Hagemann and Schüler-Springorum, eds., 159-180, concluded that while most Germans perceived the First World War as having enhanced women’s opportunities, “such transformations were not universally regarded as a declaration of war on men and masculinity”. 171. The stormtroopers, of course, regarded social transformations as just such an assault.
“What Kind of Guy Are You?”: Stormtrooper Masculinity in Theory and Practice

Masculinity thus formed a central component of the SA’s political practices. It was a force for integration that helped the SA make good on its claim to transcend boundaries of class, religion, and other social categories. As long as a man held true to the masculine ideal, he could belong. SA general Manfred von Killinger explained the sentiment in *Men and Might: The SA in Words and Pictures*, in which he wrote that:

> The SA won’t ask where you come from; what’s your name; what kind of schooling do you have; what is your father, is he a worker or government minister – but rather what kind of guy are you; what can you do, what can you achieve? You will now be thrown in the water, swim; if you can’t, then save yourself on the shore and another guy will take your place.

Conn claimed that in the SA, “all the German classes were united in brotherhood.” But brotherhood and masculinity were not things that could merely be asserted. Nor was masculinity itself a function of lineage, class, profession, or education – it instead had to be created, demonstrated, and constantly performed.

This was particularly true given that many of the men who joined the SA did not yet possess required traits of hegemonic masculinity. The SA – both in its early years disguised as a sporting club and in its maturity as a mass paramilitary army after 1929 – attracted primarily the young. Most of the earliest SA men were under 18 years old, with some as young as 15. The young and unemployed also drove the SA’s mass expansion after 1929. Many SA men had thus never before participated in the forms of masculinity - wartime service, economic independence, and familial authority - that they claimed justified political authority. The youngest had been too young to serve in the war, and

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41 FZG 11C1 - Alfred Conn - Nachlasse, 72.
42 Krause, 51.
thus felt robbed of full status as men. Even older stormtroopers who had done so often lacked the other markers of full manhood, such as stable economic and family lives. The SA was thus in many respects a collection of men psychologically riven by a wholehearted embrace of male roles that they only imperfectly embodied: would-be soldiers denied an army in which to serve, men who wanted to found a family but who could not afford to marry, and homosexual men who believed their proficiency with violence should grant them masculinity despite their lack of heterosexuality. These men exerted great efforts to construct themselves as traditionally hegemonic men, both for the personal and political fulfillment it would bring. They strove to be warriors, comrades, political leaders, and family fathers, and they believed that the SA would help them become the type of man they aspired to be.

Stormtrooper efforts to shape themselves into hegemonic men took two forms: real-world deeds and works of imagination. In the first case, tangible acts included sports, marches, military training, battles with political opponents, and other opportunities for the stormtroopers to perform masculinity in their own lives. The SA was much more successful in these realms than it was in establishing the stormtroopers in other, more long-term performance of hegemonic masculinity – namely, as husbands and family men. The SA men therefore also built their masculinity in the realm of rhetoric and imagination. Stormtroopers favorably contrasted themselves with stereotypes of Jews and effeminate homosexuals as negative countertypes to the stormtroopers’ own masculine type. Campaigns against open homosexuals – both inside and outside the SA itself – proved especially prominent as a means to counter cases of homosexuality within SA ranks, which threatened the stormtroopers’ fragile sense of masculinity and risked
demonstrating a gap between their ideals and their reality. This dual approach of both word and deed allowed the stormtroopers to conceive of themselves as superior men entitled to political power.

The Stormtrooper Body: Physical Prowess in Political Context

Sturmführer Herbert Ruck’s contribution to the “SA-Spirit” column claimed that “It is unthinkable that an SA man would become soft. No, actually the opposite is true. Calm and proud, everyone bears his share [jeder sein hartes Los]. No complaints come from his lips.”43 Sports, marches, and physical struggle developed an SA man’s individual abilities and established his masculinity. They also helped the organization select the most capable leaders, whose authority was legitimized through their successes in war or sport. But most of all, the importance of the stormtroopers’ bodies came from their understanding that in the process of fashioning the body, they would also fashion their self-identity.44

The SA desire for trained and hardened bodies came from their adherence to an idealized image of male beauty created by 18th century scholars of Greek art. One of the most influential German thinkers in this spirit, the art historian and archaeologist Johann Joachim Winckelmann, presented Greek statues as models of masculinity that possessed

43 “SA Geist,” Der SA-Mann, March 1, 1932, p2.
“power and virility, and also harmony, proportion, and self-control.” These traits were valued for their ability to harness masculinity’s more dangerous elements to the service of order and hierarchy. Ideas about male beauty and its connection to utopian political conceptions played a strong role in the scouting and youth movements of the late 19th century, which informed early SA activity just as much as did wartime experiences.

SA-man Klaus Gundelach described the sporting activities at one SA leadership camp as the true heart of the movement:

Only now begins the actual service, the hard schooling and serious education of the single man and disciplined troop. There is a lot to learn. Previously neglected and undiscovered abilities of a soldierly man [eines soldatischen Mannes] need to be acquired with tireless, straining work and strict self-discipline. Many sweat-drops fly, the muscles ache, but the will and discipline grow, conquering the lethargy, tiredness, and weakness; and the soldierly leadership and fighting strength triumph. From day to day there arises a more heated, clenched effort of the schooled troop toward a siring of men [Manneszucht] held tightly in the hand of their leader.

Some sports were direct substitutes for banned military training (Kampfspiele or Wehrsport). SA leaders often claimed such activities as part of an ancient German heritage. Prehistoric Teutonic peoples, according to one “SA sport” article, had practiced militarized games as part of their eternal battles against other tribes – a situation that the Nazis believed to still determine world history. However, the Germans had abandoned these activities in an “era of slavish servitude” that “feminized our sporting arts.”

Masculine sports, on the other hand, played a vital role in building both body and soul. They also trained participants in physical strength and taught them to subsume their wills

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46 Mosse, *Image of Man*, 34-35. For the importance of gymnastics for the general European ideal of masculinity, see 40-47.
47 Hans Blüher, as an historian of the *Wandervogel* youth movement and of politicized male eroticism, was a crucial link in this respect as well. See George Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology*, 172-178 and 212-217.
to a Führer. Hamburg stormtroopers particularly esteemed 8- and 4-man rowing, which built on local sporting traditions and encouraged the men to function in unison. Otherwise, SA men were instructed in and encouraged to pursue a sports that would strengthen the body, like gymnastics, or train in self-defense, like boxing, ju-jitsu, and various forms of unarmed combat. Hitler himself had commented on these sports’ importance in a letter to Salomon on the occasion of the SA’s refounding:

Insofar as the members are to be physically trained, the main emphasis must not be on military exercises, but rather far more on sporting activities. Boxing and ju-jitsu appear far more important to me than some kind of poor, half-measure shooting training. The physical training should inculcate in each [SA-man] the conviction in his own superiority [Überlegenheit] and the confidence that comes from consciousness of his own strength; for this he should be trained in all varieties of sporting arts, so that he may serve as a weapon of the movement.

The SA held frequent boxing competitions among the Stürme, between SA and SS units, and against members of other rightist movements. These matches provided physical training, competitive motivation, and social bonding through restrained, honorable combat.

Both the Tageblatt and SA Mann eventually provided instruction through a “jiu-jitsu course” they offered serially from August - December 1932. Jiu-jitsu had first appeared in Germany after 1905, when several Japanese sailors found themselves in Kiel after the end of the Russo-Japanese War. The Berliner Erich Rahn became the first European black belt, founded the study of eastern martial arts in Germany, and trained members of the Berlin police as well as nationalist paramilitaries – including Horst Wessel’s SA

51 “SA-Sport,” Der SA-Mann, October 1, 1932, p7.
53 FZG 923 - SA. v. Pfeffer transcription of letter from Hitler, November 1 1926.
Sturm. In Hamburg, Franz Dauhrer, another early German practitioner, gave Stormtroopers in Hamburg the chance to learn jiu-jitsu as well. But stormtroopers outside these two cities lacked the masters to train them, so the editors of SA newspapers decided to publish the lessons for broader impact. According to their author, SA-Sportlehrer H. Siegwart, the lessons provided “the opportunity affordably to learn these successful arts of self-defense, since we are convinced that the skilled jiu-jitsu fighter is better prepared against the daggers and pistols of red murderers.” The training included physical exercises the stormtroopers could practice to toughen their bodies and make them more flexible: rolls, leaps, leg lifts, and stretching exercises. These could, like the gymnastics training the SA also honored, be done with partners for maximum effect. (Image 4.1) In later chapters, the course outlined increasingly complex forms of defense against common attacks that the SA men could expect to face during street combat. (Image 4.2) Yet this body of knowledge contained few offensive moves. Jiu-jitsu, considered a ‘soft style’ of martial arts, is primarily reactive, defensive, and weaponless. The only weapon employed in the training was a long staff to be used for isometric strengthening exercises. The course of study was, as the articles always proclaimed, “weaponless self-defense” that promised to harden and transform the SA men’s bodies

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56 StAH B220: Untergruppe Hamburg to Okrass letter of March 20, 1933; Okrass to Untergruppe Hamburg letter of Mach 21, 1933.
59 “Unser Jiu-Jitsu Kursus: Drei Jiu-Jitsu Abwehrgriffe,” *Hamburger Tageblatt*, September 8, 1932. Such attacks included the “Danish kiss,” a headbutt to the face that a stormtrooper was told to expect if the opponent grabbed the lapels of his coat.
Image 4.1

Stormtroopers train gymnastics using partner exercises. (Source: Der SA-Mann)

Image 4.2

An illustration for the SA jiu-jitsu course demonstrates how to defend against multiple simultaneous attackers. Stormtroopers saw their opponents as a dark mass of armed ambushers, in contrast to the heroic bearing of the unarmed, individual SA man. (Source: Der SA Mann)
into “natural weapons.”\textsuperscript{61} The training emphasized that success in combat came not from power or strength, but from the inner spirit of the fighter himself.\textsuperscript{62} It was this fighting spirit – “the harmony [Zusammenarbeit] of body and spirit”\textsuperscript{63} – that, in addition to specific defensive techniques, the stormtroopers were to learn. This ideal sport, which mixed practical self-defense with physical and mental training, created an outwardly masculine body while fostering inward strength and resolve. Jiu-jitsu, boxing, and other “war sports” thus created the stormtroopers as men.

**Convex Mirrors: Constructing Jewish Men as SA Countertypes**

The stormtroopers needed a negative countertype with which to contrast their own idealized bodies and spirits. Any stereotype lives in its relationship to its opposite. It depends on a negative ideal against which to define itself – in Mosse’s words, “as in a convex mirror, the reverse of the social norm.”\textsuperscript{64} The hegemonic European masculine ideal already possessed such countertypes in the form of the lesser or subordinated masculinities. Male Jews and homosexuals embodied dissolute ugliness in contrast to the solidifying standard of masculine beauty. As Mosse wrote, “ugliness was the obverse of the principle of beauty…just as that principle was objectified by the ideal of true manhood, so ugliness was symbolized by the outside. [The countertype’s] bodily structure differed in every detail from that of the ideal type.”\textsuperscript{65} Jews thus took on “the flat

\textsuperscript{64} Mosse, *Image of Man*, 56.
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid, 59.
feet, the waddling gait (opposed to the manly stride), the neckless body, the big ears, and
the swarthy color” while homosexuals appeared as thin, limp-wristed effetes with bad
posture. These outer characteristics were not just allegations of physical inadequacies,
but also symbolized inner deficiencies.

The SA took up the use of these stereotypes, as did the SS as part of its
vilification campaign against social outsiders. SS antisemitism, which only after the
takeover of power came to dominate the Nazi movement as a whole, seized on these
images’ biological aspects in order to justify eugenic policies and murder. Within the SA,
however, racial science held little currency. Nor were portrayals of Jewish men in
Hamburg as bloodthirstily sexualized as the famous predatory images popular in the
central and southern German cities, where Julius Streicher’s Der Stürmer habitually
showed Jewish men savaging blonde women. The Tageblatt never published such
images – its editors feared that Nazi media would again be looked down on as a scandal
sheet and would thus turn off the placid Burghers. Instead, the Hamburg stormtroopers’
warped portrayals of villainous Jews emphasized stories of the supposed weakness and

66 Ibid, 64 and 70.
67 The differences between SA and SS conceptions of antisemitism and racism form one central theme of
Claudia Koonz’s The Nazi Conscience (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2003.), a valuable work that is
nonetheless flawed for its use of Der Stürmer as the key to SA psyche. Koonz overlooks the true SA paper
of record, Der SA-Mann, in favor of a Nuremberg alternative that was not as widely read in the Hamburg
SA. Hamburg’s stormtroopers trusted either the Tageblatt or Der SA-Mann, both of which featured their
own voices and reflected their influence. Der Stürmer became the main stormtrooper paper only after 1935,
when in connection with a racial campaign surrounding the Nuremberg Laws and the SA’s loss of relative
prestige in the movement, the Party and SA conducted an organized campaign to raise its subscription
within numbers the SA. They held Der Stürmer to be “a real antisemitic paper,” in contrast to the
insufficiently racist Der SA-Mann. (See StAH B220 letters of February 19, 20, 21, 22, 1935.)
68 On sexualized images of Jews in Nazi ideology, see: Dennis Showalter, “Letters to Der Stürmer: The
181. For the history of actual mixed couples in Nazi Germany, see: Nathan Stolzfus, Resistance of the
Heart: Intermarriage and the Rosenstrasse Protest in Nazi Germany (New Brunswick: Rutgers University
Press. 2001), especially 41-50, and Patricia Szobar, “Telling Sexual Stories in the Nazi Courts of Law:
Race Defilement in German, 1933-1945,” Journal of the History of Sexuality, 11:1/2 Special Issue:
Sexuality and German Fascism (Jan 2002), 131-163.
cowardice of Jewish men. If legitimate political authority was based on conflict and victory, as the SA believed, men who could not win such contests deserved no meaningful role in state or society.

The Jews, SA ideologues claimed, had caused Germany’s postwar descent into poverty and chaos with their pacifist and cowardly ideas. SA literature bemoaned pacifism’s putative role in causing this downfall, as in a typical screed from the pages of Der SA-Mann:

It would be foolish to believe that a people who 18 years ago created the most magnificent army that the world has ever seen, that for 4 ½ years has conducted unbroken war management, should suddenly want nothing to do with truth and warlike virtues, but rather has totally fallen victim to instinctless pacifism. Naturally that isn’t true. What a totally Jewicized [verjudete] press says in the service of international market capitalism is not the voice of the true German people.69

In contrast, therefore, to the SS’s portrayal of Jews as racial and sexual enemies, the SA charged the Jews with the crime of pacifism, which articles in stormtrooper media described variously as an “unmanly sense” [unmännliche Sinn]70 or as “self-emasculinization” [Selbstentmannung].71

Even though SA men believed Jews to be behind all the international conspiracies that stormtroopers feared, this supposed fact did not make them more masculine. Even in their role as shadowy figures of power – a conspiracy that was variously pacifist, Marxist, “Bolshevist,” or capitalist – Jews appeared in SA literature not as strong martial leaders, but as cowards who directed operations from the back. They hid behind women and children, and used Communist muscle to fight on their behalf. When in SA propaganda the Jews came out from their hiding places to fight the stormtroopers, they were

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69 “Militarismus und Soldatentum,” Der SA-Mann, January 5, 1932.
70 Gerhard L. Sinz, “Pazifismus als Feigheitslehre,” Der SA Mann, January 12, 1932, p5
71 Ernst Röhm, “Tagesbefehl” Der SA-Mann, March 23, 1932, p5
laughably ineffectual. One battle report in Der SA-Mann described how an SA troop made a propaganda drive through a Communist-dominated Jewish neighborhood. When the SA stopped in front of the Karl-Liebknecht-Haus to cause trouble, the residents cowered in fear. They gave “a cry, as if there were a pogrom in progress.” As a joke, the Truppenführer ordered his unit to open fire, at which point, “God, did the brothers run!” In a short battle hardly worthy of the moniker, the SA men routed the Jewish forces. The SA narrator claimed that “Those who went to defend and protect the republic weren’t seen again. Only the remains of their flag lay on the trucks.” The Jews of this SA story – so weak and cowardly that they leave their flags behind as war spoils for their enemies – cannot possibly be a part of a Germany based on the SA’s masculine ideal. In ironically calling them Brüder, the author emphasized their inability to “protect” or “defend” their own interests, a flaw that placed them outside the masculine Volk community just as much as did their racial separateness. Other stories from the Hamburg SA featured Jewish agents – especially one hated leader of the Red Front Fighters, a Belgian Jew named Andre – who directed attacks on Nazi meetings from within a protective cordon of Communist minions.

These stories resonated because of their connection to a longstanding and contested discourse surrounding German-Jewish military masculinity. As one scholar of German-Jewish military veterans described 19th century attitudes, both Germans and Jews largely accepted that “Jews could stake no claim to citizenship unless they

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72 “Wir sind durch die jüdische Schweiz gefahren!” Der SA-Mann, November 26, 1932, p4.

73 The background and fate of Andre, who had helped found the RFB in 1928, can be found in Gertrud Meyer’s account of the Hamburg antifascist movement, Nachts über Hamburg. Berichte und Dokumente (Frankfurt/Main: Röderberg-Verlag, 1971), 46-48. Andre directed its activities in key neighborhoods surrounding the Elbe until his arrest on March 5, 1933, after the Nazis revoked his immunity as a member of the Bürgerschaft. He was executed on November 4, 1936.
contributed as soldiers to the defense of the state.” Yet Jewish men were barred from military service because of a popular conception that they lacked the abilities and mentalities necessary for success. In other words, German and Jewish men held “divergent masculinities” that justified their divergent political authority. In the imperial period, German-Jewish men joined the military in increasing numbers as part of a strategy for full assimilation and acceptance as equal citizens. By the First World War, these men fought in numbers far above their percentage of the population, and they expected afterwards to cooperate with other nationalist and militarist groups. Some, especially the nationalist veterans association the National Association of Jewish Combat Veterans [Reichsbund jüdischer Frontsoldaten, RjF], went so far as to hope that their common membership in the “front community” would allow them accommodation with National Socialism. Some Jewish men who aspired to military masculinity and its consequent political authority even tried to join the NSDAP and SA. One young man, who had been born illegitimately to a Jewish woman and “Aryan” father, falsified his identification papers so as to take his father’s name and join the SA, where he served for years before being caught and expelled. He was undeterred, and joined the SA riding school in Schwerin with a new set of false papers. Most Jewish men who joined the SA were discovered only after the takeover of power and the intensification of the regime’s antisemitism. But many militarized German-Jewish nationalists retained their hope for

75 Ibid.
76 Ibid, 251.
77 NARA A3341 SA Kartei A004 Leopold H. See also StAH B202 for a record of his expulsion. (Brigade 12 to Standarte 76 letter of 28 June 1935.)
78 See for example the cases of SA men expelled in 1934 for not being able to prove their “Aryan descent.” While many of these men only had names that “sounded Jewish,” many others had identifiable Jewish backgrounds – at least, according to the Nazis’ racial standards of proof. See StAH B78, especially the
an accommodation with National Socialism until 1935, when the Nuremberg Laws
“invalidated the link between military service and citizenship, which had been a central
condition of Jewish emancipation since the Napoleonic era.” National Socialists not
only ignored the efforts of some Jewish men to conform to hegemonic stereotypes of
masculinity, they actively resisted their actions to do so. No matter how militant, warlike,
and German-nationalist these Jewish men became, Nazi racism would still deny them full
inclusion in the German community. That many veterans in the RjF did not realize this
fact in time speaks to military masculinity’s power to entice men from groups not
normally included within its bounds.

Jewish men therefore played a paradoxical role in the stormtrooper mind. On the
one hand, they were supposedly responsible for the deadliest threats to Germany, but on
the other they were never able physically to challenge the SA. Jews were therefore not a
real threat, unlike the Communist fighters they supposedly sponsored. Jünger, beloved of
the SA though not one of them, claimed that true masculine peoples would have nothing
to fear from the Jews:

While I acknowledge that the Jewish race itself has destructive qualities, I
am tempted to ask if true destroyers would admit to a fear of the Jew. ‘No
man can be on first name terms with the devil and be afraid of fire.’

cases of Ignatz Schreiber and Edgar Böhm, and SA Mann Bernstein, who argued against his expulsion
because his father had served in the Austrian army and thus proved the family’s Aryan credentials. Other
cases can also be found in B202, including Leopold H, SA-recruit Rendsburg, who “committed a
purposeful deception” on the SA by hiding his “non-Aryan” background. (undated letter of Brigade 12 to
SA-Anwärter Rendsburg)
79 Caplan, 251. The RjF’s attempt to gain Nazi sympathy through appeal to common military experiences
was quite contentious in the Jewish community, which decried the illiberal and self-serving aspects of
“German-Jewish Fascism.” See Caplan, 251-272.
80 Years later, far past the point when the Nazis’ antisemitic policies should have been clear, around
150,000 Jewish men of mixed (“mischlinge”) heritage later served in Hitler’s army. They did so largely to
prove to the Nazis that Jewish men could also fight for their country. See Bryan Mark Rigg, Hitler’s Jewish
Soldiers: The Untold Story of Nazi Racial Laws and Men of Jewish Descent in the German Military
(Lawrence: University of Kansas Press), 2002.
(German saying) The Jew is as unthreatening to the values of a heroic youth as he is threatening to the values of the bourgeoisie. Jünger’s statement hints at how masculinity could provide solutions to multiple social problems – class tensions, “racial questions,” and the crisis of values afflicting German society. An education in true masculine virtues would immunize Germany from the influence of its enemies. Similarly, Jews could never gain a position of legitimate authority in the German Männerstaat the SA hoped to re-create, since Jewish men supposedly rejected the foundations upon which that authority was to be built. SA men thus built stereotypes about effeminate and weak Jewish men in order to bolster their own arguments for removing Jews from public life, as well as to enhance their call that “Aryan” men should pursue national renewal through an embrace of an aggressive and violent paradigm of masculinity.

Comrades or “Criminals”?: Homophobia as Political and Psychological Self-Defense

Not all German men found attractive the idea of living in an entirely male society dedicated to warfare and apart from emotional connections with women. Heinz Preiß, a Communist youth group member who fought the SA in St Georg, said that the Nazi “Männerbund” scheme repelled some potential recruits, who preferred the mixed-gender atmosphere of the socialist organizations. The stormtroopers’ glorification of male camaraderie, which followed nineteenth century norms, seemed altogether different in an era where homosexuals first began to identify themselves as such and claim a public

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81 Quoted in Theweleit, Male Fantasies vol 2, 140.
presence for their new subculture. Stormtroopers now feared that their open praise of their fellow men would be seen as evidence of homosexuality. The director of Hamburg’s Institute for Sexual Research, based on the Institute’s study of the late 20th century, wrote that “since homosexuality became its own form of publicly accepted sexuality, the fear of young men to be called ‘gay’ has also increased.”83 The SA men feared being labeled as part of the growing movement of open homosexuality, because they held true to stereotypes of hegemonic masculinity that labeled these men as effete, perverse, weak, and unreliable. Hirschfeld had done the movement no favors by strongly supporting a feminized view of male homosexuality. For their part, stormtroopers were less interested in challenging hegemonic masculine stereotypes than they were in conforming to their boundaries.

The Hamburg SA expressed these fears by trying to prevent men known for same-sex attraction from joining its ranks. In 1926, members of the National Socialist-sympathizing Schlageter Bund approached the SA seeking membership. They showed all the signs of fitting well. Like Böckenhauer’s original core SA group, this circle had named itself after a nationalist hero; it was dedicated to the military training of German youth and educated its members on principles of National Socialism; and it had been formed and was led by a former police officer, Erwin Lehmann. Lehmann, however, also had a reputation as an open homosexual. The SA not only refused the entry of his group, whose 36 members would have significantly enhanced SA ranks at that time, but also managed to have it disbanded altogether.84 The SA thus pushed away a potential

84 StAH 331-3 / 1097, report of February 18, 1926.
supporter of some influence, because it deemed the cost of associating with a known homosexual to be too dangerous.

Within the SA thus existed a paradoxical situation. The movement drew in many men attracted to their own gender, who joined the SA because of its praise for promise of close relationships with men. These men could sometimes be privately honest with their comrades about their inclinations, especially after Röhm’s appointment in 1930 allowed them to feel that they might be protected by the highest levels of leadership. Many homosexual stormtroopers could thus remain within the organization with few questions asked. The Kampfzeit SA was often disinclined to police its own members for moral or criminal misbehavior, especially in matter Röhm called “prudery [that] certainly does not seem revolutionary to me.”85 He also quipped in his autobiography that “Nothing is more false than the so-called morality of society.”86 Homosexual stormtroopers could thus exist in the SA with the protection of the higher leadership and with the cover of the rank-and-file SA’s general disdain for bourgeois morality. Same-sex desiring stormtroopers could not, however, flaunt their sexuality. They often had to remain guarded around their comrades, many of whom felt threatened by any personal association with homosexuality. Above all, homosexual stormtroopers had to take care that their orientation never come under public scrutiny, since the revelation of a stormtrooper’s homosexuality undermined the group’s claim to the hegemonic masculinity for which they so desperately fought.

The first outing of a Hamburg stormtrooper took place in 1928, when an SA-Mann Gerhold fatally shot a member of the Social Democratic Reichsbanner during an

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85 Hancock, “Only the Real,” 623.
86 Ibid.
election confrontation. At first, the incident seemed to confirm the SA’s typical understanding of its battles, in which they had been attacked while attempting innocent electioneering, after which they were forced to use violence in defense of their political rights and personal safety. The incident began when four Reichsbanner men, underway toward a popular bar strip near the Schlump train station, thought they recognized a group of comrades hanging election posters. Upon approaching, however, they realized that the group was in fact a unit of SA men. Reichsbanner man Heidorn, citing laws preventing political parties from hanging posters on private property without the owners’ permission, grabbed the posters from an SA man’s hands, after which another stormtrooper punched Heidorn in the back of the head and the brawl began. Most of the SA men took flight – they later claimed that the Reichsbanner men were armed with nightsticks and other weapons, while they themselves had none. This left Gerhold in the clutches of four opponents. During the scuffle, Gerhold drew a pistol and shot Reichsbanner man Wulf. The shots drew reinforcements on both sides while causing the original combatants to flee the scene. Arriving Reichsbanner men placed Wulf back into a taxi and took him to a nearby hospital, where he died. Gerhold was put on trial for murder.

Dr. Korn, the most active stormtrooper lawyer, charged the Reichsbanner with initiating the fight by inappropriately assuming police powers to enforce election laws. The judge found sympathy in this argument and bemoaned both sides’ new style of politics. Gerhold told the court that he had been attacked by Communists in a similar situation weeks earlier, after which he had begun to carry a firearm for self-defense. The

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87 Hamburger Echo, September 27, 1928.
prosecutor countered that Gerhold had “crossed far beyond the line of self-defense,” but the judge found Gerhold’s claim sympathetic. He determined that the Reichsbanner had begun the fight by assuming police powers for themselves, chasing down the fleeing Nazis, and causing Gerhold to fear for his safety. Gerhold, the judge said, “had already had terrible experiences with the Communists and believed himself to be in danger. His exercise of self-defense should not be denied, even if he overstepped its bounds. And if he did overstep, he did it in the context of his past terrible experiences. This must stand to his favor.” The judge thus acquitted Gerhold of murder, though he did sentence him to a year in jail for not having a firearms license. The sentence was on the high end for such a charge, but still far more lenient than the murder sentence the Reichsbanner hoped would be delivered. The Echo called the verdict a “miscarriage of justice that all right-thinking people must deeply bemoan,” and predicted that “this monstrous judgment, which has given the criminal nationalists a free pass to continue their murderous deeds, will make it difficult to keep the peace.” The Echo also complained about the paternal attitude of the judge toward the defendant. The paper found the judge unusually soft in his handling of the accused murderer, saying “Please take your seat” and “Would you please come up here for a bit?” rather than his usual “Accused, sit down!” and “Accused, approach the bench!” He also gave the defendant a bit of fatherly advice at the close of the trial, “One would think that you, young man, would have had enough. A child who burns himself should fear fire. But this isn’t a criticism – you haven’t done anything more than all the

88 Ibid.
89 Ibid.
90 Ibid, 1928.
91 Ibid, 1928.
other parties do too.” In closing, the judge admonished Gerhold to work on his own personal development rather than busy himself with politics.92

Based on these events only, the SA could have come through this incident relatively unscathed. The judge himself upheld SA propaganda that asserted their right to self-defensive action against violent Marxist thugs. He also, through the warmth and concern with which he treated the defendant, symbolically reinforced the SA’s self-image as the basically decent sons of good German fathers. The trial, however, also revealed another aspect of Gerhold’s past, one that caused far more embarrassment to the SA than a conviction of murder would have carried. During the judge’s questioning of the defendant, he asked, “A gun isn’t a children’s toy. Haven’t you made mischief with one before?”93 Gerhold had. He had been investigated but not charged with extortion and attempted murder for shooting in the head a Jewish merchant with whom he was having sex. Gerhold had repeatedly pressured the man, known only as M. in accounts of the trial, for money through playing on his affections and making him feel guilty. M., short of money himself, could only offer to lend money. Gerhold, frustrated at his failure and likely paranoid that evidence of the affair could become known, went to M’s darkroom and, standing behind him in the close quarters of the room while M developed some photographs, shot him in the head. Gerhold claimed that the gun had gone off accidentally, which M. naively believed at the time and declined to press charges. During Gerhold’s murder trial, M. took the stand to recount the incident. He also told the court that, in light of subsequent events, he no longer believed the shooting accidental. The prosecutor emphasized Gerhold’s sexual history in his arguments against him. He told the

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92 Ibid, 1928.
93 Ibid, 1928.
court that “The personality of the defendant has been seen here to be dangerous and risky [gefährlich und bedenklich], and it would be met with praise if he was eliminated from the public. His love relationship also makes clear the accused’s scruplessness.”94 The judge ignored this part of the prosecution’s argument, but the media did not. The presence of a former lover in court made the SA man’s same-sex past impossible to ignore. The intimate setting of a darkroom recalled the dark and mysterious images with which broad sections of the public held homosexual men, who were thought to be sneaky, furtive, and manipulative. The very word darkroom had associations of male-male sex – for that was the name for the poorly lit sections of bars in which men could meet for anonymous encounters.95 The twice-murderous intentions of the homosexual SA man signaled a depth of melodrama and depravity to which such a character was supposedly prone. Gerhold’s story was thus symbolically laden with a wealth of negative associations that the SA resisted at all costs.

The resulting publicity of an SA man’s homosexuality created difficulties for the SA at the same time it was trying hardest to woo members of the other hyper-masculine paramilitaries. To overcome the public embarrassment, the SA conducted a high-profile public action designed to deflect accusations of homosexuality by demonstrating its homophobic bonafides. Public protestations of disgust at homosexuality also allowed those stormtroopers who fought their same-sex inclinations a cover story that would stand up to scrutiny. Modern psychological studies have identified a process of “reaction formation” in which people with intense resistance to their own same-sex desires project

94 Ibid, 1928.
vehement opposition to homosexuality. This, they hope, will convince both others and themselves of their heterosexuality. The concept has both longstanding support in theory and recent empirical backing. Both individual stormtroopers and the SA as an organization acted in this sense. They found that homophobic activism could immunize themselves from accusations of their own homosexuality, bolster their self-images as hypermasculine warriors, and preserve their standing among traditional conservatives, prudish bourgeois elites, and militant Wehrverbände members.

In December 1928, the SA accordingly targeted for protest a play that had just premiered in Hamburg, Ferdinand Brückner’s Der Verbrecher (“The Criminal”). The play concerned the troubles of young homosexual men in a big-city boarding house. It followed to an extent the tropes current in depictions of homosexuality on the German stage at that time: same-sex oriented young men were doomed outsiders leading lives destined to end in tragedy. Yet Der Verbrecher modified the formula in that its main character’s doom came not with his own discovery of his homosexuality, which in traditional plays connected the character with sin and its inevitable wages, but with the discovery of his secret by a blackmailer who threatened to inform the police if he was not paid. In the second act, the youth was caught in the trap of either admitting the accusation’s truth or being convicted of perjury – becoming the eponymous criminal in either outcome. He was a double victim: of the blackmailer and of the law. Der Verbrecher therefore attacked the justice system and Paragraph 175, which criminalized


male homosexuality, as an unfair burden on private life that encouraged crimes such as blackmail and also made otherwise law-abiding citizens into criminals. The true criminal, the play argued, was not the homosexual but the law itself. The *Hamburger Echo* called the play “a valuable and meaningful document of the times.”

The Nazis felt differently. Conn, who had yet to be ejected for his paganism, was among the SA’s most ardent homophobes. He wrote in his memoirs that the Nazis fought the play “as part of our fight against shame and filth [*Schund und Schmutz*]. We wanted to bring the impression thereby, that the Party was prepared to fight with all the means at its disposal against all tendencies that threatened to bury morality and family.”

This was the first time the Nazis had become so enraged over a play that discussed homosexuality, though the 1920s had already seen many plays of this nature – a high point for depictions of homosexuality in German theater not to be matched until the 1970s. Brückner had even premiered another play dealing with homosexuality two years beforehand: *Krankheit der Jugend* (“Sickness of Youth”), in which two lesbians killed themselves rather than succumb to societal pressures to deny their love. A number of possible reasons present themselves as to why the Nazis and the right did not protest *Krankheit der Jugend*, yet went to great extremes against *Der Verbrecher*. Depictions of male homosexuality tend to threaten men more than portrayals of lesbianism, whether in Weimar Germany or elsewhere. Additionally, *Der Verbrecher*’s attack on the justice system provoked Nazi sensibilities more than a play in which the homosexual characters killed themselves – an ending that proved, to the straight stormtrooper mind,

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98 *Hamburger Echo*, December 1, 1928.
99 FZG 11C1 - Alfred Conn - Nachlasse, 64.
100 Both periods coincided with peak periods of political activism in the homosexual rights movement. For a discussion of the differences between these eras see Korb, *Homosexuality on the German Stage.*
homosexuals’ weakness and immorality. The style of the second play’s staging also irritated the Nazis. Being produced with “new realist” techniques [Neue Sachlichkeit], the staging mixed symbolic and realistic elements. The set, a cross-section of a three-story boarding house, physically endorsed the coexistence of multiple perspectives and experiences in society. The Echo called it “a house divided into six parts. As we look into the apartments we simultaneously see six destinies that demonstrate the chaotic diversity of life, the beautiful and the ugly together.” The concept offended National Socialists committed to a single idealized image of German society – and to one hegemonic concept of masculinity. But the stormtroopers were most threatened by the play’s exposure of homosocial male environments as locations enabling homosexual contact. In the play, the “Sports Club” provided a site at which homosexual men could be introduced to the scene, meet others, and have sexual encounters. The play hinted too at the dangers of male friendships, as one of the main character’s closest friends turned out to be an untrustworthy blackmailer. To the SA, this seemed like an accusation. Indeed, the indictment – if it was such – had recently been proven true by Gerhold. The SA thus organized massive and violent protests, to fight against the content of Brückner’s play and to overcome its own public embarrassment at being associated with homosexuality.

The Nazis began by assembling groups of students and members of völkisch youth groups to sneak into the theater and yell “fire”, or to set off whistles and sirens while the play was onstage. The police, as Conn recalled, “did everything to stop our disruptions, and things soon developed into a question of prestige between the Party and police.” Conn and Wilhelm Hüttmann, the Nazi member of the Hamburg parliament,

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101 Hamburger Echo, December 1, 1928.
102 FZG 11C1 - Alfred Conn - Nachlasse, 64.
soon planned a more elaborate disturbance of the play’s November 31 performance. Conn took obvious pride in this operation of the SA’s front-hardened military officers and their unquestioning young followers over the unsuspecting theatergoers, who according to his account consisted entirely of effeminate Jews and homosexual esthetes. This night remained in his memory to the point where he could, decades later, recount its planning and execution in great detail. The youngest SA men brought simple noisemakers and stationed themselves in the upper balcony, while Conn and two comrades sat in the first row of the first balcony. They had prepared capsules of itching and sneezing powder, and had also brought smokebombs as well. Conn’s deputy Trzebiatowsky took charge of the arsenal, and sat between his comrades to shield the stash from discovery. They would arrive separately and begin the disruption once their young comrades above created a diversion with their noisemakers. Conn himself went undercover for this mission – he dressed in a smoking jacket and brought a copy of the 

_Berliner Tageblatt_, which he thought would disguise him as a Jewish intellectual. He smugly recounted the night in his memoirs:

> As the first one to arrive, I pulled out my newspaper and began to read. To the right of me sat a Jew. He took my Jewish reading material at face value and trusted himself to speak with me. I stayed reservedly friendly, cast doubt on his prediction of a disruption citing the massive police presence, and returned to my newspaper. In the meantime the two others had appeared. And then the play began.\(^{103}\)

The first act passed with no signal from the SA students in the upper balcony. Conn assured his Jewish neighbor that this meant the play was in the clear, but the latter shook his head and meekly replied, “You never know.” The second act began. As the main character endured his trial onstage, debating whether or not to confess to perjury or reveal

\(^{103}\) Ibid, 65.
his homosexuality, Conn saw Trzebiatowsky juggling the capsules in his hand. He was unable to make up his mind to let loose, and Conn prompted him with increasing urgency as the home-made capsules began to disintegrate. Finally, Trzebiatowsky threw the stinkbombs from the balcony into the main seating areas below, which caused “an immediate and violent tumult.” The lights went up and a police company stormed the theater. Conn pretended ignorance while his Jewish neighbor, he claimed, began to exclaim wild and inaccurate theories as to where the disturbance had come from. In Conn’s depiction, it was as if this Jewish homosexual was so far removed from military matters that he could not recognize the basics of an operation that had been carried out under his nose. In the meantime the SA youths up top had begun their disturbance, drawing the attention of the police, who apprehended them and escorted them from the theater. The guests below “sprayed many bottles of cologne to cover the bestial stench,” and the play eventually resumed. Meanwhile, Hüttman had assembled outside the theater a mob consisting of SA men and members of other völkisch youth groups and nationalist parties. During the play’s November 31 and December 9 performances, Hüttman led this mob in harassing exiting theatergoers and antagonizing the police, who arrested 19 people at the first protest, including Hüttman himself. At the second, the mob was so large and impassioned that it trapped the theatergoers inside, which obliged the police to bring in reinforcements to clear a path to the train station.

104 Ibid, 65.
105 Ibid, 65.
106 Hamburger Echo, December 1, 1928.
107 Hamburger Echo, December 10, 1928.
The *Hamburger Echo* claimed that the Nazi protests “expose[d] the spiritual nature *[geistige Beschaffenheit]* of these people more clearly than any pamphlet.”\(^{108}\) Though they meant the statement as an accusation, the Nazis themselves would have agreed – as did others on the right. The SA’s anti-Verbrecher protests won them newfound sympathy, as from the DNVP’s member of the Hamburg parliament, Nagel, who applauded Hüttman’s assertion during a subsequent parliamentary debate that the National Socialists fought “against the Jews’ dirty fantasies.”\(^{109}\) [“*Wir kämpfen die Schmutzgebilde jüdischer Phantasie*”] Nagel added, “The author of this play insults the German court system. That is a scandal. Our German people is a race in chains so long as such a play is allowed to continue. If the German youth disrupts such proceedings with stinkbombs, then I can only agree.”\(^{110}\) When the new session of the *Bürgerschaft* opened in January, the Nazi representative Brinkmann asked if the body had any plans to punish the *Schauspielhaus*. The negative answer confirmed the SA’s disgust with parliamentary democracy’s willingness and ability to defend conservative definitions of the German family.\(^{111}\) It also disappointed them because they hoped to keep the issue alive through the coming weeks, so successful it had been for the Party’s political arguments.

Police observers of the political scene saw immediately the event’s importance: “that the different rightist groups whose members made up the protesters were completely unified, even though they usually fight each other at every opportunity.”\(^{112}\) Before the Verbrecher protests, the SA had claimed in its propaganda to the other Wehrverbände that it shared their values and would be a more active and effective agent

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\(^{108}\) *Hamburger Echo*, December 1, 1928.  
\(^{109}\) *Hamburger Echo*, December 8, 1928.  
\(^{110}\) Ibid.  
\(^{111}\) “*Aus dem Bürgerschaft,”* *Hamburger Echo*, January 17, 1929.  
\(^{112}\) StAH 331-3 / 1097, report of December 12, 1928.
of counterrevolution. The targets of this propaganda, however, often doubted these claims, especially when events like the Gerhold trial showed SA men as members of subordinate and lesser masculine subgroups rather than the dominant types they claimed to be. The Verbrecher protests solved this problem. By targeting a homosexual subculture that was almost universally hated – even among the normally staid middle class\textsuperscript{113} and the otherwise liberal socialists\textsuperscript{114} – they created a chance for cooperation between political rivals, and they furthered their argument for the legitimacy of violence as a political tactic. The protests thus increased the SA’s standing on the right as a defender of conservative values while simultaneously countering accusations of homosexuality within the group’s own ranks. The theme of homosexuality that could have been used against the SA now counted to its favor.

Whatever their numbers, and whatever protection they might have hoped for from Röhm and the national leadership, homosexual stormtroopers thus existed within a threatened space. Hamburg’s Sturmführer Bisschopinck, the Sturm 6 treasurer who had assembled around himself a Röhm-like clique of homosexual officers, lost his position in early 1930. Conn had always clashed with him, for explicitly personal reasons. Conn described Bisschopinck as having a “known deviant tendency” [erkannten abwegiger Veranlagung].\textsuperscript{115} Ellerhusen, like Hitler in Röhm’s case, already knew about

\textsuperscript{113} George Mosse famously described the connection between nationalism and bourgeois notions of respectability in \textit{Nationalism and Sexuality}, while Isabel Hull analyzed the mixed record of the gay rights movement’s adoption of bourgeois respectability in “The Bourgeoisie and its Discontents: Reflections on ‘Nationalism and Respectability,‘” \textit{Journal of Contemporary History}, 17:2 (1982): 247-268.


\textsuperscript{115} FZG 11C1 - Alfred Conn - Nachlasse, 69.
Bisschopinck’s orientation when he appointed him the leader of Sturm 6. He had done so despite reservations that Conn expressed as the two old comrades shared a train cabin to Hannover. Ellerhusen tried to mollify Conn, who insisted that he “would not work with such people” suspected of being “counter to [Paragraph] 175.”

In January 1930, Conn learned that Ellerhusen had elevated Bisschopinck to *Sturmführer*, an act that he called “a completely unbelievable decision.” Bisschopinck had been in the SA since 1927, but had lost his post for unspecified reasons before Ellerhusen again awarded it to him soon after taking command. Conn expressed his shock in a letter, since Ellerhusen was avoiding contact with him despite their longstanding camaraderie.

This only further incensed Conn, whose objections seemed more personal than political or practical. His writings on the subject focused on the relationships between the men involved, and he bristled at the growing closeness between his old comrade Ellerhusen and the newcomer Bisschopinck. Conn wrote to Ellerhusen that “with such actions, you snub your best friends and allow yourself to be led astray.” This was coded language. Conn’s writings betrayed his jealousy that Bisschopinck had come between him and Ellerhusen – who by January 1930 had begun ignoring his old friend in favor of his relationship with Bisschopinck. The letters to Ellerhusen took increasingly maudlin tones. “Since you’ve gone out of your way to avoid speaking to me…” Conn wrote in January, “I will not be attending the [SA leadership] meeting tomorrow.”

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116 FZG 922 SA – Conn to Ellerhusen letter of Jan 28 1930.
117 Ibid.
118 Ibid.
119 Ibid.
After not hearing from Ellerhusen for another month, he asked, “What is the real reason you’re so intentionally avoiding me?”

The reason was the homoerotic triangle with Bisschopinck – what Sedgwick called “homosocial desire.” The type of homophobia Conn expressed against Bisschopinck was akin to a type that Sedgwick described as not just persecutory, but also as productive of larger political goals. In these cases, she wrote, homophobia functioned “not most immediately as an oppression of homosexual men, but as a tool for manipulating the entire spectrum of male bonds.”

Conn blamed Bisschopinck for his own deteriorating relationship with Ellerhusen. Conn claimed that after Ellerhusen became Brigadeführer, he “gave himself over to the company of bloodsucking cronies [Zeckkumpanen]” – Bisschopinck and his allegedly homosexual circle. The group overindulged in alcohol and generally lived a debauched lifestyle, which “began to cost [Ellerhusen] more and more of his old energy; he lost his drive and became anchorless.” Conn’s campaign against Bisschopinck was thus rooted in his own insecurities about his relationship with Ellerhusen, with whom he had until Bisschopinck’s entrance to the scene enjoyed “untarnished camaraderie.” But now Ellerhusen enjoyed the company of other men whose open homosexuality called into question the masculinity of everyone else involved. Conn thus took allegations of immorality to other leading party members and threatened his own resignation in a letter whose histrionics pleaded for a response. “From your conduct,” he wrote to

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120 FZG 922 SA Conn letter to Ellerhusen, February 27, 1930.
121 Sedgwick, Between Men, 1.
122 Ibid, 16. See also 83-96.
123 FZG 11C1 - Alfred Conn - Nachlasse, 69.
124 Ibid.
125 Ibid.
126 FZG 922 SA Conn letter to Korsemann of January 28 1930.
Ellerhusen, “I have to understand that you value your cooperation with B. more dearly than [your relationship] with me…. and I regret that for your part you have decided to ignore me until the end.”

Conn won his war against Bisschopinck. The complete records of – and thus reasons for – Bisschopinck’s removal from his post no longer exist. But at some point in April 1930, Ellerhusen arranged his transfer, along with some other members of Bisschopinck’s group, to the small Silesian town of Golar. “We are finally rid of Bisschopinck,” wrote Conn. “Everyone is breathing a sigh of relief.” But not all stormtroopers did. Bisschopinck was a war veteran, an old fighter, and – in the words of an old SA man who later wrote to complain of the leadership’s increasing “Puritanism” – an “unsurpassed treasurer” who was among the leading lights of the local SA. But even this old fighter acknowledged that revelations of homosexuality, an act that was “forbidden to soldiers of the land [Landesknechten],” required the SA to “give [him his] walking papers.”

Allegations of homosexuality thus troubled the SA both from within and without. The problem became particularly acute after April 1931, when the Munich Observer first published a series of private letters that revealed Röhm’s orientation to the public. In an echo of the Social Democratic outing campaigns of the late imperial period, the paper accused him of committing offenses against Paragraph 175 and of corrupting German youth. Shortly before the presidential election of April 1932, SPD papers again published

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127 FZG 922 SA Conn letter to Ellerhusen of January 28 1930.
128 NARA A3341 SA Kartei B104 Gunther P. P. had come to Bisschopinck’s Sturm on Ellerhusen’s recommendation. Bisschopinck later got P. a job at the Hamburg-Amerika Line,
129 FZG 922 SA Conn letter to Korsemann of 15 May 1930.
130 FZG 991 Franz Koeberle letter of 2 March 1931.
131 Ibid. Koeberle’s statements on this matter contain the strange phrasing that Bisschopinck and friends were engaged in “lesbian love.” The word choice implies that many stormtroopers were in fact quite ignorant of homosexuality.
Röhm’s letters, which they claimed as proof “that he does not possess the moral qualities” of political leadership.\textsuperscript{132} The political campaign against Röhm was accompanied by legal persecution as well – in 1931 and 1932, prosecutors tried at least five times to convict Röhm under Paragraph 175. None of the charges stuck.\textsuperscript{133} From this point onwards, SA opponents used homophobic slurs as some of their most effective taunts – one being the catcall “SA pants down!” [“SA-Hose runter!”], which was almost guaranteed to start a fight.\textsuperscript{134} The KPD’s \textit{Volksblatt} reported enthusiastically on such cases, which it claimed even took place between Party members and SA men. In one situation, a Party member returned a stormtrooper’s “Heil Hitler” with the well-intentioned “Heil Röhm” – and thus earned a physical attack and an accusation of slander to the police. “It seems to be dawning in the brains of SA men,” wrote the \textit{Volksblatt}, “that it is unworthy for a German man to be commanded by a Bolivian homosexual.”\textsuperscript{135} Over time, the Marxist – and especially Communist – mocking of stormtrooper sexuality grew so extreme as to solidify a lasting slander against homosexual men as a group. Maxim Gorky proclaimed that “If you just root out all the homosexuals – then fascism will vanish!”\textsuperscript{136} The statement was one of many that prompted Klaus Mann’s lament that homosexuals had become “the Jews of the antifascist left.” How, he asked, could antifascist papers demonize “murderers and pederasts” with the same persecutory intensity as Nazi papers decried “race-traitors [\textit{Volksverrätern}] and Jews”?\textsuperscript{137} George

\textsuperscript{132} Hancock, “Only the Real,” 629.
\textsuperscript{133} Ibid, 628.
\textsuperscript{134} As it did in January 1932, when Reichsbanner members mobbing an SA man’s laundromat goaded the man into pulling out a revolver and firing. The SA were outraged that the stormtrooper was then arrested by the late-arriving police. “Die Angegriffenen ins Gefängnis,” \textit{Hamburger Tageblatt}, January 9, 1932.
\textsuperscript{135} “Ist ‘Heil Röhm’ eine Beleidigung?” \textit{Hamburger Volksblatt}, collected in StAH B220.
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid.
Mosse later called Communist homophobia the “darker side of antifascist culture,” which spread the association throughout the world. While this slander had far-reaching consequences for later generations of gay men, it emerged as a tactical attack that exploited the stormtroopers’ conflicted relationship with their own sexuality.

Röhm’s place in the movement, however, was secure so long as he remained useful and loyal. Hitler defended Röhm from some Party members’ calls for removal. He called the accusations “irrelevant and absurd,” reminded subordinates of Röhm’s professional competence and personal loyalty, decided in general to ignore the issue in public while defending Röhm in private. He also seems to have felt that to remove Röhm while under public pressure would be to admit weakness, and therefore resisted any public discussion of the subject. Lower-ranking stormtroopers were often not as lucky. They remained potential victims of homophobia by their superiors, who were more concerned with controlling the enlisted ranks while managing the public face of their local chapters. Accusations of homosexuality remained powerful weapons for Party members and SA officers to attack their rivals, so long as the accusation remained within Party circles. If a homosexual stormtrooper hoped to survive within the movement, he had to stay hidden – at times from his comrades, and always from the public eye. It was a dangerous situation that threatened only to be resolved through the NSDAP’s usual

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139 Hancock, “Only the Real,” 631-634.

140 As, for example, the case of a Party member named Burat, a friend of Kaufmann’s whom the SA disliked. It was a “lucky solution” that the man died before any resolution came of the problem, which combined accusations of “dictatorial” leadership by the Kaufmann clique with allegations of homosexuality similar to those levied against Eulenburg, and later Röhm. See FZG 991 SA Opposition Gau Hamburg.
preferred solution, violence. Adolf Brand warned that homosexuals who joined the NSDAP were “carrying their hangman’s rope in their pockets.”\textsuperscript{141}

Both homo- and heterosexual stormtroopers performed elements of masculinity that they hoped would win them personal respect and political power, not those elements associated with subordinated male subcultures. In the end, masculinity in the SA was as much a uniform as the brown shirt. It made stormtroopers appear united, powerful, and authoritative, but it also constrained their behavior and made them subjects of control rather than free-willed individuals. It was among the great ironies of a movement that promised to help its men gain their independence and establish themselves as autonomous subjects. Instead, both homo- and heterosexual stormtroopers found that their political lives could only continue if they subordinated their personal lives to rigid and unyielding codes of masculinity.

\textsuperscript{141} Brand in Harry Oosterhuis and Hubert Kennedy, eds. \textit{Homosexuality and Male Bonding in Pre-Nazi Germany} (Haworth: Haworth Press, 1992), 236.
In 1929 and 1930, the SA attack on Der Verbrecher, the Battle of Sternschanze, and the NSDAP’s consequent electoral success catapulted the Hamburg Party from obscurity to prominence and made it the political leader of the nationalist right. As its numbers grew, the SA had to confront problems of how to integrate and care for its swelling ranks. Their efforts – which mainly involved creating living spaces in which the SA men could be provided for – at times further strained stormtroopers’ relationships with their family members. The SA subculture was already vulnerable to charges of homosexuality, and so its leaders exerted great care that the same-sex institutions they designed did not damage their goal of establishing SA men as husbands and fathers. Nor could they, despite their insistence on male supremacy, ignore the movement’s need for women’s political activism. SA leaders therefore generated a variety of public statements and performances to demonstrate that they valued women’s presence and contributions. Such claims, however, always existed in tension with the movement’s homoerotic core, and they became increasingly difficult to sustain in reality so long as the era’s economic conditions prevented most stormtroopers from forming stable relationships outside their circle of comrades.

“Over Hard Streets”: Economic Depression and Family Instability as Engines of SA Growth

The world economic crash of October 1929 set the stage for the Nazis’ upsurge by reminding Germans of the miserable conditions with which the Republic began.
Historians of the Nazis’ political fortunes almost universally highlight the depression’s radicalizing influence on politics. Longerich described the conjunction as a favorable one for the SA, “because in the moment the NSDAP had brought its propaganda to full development, the first effects of the world economic crisis began to be felt in Germany.”¹ The best studies of the SA’s national and local social makeup support this idea as well.² According to Eric Reiche’s study of Nuremberg, unemployment bred frustration and scorn for traditional politics, and fueled the recruitment strategies of both Nazi and Communist fighting organizations. Nuremberg’s SA grew sevenfold in the two years following the depression.³ In Hamburg’s suburb Altona, the depression eroded middle-class trust in the government and in traditional bourgeois parties. After 1929, the middle class turned away from the bourgeois parties supporting the Republic and toward national socialism.⁴

The same process took place in Hamburg itself. The effects of the depression were particularly acute there since the city’s industry and economy relied on international trade and shipping. The Senate had retained much local autonomy even after the founding of the Reich in 1871, but this power over local economic policy had steadily eroded over time. In the 1920s, economic policy set by Berlin further damaged Hamburg’s economy, which in turn hampered the state’s ability to mitigate economic hardship. It had traditionally done this well, but after 1929 no longer could.⁵ According to Karen

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¹ Longerich, 79.
² Peter Merkl’s *The Making of a Stormtrooper* begins its narrative at this point, crediting the high rates of unemployment with destroying belief in democracy among the younger generation born after the turn of the century. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 1980. 3-20.
⁴ McElligot. *Contested City*. 154-159.
⁵ Büttner, “Das Ende der Weimarer Republik und der Aufstieg des Nationalsozialismus in Hamburg” in Ursula Büttner and Werner Jochmann, eds. 16.
Hagemann’s study of a Hamburg working class family’s finances, a household spent approximately 44% of its 252 RM income on rent, heat, electricity, gas, taxes, and insurance, plus an additional 32% on food. The remaining 23% of their income had to account for the upkeep of the apartment, clothes, shoes, and laundry, as well as education and medical expenses. This made the financial situation quite tenuous even for those still working during the depression. Hagemann’s case study concluded that even among better-off working class families, simply putting food on the table was the primary concern and a cause for great uncertainty. Younger members of Hamburg’s middle class fell into this uncertainty as well, especially those whose families could not compensate for their economic struggles.

The economic crisis thus brought a new generation of stormtroopers into the Nazi fold. The Hamburg SA grew almost fourfold during the 1.5 years after the depression, from around 400 members in the summer of 1929 to 1,500 in April 1931. This second wave was younger than the first. They were born after 1900, and had thus not served in the First World War. But they were still affected by the tragedy: they had lost fathers and older brothers in the conflict, and they suffered from the war’s after-effects on Hamburg’s industry and society.

The life of Scharführer Paul B, SA Schulungs-Referant in Bergedorf, provided a typical example. In his Lebenslauf he described his personal history as having “led me over hard streets.” He was born in 1904, the son of the co-owner and manager of a Hamburg firm that traded glassware and porcelain “in all corners of the world.” But the

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7 Ibid. 36.
8 Krause, 143.
9 NARA A3341 SA Kartei 046 Paul B.
father died in 1919, and the inheritance vanished in the inflation of 1923. Paul’s older brother, an Oberleutnant zur See in the First World War, had been held for 2 ½ years in English POW camp, where his health was broken. Upon the brother’s release he spent two years of “unspeakable suffering” in a Hamburg hospital before dying in 1921. When Paul’s next eldest brother died from a botched operation in 1924, it left Paul to head the household. He was 21 years old. Fortunately, he had apprenticed in his father’s profession, and so his father’s contacts in Hamburg’s merchant community were able to place him at the successful import firm Tietgens & Robertson. The job held five years, until the American market crash cut off the flow of goods from the United States. He was let go and unable to find steady work for the next four years. His father’s family was unable to help him, but he found a surrogate home in the SA. He had been active in nationalist politics for several years as a member of the “Niedersachsen-Ring” and had, he claimed, resisted his increasing national socialist sympathies only out of personal loyalty. As he later wrote the SA, “The bonds with my comrades in the NSR were so strong that I felt it impossible to dissolve them.”

Once, however, the SA showed its willingness to incorporate intact pre-existing Wehrverbände like Paul’s, they soon joined en masse. He saw in the NSDAP and SA the best chance to fight and triumph for the nationalist principles he connected explicitly with his departed father:

My burning love of Volk and Vaterland the consequent desire to be unceasingly active on their behalf had become a necessity of life [eine Lebensnotwendigkeit], and this pushed me to positive work for Volk and state. The basis of this was inculcated in my earliest youth by my father, who himself had been unable to serve the fatherland as an officer, since he was an orphan.

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10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
Paul B’s family history had come full circle. His orphaned father had been unable to serve the state as he wished, and the prosperous merchant career he later achieved had done nothing to secure his children’s futures. Paul himself had failed to replicate his father’s business success because, in his view, the weakness of the *Vaterland* had left it unable to defend Hamburg’s traditional merchant interests. Paul would therefore report for duty to the most visible, the most energetic, and the most militant defenders of those interests, the SA. By fighting in its ranks he would secure economic independence for his family and redeem his father’s legacy.

The post-1929 SA also drew in older members of nationalist circles whose allegiance it had not yet captured. But these men too had experienced a certain stunting of their lifelines due to the political and economic pressures of the times. Karl B, born in 1895, had also “worked without interruption for the national renewal” in a series of Freikorps and nationalist *Wehrverbände*. He, like Böckenhauer and other prominent SA officers, was a policeman whose enmity for socialism stemmed from the revolutionary behavior of the KPD. After 1923 he became increasingly radical, until a 1924 confrontation with Communists led to his dismissal. His firing from the police then began a long slide down the socio-economic ladder that led to further criminal acts. During a dispute with his landlord – which he blamed on her Jewishness but originated in his inability to pay the rent – he broke a window, threw the pieces at her, and was eventually convicted of destruction of property. Upon his release from jail the next year, he was immediately sent back for having unsuccessfully suborned her perjury in his previous trial.

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12 NARA A3341 SA Kartei 023 Karl B.
13 Ibid. He described the incident to the SA as “having overstepped the bounds of my duties as a policeman (battery)” or as “having gone too far in self-defense in my capacity as a police officer.”
The files of the Hamburg Justice Department are filled with crimes SA men committed in the late 20s and early 30s. Many were political and could not, directly at least, be blamed on economic troubles. But even in these cases the stormtrooper’s unemployment could turn a mild fine into a long imprisonment. Hans Friedrich L. had been caught letting a younger, underage friend handle his pistol, for which he in any case had no permit. He was convicted of an illegal weapons violation in June 1930 and sentenced to a 100RM fine, which long unemployment left him unable to pay. He thus faced 10 days in jail. Hans Friedrich’s SA-sponsored lawyer wrote the court to petition for more time to pay the fine, in light of the lasting harm a jail sentence would carry for Hans Friedrich’s future. He hoped, the court was told, again to find work at his old firm. This would not be possible should he serve time in jail:

Through the necessity of having to serve his punishment [Strafe], the convicted has already been told that the possibility to find work at his old place of employment would be broken.

Without this position the convicted would be sentenced to further unemployment of indeterminable duration, which would further endanger his character and make even more difficult his resumption of an orderly life.  

Stormtroopers thus feared the depression’s effects not just on their pocketbooks, but also on their characters and their family stability.

They were right to do so. Economic woes also drove stormtroopers, like many down-on-their-luck men of any era, to a wide variety of financial crimes. The Hamburg justice files, as well as SA records from a 1934-1935 review of personnel, record hundreds of cases of embezzlement, fraud, extortion, and counterfeiting, as well as thefts

\[14\] StAH B16 unsigned letter to Amtsgericht Hamburg of 14 October 1930.
both petty and grand. But, as was the case with sexual irregularities in SA ranks, these criminals were met with understanding in the Kampfzeit SA – provided the recruits arrived with the requisite patriotism and willingness to fight for the movement. As Böckenhauer later commented on Karl B’s case, in the context of clearing B’s criminal record so that the SA could secure him a job after the takeover, “He was merely, even if in an illegal way, protecting his own skin.” [Er hat sich also, wenn auch in verbotener Weise s.Zt. lediglich seiner Haut gewehrt.] The phrase could have formed a motto for the SA’s dealings with political opponents. It also showed, however, that SA leaders extended the sensibility to a variety of self-interested misdeeds as well.

Karl B also received sympathy from his fellow stormtroopers because he was not only looking out for “his own skin,” but also for the welfare of his dependents – “meine damalige Braut” in his case. The SA had been born out of the need for physical defense of individuals within the Nazi movement, but individual stormtroopers who found themselves in personal, financial, or legal jeopardy extended this concept of self-defense to include their obligations as family men. To the stormtroopers, the worst aspect of the economic depression – besides its obvious physical miseries such as hunger and homelessness – was its degenerative effect on the German family. This theme played a powerful role in the SA’s published works about itself, which showed stormtroopers fighting for their families’ economic survival, radicalized by worsening employment conditions, and plunged into broken family situations that were redeemed only through the stormtrooper’s victory in the political realm.

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15 For the city of Hamburg’s files of convicted SA men, before and after 1933, see StAH 241-1 Justizverwaltung I XXII Cb 3 vol 1-4. For the SA’s own files see StAH B18, B77, and B103 Band 1-3.
16 NARA 3341 SA Kartei 023 Karl B.
A 1934 book on the SA’s history, *Ehrenbuch der SA*, described the motivations of two Hamburg stormtroopers – anonymous, but standing in as archetypes – who were both shaped by the depression’s impact on their families. One featured a son for whom the loss of his father prompted the moral fall of his mother, whose sexual misdeeds carried political interpretations. In the story, the youth’s father died early. He watched his mother hang around bars day after day. She soon took a much younger boyfriend – a Communist, who vanished for days at a time in order to carry out “terror actions” against National Socialists and to attack their meetings.17 Both the boy and the mother were damaged by the spell of this violent, oversexed Communist:

The boy saw how his mother was used as a sex object by her boyfriend *[wie die Mutter in sexueller Hoerigkeit ihrem Freunde untertan wurde]*, which fully ruined him even as his youth and inexperience could not understand all the complications, the spiritual and physical effects such a relationship entailed.18

The mother soon stopped caring for her son. The story hinted that she became a prostitute. The two lived in the tavern in a state of degeneracy; the boy had no chance at a real education or a stable family life. But he found salvation in the baker’s son down the street, who had lied about his age to get into the SA and who had first exposed the fallen woman’s son to the SA uniform. The boy’s “longing for purity,” the story related, then led him naturally into the SA.19 The following years featured the usual chronicle of violence, combat, and electioneering typical to the lives of SA men living in Communist neighborhoods. His political orientation alienated him from his mother and her Communist friends, but he returned to his mother’s degenerate tavern on the day of the takeover. It was the first time he had returned since he had left to join the stormtroopers.

17 Karl Koch, *Das Ehrenbuch der SA* (Düsseldorf: Floeder, 1934), 69.
18 Ibid. 69
19 Ibid, 71.
He entered in uniform, gave a loud “Heil Hitler,” and none dared attack him as they had in the past. The boy’s story had begun with his father’s death and his mothers’ descent into a life among Communists, alcohol, and sexual depravity. It ended, however, with the boy using the Hitler uniform to symbolically reclaim this space for “his natural sense of purity”.

Stormtrooper myths held dear the images of lost fathers and threatened women. Dead fathers, particularly those killed in the First World War, abounded.20 When alive, archetypical stormtrooper fathers were weak and helpless, unable to find their own work, uphold their city’s honor, rebuild their country, or guide their sons to mature masculinity.21 Many stormtrooper sons therefore took over the role of family provider, as did the heroes of “SA Mann Brand,” Gotthard Kraft, SA räumt auf, and 10 Jahre unbekannter SA Mann.22 Others, including the eponymous hero of Hamburg’s Willi Dickkopp, struggled to feed their own families and still carry out their political activities. Another Hamburg case from the Ehrenbuch told the story of a young bank teller who had just begun his career when the inflation of 1923 wiped out first his earnings, then his position. The elder bank employees – here standing in as representatives of a discredited older generation and its failure to deal with new realities – had little to offer their younger colleagues but mockery: “The youths of the bank came to the older employees,” the story

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20 For a general discussion of Weimar concern over war widows, orphans, and youth lacking “the firm hand of the father” see Bessel, Germany After the First World War. 226-241.  
21 In light of the stormtroopers’ obsession with wounded father figures, one need not read antisemitism into Wagner’s Parsifal to understand the Nazis’ attraction to this opera. Both it and the stormtrooper myths stem from the deep cultural roots explored by folklorists and anthropologists in such foundational works as: James Frazer, The Golden Bough: A Study in Comparative Religion (New York and London: Macmillan, 1894); Lord Raglan, The Hero: a Study in Tradition, Myth, and Drama (New York: Oxford University Press, 1937); and Joseph Campbell, The Hero With a Thousand Faces (New York: Pantheon Books, 1949).  
22 Julius Witthuhn, Gotthard Kraft (Hannover: NS-Kulturverlag, [1932]), 10; Heinz Lohmann, SA räumt auf (Hamburg: Hanseatische Verlaganstalt, 1935), 118 and 139; Anonymous, 10 Jahre unbekannter SA Mann (Oldenburg: Stalling, 1933), 58.
told, “who stood clueless concerning the endless worthlessness of money, laughed at their difficulties, and recommended they put away paper marks or speculate on the market.”

The poor young banker fell from a promising aspirant to Hamburg’s commercial society to living with a Communist family “with criminal inclinations” in “a miserable alley” of the inner city. The family initially treated him as one of its own. But the daughters were wanton and lewd, and the parents saw him as nothing but a meal ticket. When his savings vanished in the end, “the family’s love ceased, and turned to dim hate [dumpfen Hass].”

After this false Communist family failed him, his true family intervened. His brother, a house painter, gave him a job that rescued him not only economically, but politically and even spiritually – because here, he met his first SA-Man. This stormtrooper “had something like a holy fire in him;” he set the fallen banker on the path to “a fully new spiritual world.” The hardships of poverty and unemployment had introduced the youth to the dark family life of the Communist underclass, had “given him time to think.” He now realized how the political situation had destroyed the German economy, which in turn threatened to destroy the German family. But through the fortunate intervention of the brother and his stormtrooper, the banker discovered in Nazism a way to recover from his personal troubles, rebuild his city’s economy, and found his own family:

He had raced through the years, and sometimes the great shadows of his life suddenly became all too clear, and gripped him by the throat, and he could no longer help it and drank the whole night through. But that became much more seldom – yes, it stopped altogether as he met a girl, had a child, and saw the small creature fidget and laugh. He sees in him the youth of the Third Reich, and… he knows this child will never know danger, just as he knows that his superiors will step up and make sure that

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23 Koch, 61-61.
24 Ibid. 62.
25 Ibid. 62.
26 Ibid. 63.
27 Ibid.
the convictions vanish from his record, as the broken and overthrown system had vanished.\textsuperscript{28}

The stories told of stormtroopers before and after the takeover painted their personal stories as the struggle to find work, marry their girlfriends, and raise a family. These goals were difficult to pursue in the context of the Weimar Republic’s notorious economic instability. The stormtroopers in turn blamed the republican system, “parliamentarism,” and socialism for Germany’s inability to defend its borders, pursue an independent trade policy, and build the German economy so as to provide for German families. They therefore embraced National Socialism as a way to build a foundation for their own individual lives, and continued to blame “the System” for pushing them into a life of crime.

Biographical data from the SA personnel files in the Captured German Records Group support the stormtroopers’ idealized self-images. In many cases, SA men were unable to pursue family opportunities because of poverty. The vast majority of the stormtroopers were single during the \textit{Kampfzeit}. Conversely, those who married often delayed their entry into the SA due to family pressures. Chart 1 (attached) shows marriage data for Hamburg stormtroopers whose marital status is known from \textit{Fragebogen, Lebensläufe}, or other documents in the Berlin Document Center collection, supplemented by those records with similar data in the \textit{Staatsarchiv} Hamburg. This sample of Hamburg stormtroopers shows that of 111 SA men whose marital status is known, 71.8\% were single throughout the \textit{Kampfzeit}, and 32.7\% remained single even afterwards.\textsuperscript{29} Married stormtroopers were generally older, and had started their families during the marriage boom in the first few years after the war. Marriage rates fluctuated

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item Ibid 64-65.
\item NARA 3341 SA Kartei – Wackerfuss sample (N110)
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during the rest of the 20s due to economic troubles before rebounding in a wave of stormtrooper marriages in 1933-1935. Stormtrooper childbirth rates (see chart 2) fell along a similar curve, with an especially sharp drop after the 1929 depression. Economic woes prevented stormtroopers from stating families, and prevented family men from being stormtroopers.

The stormtroopers’ own understanding of political struggle was rooted in the context of individual families. The SA as an organization felt this way as well. It kept no systematic data on whether stormtroopers were married, with children, or fatherless, but accounts of family troubles permeate those personnel records they kept. The prevalence of family woes in the SA’s administrative files testifies to its concern with the state of the stormtrooper family. It also provides several concrete cases of the classic myths stormtroopers held dear about themselves and their comrades.

Hans Friedrich L, the stormtrooper who faced jail time for nonpayment of his fine on a firearms charge, had come in conflict with the terms of his sentence because his family was so broken as to be of no assistance. His father, the SA’s letter pled to the *Amtsgericht*, earned only 140RM a month with which to support his sick wife, unemployed son, and underage daughter.\(^\text{30}\) Young stormtroopers often could not count on their families to bail them out of trouble, whether financial, political, or personal. And these categories often merged. In 1928, SA-Mann Karl V. met a girl shortly before his 21\(^{\text{st}}\) birthday. Six months later he learned she was pregnant – a “fait accompli,” he called

\(^{30}\) StAH B16 unsigned letter to Amtsgericht Hamburg of 14 October 1930. This was slightly more than half the 252RM the working-class family studied by Hagemann required in late 1930 to early 1931. Hagemann, in “Wir hatten mehr Notjahre” 33.
it [vollendete Tatsache].

“Despite my parents’ insistent warnings,” he later wrote, “I decided, as an upstanding and perhaps naïve young man, to accept the consequences and marry her.”

He also joined the SA shortly afterwards, feeling the call to protect this young family. Yet his national socialist activity got him fired, and the family was forced to move in with her parents. Here the difficulties continued as the young stormtrooper refused to give up his SA duties even while remaining unemployed, which the father, “a card-carrying member of the SPD,” opposed on both economic and ideological grounds. The situation eventually destroyed the young stormtrooper’s family when he and his father-in-law came to blows during an argument: “I saw myself obligated to present my wife a decision between myself and her parents. When this decision fell against me, I saw myself obligated to leave the house.”

Karl’s wife convinced him to take responsibility for the ensuing divorce, a suggestion he failed to resist because of his “spiritual collapse” [seelischen Notlage] and which left him open to her retroactive financial demands once he found work after 1933 using SA connections.

Karl V’s file in the justice records of the Staatsarchiv concerns his failure to pay child support for the years between the divorce and her demands, of which he claimed to be unaware. He claimed that she had waited until the moment he was back on his feet to again destroy him and the new family he was trying to found.

Karl V reminded the now-Nazified court that

My monstrous load of debt [ungeheure Schuldenlast] came, in addition to other disadvantages, not only through unemployment but from my many years of active service for the NSDAP. I must also say that as a citizen of Danzig I received no social assistance for months at a time, so that I had to

31 StAH 213-3 Staatsanwaltschaft Hamburg – Strafsachen. 4407/38, letter of Karl V. to Amtsgericht Hamburg of 14 March 1938.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid.
35 His claim appears doubtful in light of a notice attached to court records that listed a series of conversations and letters between Karl and his ex-wife on the subject of his financial obligations.
rely on donations and loans from comrades to keep my head above water.\textsuperscript{36}

Karl V’s case combined many elements of fallen German manhood that reinforced the mutual dependency between the SA and its stormtroopers. He had found himself in Hamburg because of the helplessness of the nation to defend its borders and of Danzig to take care of its sons. Karl’s description of his personal and financial mistakes leaned heavily on his self-image as an upstanding but naïve young man who was merely trying to live up to his obligations. When his political duties conflicted with his family responsibilities, he justified it in terms of duty his superiors in the SA could understand (as in his repetition of the phrase “I saw myself obligated”). In the end, the SA helped him “keep his head above water” until their takeover of the state granted the stormtroopers the power and influence to defend their own interests.

Karl V claimed in his letter to the court that were it not for the sake of his new wife’s poor constitution “there would be nothing else for me but to end my terrible distress with a bullet.”\textsuperscript{37} This was not an idle threat. Suicide may have been an intellectual fascination among writers of the Weimar period,\textsuperscript{38} but for the Kampfzeit SA it was also an ever-present danger. Some stormtroopers who simultaneously faced family and financial distress took their own lives. SA Mann Heinz Grosser shot himself on June 19, 1931. According to a report by his commander Sturmführer Meier:

The reasons lay partially in family burdens and partially in economic misery. The father is a drinker and had left his family in the lurch, while the mother is in a sanatorium. Otherwise, he was also unemployed and

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid
received not the slightest support; his love life, as the press has reported,
drove him to his final end.39

Grosser was “always a good and true comrade,” and the SA regretted his death.

The SA’s reluctant assistance a few months later of SA-Mann Pawlowski can be
seen in this light. Pawlowski was arrested in late 1931 for embezzlement and theft. He
had already been convicted in the past of fraud and forgery; this history plus his attempt
to flee the arresting officer caused his bail to be set at 200RM. Dr. Walter Raeke, the
SA’s main lawyer during this period, investigated the matter on the SA’s behalf to see if
they would assist. His clerk visited Pawlowski’s home, and while Pawlowski himself
“didn’t make a bad impression,” “the impression made by his family is (wife, mother) is
entirely bad.”40 The SA leaders in charge of the case considered, “in light of poor
impression made by the family” and the fact that they “gave no real effort to raise the
bond themselves,” denying Pawlowski’s request for assistance.41 Yet Raeke had already
taken it upon his own discretion to supply the bond. “I note,” he wrote, “that Pawlowski’s
wife has just given birth a few days ago [to the couple’s second child], and is now in the
recovery center in Finkenau. Her condition is said to be precarious.”42 Pawlowski in
return praised Raeke for providing a Christmas miracle to his family:

I would like to convey my personal thanks to you, as well as wishes for a
merry Christmas from myself and my family. I am already so indebted to
you in thanks; I will in the future conduct myself as a true German man
[werde als echter Deutscher mich verhalten]43

The SA assisted Pawlowski only reluctantly. His crimes were not political, and therefore
judged to be self-interested, while his family seemed lethargic and lacking motivation to
better itself. Such families did not fit the SA’s self-image. But Pawlowski had been a stormtrooper since 1927, and the SA in the end intervened to protect his family when economic hardship threatened its well-being. In return, they received a pledge of loyalty and his promise to behave according to the standards of “a true German man” – the definition of which, of course, would largely be determined by the SA itself. The economic and moral troubles of the German family were therefore a crisis for individual stormtroopers, but an opportunity for the organization.

SA Homes and Kitchens: Social Assistance and Ideological Conditioning in the SA Subculture

As the SA grew in strength, it increasingly provided to its stormtroopers extensive social services, which included legal aid, health insurance, food, and lodging. By doing so, the SA made good on its promise to deliver “socialism of the deed” and to rescue the men of the movement from character- and family-endangering conditions of poverty. SA leaders knew, however, that the programs also created a sense of dependency, which in turn bred loyalty. In the SA-Heime and SA-Küchen in which many stormtroopers came to live, the SA thus offered a homogenous social space in which young stormtroopers were then educated in ideological and behavioral codes suiting the SA’s conception of German manhood.

The life stories of young men of the late 1920s bred resentment and frustration, and this made them ready recruits for the NSDAP and KPD. These two radical parties fought to claim the loyalties of unemployed working- and middle-class men, as well as those not yet affected whom the economic troubles made paranoid about their own

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44 StAH B24 Führerbesprechung of December 21, 1931.
situation. As Richard Hamilton noted in his study of the NSDAP’s rise in Kiel, the Depression was not guaranteed to drive voters to the Nazi, or the unemployed to the SA. Instead, “mediating forces” drove disgruntled voters and potential activists to one or the other extremist party. In Hamburg, the Nazis’ professed attachment to Hamburg’s most powerful institutions – including the city-state, the Lutheran church, the family, and the seafaring economy – mediated the effects of the Depression in a way calculated to attract unsettled citizens of the Hansastadt. The SA and its offering of social services were among its most powerful tools to this end. As in the legal efforts of Dr. Corn and Dr. Raecke on behalf of accused SA criminals, assistance to a stormtrooper engendered enduring loyalty. Indeed, the SA took its social assistance much further than legal aid. Beginning already in 1925, but expanding greatly after 1930, it set up a network of institutions that provided unemployed young men with food, shelter, and a surrogate family that would protect them from economic upheaval.

The Hamburg SA tried from the earliest days of its re-founding to provide for stormtroopers injured in political battles. In 1925 it explored forming a collective insurance plan inspired by a group of nationalist paramilitaries interested in “protecting our members in the event of any injury sustained from membership in a völkischen Verbande.” Members could pay 1RM quarterly in order to ensure benefits in case of injury during official political activities. But the SA preferred to form its own plan. This had the advantage of not mixing SA finances with those of other nationalist groups, which were notoriously unstable by nature and always covetous of each others members.

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46 StAH B66 letter to the Ortsgruppenleitung des Frontkriegerbund of October 10, 1925
A separate plan also allowed the SA to develop a more comprehensive scheme than that offered by the other Wehrverbände. The SA plan would not only insure its members from attacks during party events, but would also pay out for injuries of any kind suffered while traveling to and from political events. Hitler himself backed the arrangement, and allowed the plan to be promoted with his own recommendation. In March 1929, stormtroopers received letters titled “What Many Still Don’t Know,” which informed them of the plan’s benefits and provided vivid horror stories arguing for membership. Many SA men had already signed up for the plan, which in Hamburg was managed by Sturmführer Bisschopinck before Conn drove him from the city. These early adopters mostly lived in contested or Communist-dominated areas, as one of the most frequent times for stormtroopers to be attacked was on the way home from meetings. But many SA men who lived in less disputed areas had not yet joined – a fact that the letter portrayed as a mistake:

Many members have not yet taken up this offer, because they assume that the SA-Insurance pays out only for attacks by Marxists, and that in their neighborhood things have not yet reached that depth. This is an error! SA-Insurance pays out not only for injuries from attacks, but also for all accidents [Umfällen] taking place while traveling to or from a Party event.47

The letter cited the cases of two women party members. One had been hit by a car while on her way home from a meeting; she was bedridden and unable to work for two weeks. But for the affordable price of 20 cents a month she received benefits of 42 RM. The other was attending a quiet meeting at which “a tumult suddenly erupted;” she was caught in the melee and bedridden for eight days.48 The use of women to convey the need for insurance told the SA Man that politically related injuries were a constant threat – no

47 StAH B66 “Was viele noch nicht wissen!”
48 Ibid.
matter how geographically or socially insulated one might be. If even women of quiet
towns fell victim to Marxist attacks and car accidents, an SA man who lived in the
crowded, busy, and politically contested neighborhoods of central Hamburg could only
imagine what he risked. The SA sought all its members to join its insurance plan to
protect themselves and their families. As the letter concluded, “Incidents such as these
take place quite often in small, quiet places. That is why Adolf Hitler calls upon you to
insure yourself through the SA-Insurance against such events!” A report of April 1929
revealed that 408 Hamburg stormtroopers had already joined the plan. This figure
represented almost every stormtrooper in Hamburg.

But the stormtroopers needed financial support not only when victims of
catastrophic injuries, but also in daily efforts to feed and clothe themselves. The problem
had appeared already before 1929, as many young stormtroopers had never been in stable
financial position. Hamburg attracted many youths from the countryside and from other
German cities who hoped to find work in its shipping industry. Those with pre-existing
Nazi ties often contacted the SA for housing upon their arrival. Ernst Büchler did so
when he was about to move to Hamburg from Kiauschen in East Prussia. He wrote
Böckenhauer in November 1926 to inquire about lodging for himself and his sister; it
seems he believed he could live at the SA- Geschäftsstelle itself. But the SA of the mid-
20s was in no position to help. Böckenhauer was forced to respond that the party had no
lodgings to offer, but that it might be able to find a member to take him in until he found

49 Ibid.
50 StAH B66 letter of April 1, 1929 to Standarte II
51 Krause estimated the SA’s strength in the summer of 1929 at approximately 400 men, still far behind the
Stahlhelm’s 3,000. (97) This would make the 408 enrollee in the insurance plan even greater than his
estimate of the total number of stormtroopers.
his own room. The Nazis – and especially the SA – had always prided themselves on their sense of generosity and their protection of the *Volk* community. Once the depression began, they hoped to move beyond the ad-hoc measures seen in Büchler’s case, both because they sincerely believed in caring for their nationalist neighbors and because of the propaganda value it could afford the party. For this reason, the party and SA established a series of soup kitchens (SA-*Küchen*) and group homes (SA-*Heime*), where these unemployed young men could find count on finding a place to eat and sleep among trusted comrades. Conn established Hamburg’s first in October 1930. He gathered materials largely from individual donations, which he requested through classified ads in the *Hanseatische Warte*:

> For the erection of an SA-Heim for unemployed SA-men we require: wool blankets, bed sheets, electric lights, tables, chairs, cabinets, curtains, and draperies. Party members of ideological friends [*Gesinnungsfreunde*] who can make such materials available are asked to contact the SA-Geschäftsstelle at Gr. Bleichen 30 either by letter or telephone.

The idea quickly gained popularity within the movement. A party member named Tesch wrote to SA headquarters in November offering to rent his three-story house to the SA for use as a second *Heim*. But the SA, while thanking him for his offer, declined. The group could not at that time consider paying rent on a property, wrote the responding Adjutant, as “the already great financial strains on the SA at present cannot bear more expenses.” Furthermore, he wrote, “The rooms in their present condition are not suited to SA purposes, and the costs of reconstruction would be considerable.” Even if the SA could have afforded the rent, the traditional-style row house was built as a single-family

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52 StAH B152 letter from Böckenhauer to Büchler, November 5, 1926.
53 Forschungsstelle für Zeitgeschichte 991 Opposition Gau Hamburg – letter of Kaufmann to the Organisationsabteilung der Reichsleitung der NSDAP, January 24, 1931.
54 StAH B152 letter to the Hansische Warte of October 14, 1930.
55 StAH B152 letter from Oberführer NM to Pg. Tesche of November 19, 1930.
home with separate rooms for sleeping and studying, not as a group home for young men living in the manner of a military barracks. The SA valued giving its unemployed stormtroopers a place to sleep, but it also held true to a certain vision of what that living environment should be like. It did not want to run a hotel where each stormtrooper rented or was given a private, individual room. Instead, the SA sought a communal living situation that would encourage social bonding and mutual reliance among its men. Tesche’s home was therefore “out of the question”, but the SA encouraged him to approach them again in early 1931 in case their finances improved and they could remodel along more communal lines.

Unable to extend the promising Heime-system for lack of money, the SA in the first half of 1931 instead established soup kitchens where stormtroopers could find a warm meal for ten or twenty cents. Of a Bramfeld kitchen that had opened on March 6, 1931, the Hamburger Tageblatt wrote that “In a time where some men don’t know where their next warm meal should come from, this kitchen is a vision of the future for the many who are down on their luck.” The opening of these kitchens was not only an occasion for relief among those they fed, it also offered the Nazis a chance to advertise their generosity as “socialism of the deed.” A glowing account of the SA-Küchen appeared in the Hamburger Tageblatt on April 16. It provided a typical example of the Nazis’ self-promotion as responsible, socially conscious citizens; it also embodied the party’s use of gripping narratives to win audience sympathies. It began in medias res, at a triumphant Hitler rally that had taken place in Hamburg four months before. “A thick and hot air lay over the mass meeting,” the reporter wrote, “of the type that only emerges

56 Koch, 213.
when thousands stand pressed together indoors.”\(^{58}\) The stormtroopers lined the front of the stage, “German men holding in their hard fists motionless staves of oak.” It was an archetypical stormtrooper image, but something was amiss:

Then along this front a single red flag made itself seen. First a slight waver; then it began to sink. A *Staffelmann* sprung in and swiftly grabbed the banner, so that it would not fall into the dust of the hall. The flag-carrier sank to the ground unconscious.

The haggard face was had grown page. The lips almost white. We know these outer signs. When one suffers from hunger, when the mouth has nothing to bite all day long, this color comes.

The Führer clenched his teeth. He himself, a soldier and worker, knows what hunger is; he knows the embarrassing pain and knows too how quickly hunger, the adversity of the belly, weakens everything else.\(^{59}\)

Hunger was among the stormtrooper’s greatest fears – not for its unpleasantness, which they claimed to embrace as ennobling – but for its effects on their masculine self-image. Hunger transformed a man from a strong, upright warrior into a pallid, weakened husk. Even if, as in this description, he remained steadfast in his inner conviction, the “outer signs” of hunger would weaken his body and leave him in “embarrassing pain” and helplessness. Fortunately, the *Tageblatt* proclaimed, the Führer not only understood the plight of his men, but he also had a plan to combat it:

One day came the order:

The Ortsgruppen have established SA-Küchen. These kitchens are now everywhere. Every day thousands of our brownshirts and their families go to these kitchens, where selfless women have prepared a hearty, nutritious soup.

Farmers send free of charge potatoes, meat, and vegetables. Members of the NS Autokorps transport the goods. NS-grocers provide the spices. NS-women cook. And none speak of it. None seek reward. Nor thanks. A striking proof of our will. And the hungry SA-man needs not offer great words of thanks. This is how we seek to help the hungry workers of the fist. It’s not much, but we do what we can.\(^{60}\)

\(^{58}\) “Kampf dem Hunger in unserem Reihen,” *Hamburger Tageblatt*, April 16, 1931.
\(^{59}\) Ibid.
\(^{60}\) Ibid.
The article’s note of humility was belied by the high place the SA-Küchen and Heime played in Nazi propaganda. The article also exaggerated the ubiquity of the program, at least before the Nazis secured state resources to extend it in 1933. Yet it spoke accurately of the coordinated efforts of farmers, drivers, grocers, and housewives required to open and run the kitchens. The “socialism of the deed” demonstrated by the SA kitchens was not just in the feeding of the stormtroopers, but also in their demonstration of unity among different sectors of an increasingly fragmented populace. This itself was attractive to citizens fearing the social, political, and moral fragmentation of the Weimar years. The SA-Kitchens grew steadily throughout 1931-1932. Already in April 1931, as the article announced, the program expanded to include “workers of the head” – Nazi students. The Nationalsozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund (NSDStB) had, especially in Hamburg, had difficulty attracting and retaining members. The party now hoped to adopt the successful techniques of the SA to draw in students they had previously found difficult to reach.

SA finances that June, while still tight, afforded the opening of a second Heim that would be supported both through donations and through charging a token amount of rent. It would combine the advantages of a meeting Lokal, a residence, and a soup kitchen and thus streamline the SA’s provisioning of social services. (Image 5.1) This model proved successful, and spread throughout the city. How many ultimately existed can no

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61 On the NStB, see Geoffrey Giles, Students and National Socialism in Germany (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), which compares the Hamburg group’s history to that of the national NStB.
62 Giles, 93. The student leader of the Hamburg NSDStB had in the summer of 1929 tried to re-fashion the group as a “SA University Group”, but met with strong resistance from fellow students. Giles, 46-47. By 1932, however, the emergence of the SA and its strong networks of social support made the idea more palatable. Approximately half the members of the NSDStB were also members of the SA even before the party, in September 1932, made SA membership mandatory for its student members. The experiment failed, however, as the all-encompassing demands of SA service meshed poorly with the demands of student life. 93-96.
63 StAH B184G Monatsbericht des Sturmes 76 of June 1931.
longer be ascertained. The Communist paper *Hamburger Volkszeitung* counted 28 *SA-Heime* in 1932, mostly in working-class areas hit hardest by the depression.\(^6^4\) Given the fact that 58% of the SA was unemployed that year, the demand was greater than could be met.\(^6^5\) Only after the takeover of power was the Hamburg SA able to establish enough

**Image 5.1**

Stormtroopers outside a SA-Heim wash up in the morning. Though this image, taken by Hitler’s official photographer, conveys cleanliness and respectability, it also shows the conflicted intimacy of life in SA-Heime. Neighbors sometimes complained at the stormtroopers’ impropriety, rowdiness, and occasional lack of clothing. (Source: Hoffmann, *Das Braune Heer: 100 Bilddokumente: Leben, Kampf, und Sieg der SA und SS*).


\(^6^5\) Krause, 192.
Heime to accommodate all would-be residents – during the Kampfzeit, they often had to send their men to the Altona SA, which resented having to feed and house the “wandering SA-Men” they continually found at their doorsteps.\textsuperscript{66} Stormtroopers were drawn to the SA-Heime, and new recruits were also thereby drawn into the SA. The SA-Heime offered unemployed SA-men a full stomach, a warm bed, and even warmer emotional support from a tightly knit community of fellow men. The Communists’ efforts at social assistance through “Rote Hilfe” soup kitchens, plus a few unsuccessful attempts at establishing KPD-Kaserne, were meager offerings to those young men who craved not only physical aid but also emotional support.\textsuperscript{67} The Nazis argued – not without evidence – that the KPD was less concerned with setting up systems to help the impoverished masses than it was in politicizing the unemployed for its own purposes.\textsuperscript{68} The Nazis’ efforts to provide for its SA men through charitable institutions thus became a central contrast with their main political enemies. It showed, the stormtroopers argued, that Nazi aid to the poor could not only help their material condition, but bolster their morality as well.

SA-Heime became legendary in the stormtroopers’ understanding of themselves and of the Nazi movement. Through living together and sharing all manner of goods, the stormtrooper would learn true camaraderie:

If an SA-Mann has only one cigarette, he breaks it in two and gives his fellow a half. Or one smokes it together. That’s thrifter, because only one stump remains. A third comrade then gets the stump for his pipe. And so three men get their enjoyment, and three are content.\textsuperscript{69}

\textsuperscript{66} StAH B152 letter of Möhring to Böckenhauer of July 4, 1932.
\textsuperscript{67} Reichart, Kampfbunde, 468.
\textsuperscript{68} See Eve Rosenhaft’s description of this dilemma in Beating the Fascists: The German Communists and Political Violence. 1929-1933 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 53.
\textsuperscript{69} Koch, 214.
The cigarette sharing ritual would be repeated many times throughout the day wherever stormtroopers lived together. Its essential elements held true as well for food, drink, sleeping arrangements – all the aspects of daily life that the stormtroopers experienced together. It meant more than just providing for each man during a time when goods were scarce. Sharing also showed the true personality of a stormtrooper, and revealed whether he had a true sense of camaraderie valued by the organization and its men:

> Above all one notices immediately who is a real comrade. If someone gives ungenerously, if someone provides, perhaps, only because he thinks he is going to need something for himself later that afternoon, he thereby makes himself unloved and soon must move out.\(^\text{70}\)

Post-taking descriptions like this one from the *Ehrenbuch* assured their readers that such selfishness “happened only seldom”\(^\text{71}\) – an assertion belied by the actual record of petty theft in SA communal locales. The SA’s propaganda surrounding their institutions covered up this unpleasant aspect, however, and most current and potential party members therefore remained unaware and idealistic. Additionally, the SA’s own zealous prosecution and expulsion of anyone caught stealing from comrades assured the SA men themselves that their comrades remained true to the ideal image. Anyone failing to measure up had never been a true stormtrooper in the first place.

The SA’s social welfare institutions also trained the stormtroopers in associating being well provided for with fighting hard for the movement. The food, clothing, and housing they received were payment for their tireless activity and physical struggles on national socialism’s behalf. The relationship between loyalty and provisioning allowed stormtroopers to see in these welfare agencies a fair bargain in which they earned their way, rather than the welfare-state handouts they often disdained for harming individual

\(^{70}\) Ibid.

\(^{71}\) Ibid.
imitative and work ethic. In the SA, the harder one worked, the more one was rewarded.

Poems by Heinrich Anacker describing the SA’s Kampfzeit milieu illustrate this linkage between stormtrooper work ethic, movement militarism, and humble reward. In “Erbsen mit Speck”, the stormtroopers returned to the SA-Heim after a hard day’s marching to be rewarded with their favorite, albeit humble, meal – peas with bacon:

| Today the Standartenführer wore us out | Heut hat der Staf uns recht geschlaucht, |
| Til all our bones were rattled,         | Das alle Knochen kliirten,               |
| He really breathed down our necks –    | Und hat uns auch mal angehaucht –       |
| But now he lets us feast;              | Nun lassen wir uns bewirten;             |
| After drills and dirt,                | Nach Drill und Dreck                    |
| There’s peas and bacon,               | Gibt’s Erbsen mit Speck,                |
| Boom – out of the goulash-cannon!      | Bumm – aus der Gulaschkanone!72          |

The poem was in some ways a typical soldiers’ song – the officer pushes them hard, but in the end they’re well fed, which is one of the true soldier’s few priorities. But here the associations closely linked daily life and military drill in a way that traditional soldier songs, which are usually set on the fronts of actual wars, could not. The soup was even shot out of a “goulash-cannon,” a wheeled soup-cauldron of the type used to feed troops during wartime. (Image 5.2) The third and fourth verses also revealed a disturbing narrative pattern: the action moved from the daily struggles of local neighborhood conflict to an actual battlefield, where the stormtroopers-turned-soldiers again enjoyed their preferred soup. In the final stanza they ate peas and bacon “in soldiers’ heaven.”

Men living together in SA-Heime were thus not only recipients of peas, bacon, and physically nourishing foodstuffs. They also ingested a militant ideology that preached combative struggle against neighborhood political enemies, the expansion of that conflict

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Stormtroopers serve soup out of a “goulash-cannon” to hungry comrades. This provisioning method, which harkened back to the stormtroopers’ psychological roots in wartime, was usually used on marches and other expeditions, or to supplement food distribution at SA Kitchens that could not handle the high demand for their services. (Source: Hoffmann, Das Braune Heer. 100 Bilddokumente: Leben, Kampf, und Sieg der SA und SS.)

...to future wars between nations, and the stormtroopers’ eventual death and ascension into a Valhalla-like afterlife. There, just as his SA leaders in life had fed him in exchange for his physical exertions, the stormtrooper’s heavenly father would provide eternal reward.

The combination of physical and ideological support offered through the SA’s communal living arrangements more than justified the effort and expense they required. The institutions greatly aided party recruitment, both of stormtroopers directly assisted and of civilians attracted by this demonstration of the party’s social values. But it also created tensions between the movement’s political and paramilitary wings, within the SA itself, and between the stormtroopers’ lived experiences and their public self-positioning as members of traditional German families.
Conn built the first SA-Heim without Kaufmann’s permission. Kaufmann at first thought the development “ominous” because it threatened further to encourage a separate subculture within the movement.73 “I believe,” he complained to the national party office in January 1931, “that there is no Gau in the Reich that has provided, considering all the bounds of possibility, for the welfare of the SA as has this one.”74 He supported the Gau’s establishment of SA-Küchen, but described their operation with the tone of a father frustrated with the ingratitude of children who fail to appreciate the work that went into their care:

The Gau Schleswig-Holstein, Hamburg, and the SA Oberführung have called into being a Hilfsaktion for the SA with the greatest success. Out of it, kitchens for the feeding of unemployed party members and SA-men have been instituted in various sections. Entire wagon-loads of potatoes and other foodstuffs have been mobilized in Schleswig-Holstein for the support of these SA-Hilfwerke.75

The SA also had to deal with other problems known to anyone responsible for housing masses of young men: cleanliness and upkeep. The Marine SA’s members often stayed at SA-Heime and the SA-Geschäftsstelle during their weeks between being at sea, but they were often drunk and destructive. This prompted a stern warning from Marine-Sturmbann I, which issued a series of orders in August 1932 to remind its men that their accommodations had to be better cared for. Besides more egregious lapses in respect for property, such as broken windows, tables, and chairs, the main problem was the young stormtroopers’ general slovenliness. They loitered in front of buildings and in stairwells, which caused resentment from janitors who had to clear away their trash and cigarette

73 Forschungsstelle für Zeitgeschichte 991 Opposition Gau Hamburg – letter of Kaufmann to the Organisationsabteilung der Reichsleitung der NSDAP, January 24, 1931.
74 Ibid.
75 Ibid.
butts.\textsuperscript{76} They often left their bicycles obstructing entryways and stairs. The condition of the interior rooms was even worse: window frames warped from having been left open in the rain, the bathrooms dirty, the toilets stopped up with “evidently large objects thrown in the Klo”.\textsuperscript{77} The Sturmbann reminded its slovenly stormtroopers that the cost of repairs and upkeep ultimately came out of their own pockets, and it appealed to their sense of camaraderie to minimize the damages: “He who wantonly harms our property thereby directly injures his comrades, since it is with his comrades’ money that the injuries have to be made good.”\textsuperscript{78} In some cases, the SA expelled stormtroopers who did not pay the minimal rent at SA-Heime, especially when these men had also been unable to pay party dues or had committed acts of petty theft against the SA or individual comrades.\textsuperscript{79} The shaky finances of individual stormtroopers thus caused stress not only between the SA and NSDAP proper, but also within the SA itself.

Many stormtroopers were attracted to the youthful, masculine environment of SA spaces. They saw them as a safe environment that had rescued them from the hazards of urban life during the depression. But these safe spaces sometimes constituted their own moral threat by removing the stormtroopers from the families they claimed to protect and defend. The atmosphere within SA establishments was insular and cliquish. (Image 5.3) Stormtroopers were warned not to trust outsiders, even “wandering” SA men who turned up seeking assistance. The leaders of Standarte 15 were instructed in April 1932 that:

So-called ‘wandering’ national socialists should not be allowed to receive support, since 99% of these people are thieves, or are not worthy of aid for

\textsuperscript{76} StAH B184f Tagesbefehl of August 18, 1932
\textsuperscript{77} StAH B184f Tagesbefehl of August 6, 1932.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{79} As in the case of an SA-Man Hoffman, who was ejected from Sturmbann III/76 in late 1931 for having not paid rent, not forwarded 21RM collected for the SA, and having made off with a pair of boots. StAH B107 Böckenhauer letter to Gau Hannover-Ost, of December 4, 1931.
other reasons. It cannot be helped that if 1% are respectable people, they must suffer along with the vast majority of un-respectable people.\(^{80}\)

SA-*Heime* and –*Küchen* were local places that catered to the needs of neighborhood stormtroopers who often knew each other from childhood or earlier associations – the “respectable people” known and valued by their communities. Yet some members of the movement feared that the SA’s communal living arrangements were anything but respectable. On the one hand, the presence of so many men living together raised the old specter of homosexuality. The SA’s activism against public symbols of homosexuality, however, somewhat insulated them from this charge. Many National Socialists therefore feared uncontrolled heterosexuality as much as they did homosexuality.

The stormtroopers lived among their young fellows largely unsupervised and sexually unregulated. Members of the political wing of the party feared the results of a lack of adult supervision, and they often pled to SA officers that they take a firmer hand with their men. Uncontrolled, the SA-*Heime* threatened to become dens of immorality rather than bulwarks against it. One party member wrote directly to the *Brigadeführer* in September 1932, complaining that a failure to enforce gender segregation and proper sexual restraint would weaken their distinction from the Communists. He wrote that,

> I feel it is my duty to inform you that in the SA Heim on Heimhuderstrasse 14, an SA Man lives together with his girl [*Braut*]. We work for a pure Germany. Such wild marriages should not be allowed. It excites scandal, and could then cause more SA men to want their girls to live with them, and then our communal enterprise would be finished.\(^{81}\)

Böckenhauer dismissed the Party member’s concerns when the SA’s investigation revealed the couple had recently married.\(^{82}\) He did not investigate whether or not the

\(^{80}\) StAH B107 Böckenhauer letter to Standarte 15 of April 4, 1932.

\(^{81}\) StAH B152 letter of Focking to Böckenhauer of September 14, 1932.

\(^{82}\) Ibid. Böckenhauer to Focking, September 25, 1932.
Stormtroopers in an SA Heim display their camaraderie for Hoffman’s camera. The official propaganda image again carries its flip side: the close male relationships fostered within the SA Heim’s walls strengthened charges of homosexuality against the stormtroopers. (Source: Hoffman, Das Braune Heer. 100 Bilddokumente: Leben, Kampf, und Sieg der SA und SS.)
woman actually lived with her stormtrooper husband, despite the breach of policy this would represent. Despite most stormtroopers’ interest in women as sexual partners and eventual spouses, the SA feared that allowing women to move into SA-Heime would dilute the masculine environment that made the homes so attractive. The SA wanted its young men to bond with each other, and it encouraged them to revel in masculinity’s rougher aspects. It saw political utility in such an atmosphere, even when the environment created the potential for unsupervised young men, left largely to their own devices, to run amok.

The potential disconnect between the SA’s militant masculine values and those of the “respectable people” they claimed to defend can be seen in a letter of Truppführer Alfred Z. to his wife in March 1933, shortly before the Nazis’ amnesty released him from a jail sentence for stealing weapons from the Reichsbanner in late 1931. The incident had driven a wedge between Truppführer Z and his wife, not only through their literal separation but also due to a disagreement over how he should handle his trial. As he wrote to her,

> You told me that Sunday, that during the coming proceedings in my case I should describe the events exactly as they were… From my standpoint *back then* I could not do so. Because I would have been treated roughly *under the old system*. And my comrades as well. I would not have left the proceeding a free man. \(^83\)

Truppführer Z lied to the court in the hopes of avoiding conviction. The attempt failed, and it drove him and his wife apart. He wrote her in 1933 hoping that she would take him back upon his expected release. The SA, on the other hand, stood by him without reservation. It supported his release under a March 1933 amnesty for political crimes, with the comment that “it appears he was punished for crimes that today would be

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\(^83\) StAH B16 letter of Alfred Z to his wife Elly Z., March 22, 1933. Emphasis in original.
unpunishable.” The letter revealed that morality within the SA subculture could be quite different than its public face. Women who advised their stormtroopers to adhere to conventional norms of honesty and trust in the system risked being cast as dangerously naïve outsiders.

Though homosexuality was always a threat to the stormtrooper’s sense of masculinity and the public image of the movement, the small number of homosexual stormtroopers in absolute terms meant that any embarrassment they caused could usually be concealed, or they could be driven out of the movement. But wild masculinity could be of a heterosexual nature as well. As such, the young male excesses at play in the SA’s communal lifestyle threatened to widen the gap between male and female experiences, perspectives, and morals. This would be both a political risk and an ideological one, in that the NSDAP needed women voters to expect any real progress in a now-egalitarian voting system. It also risked harming the party’s pretensions to being a totalizing solution for society, a party that would fight against the fragmentation, squabbling, and differences of opinion that had in their view so troubled a democratic Germany.

**Love and Marriage: The State of the Stormtrooper Family**

In the immediate postwar years, veterans returned from the front with the intention to found their own families. These efforts often met with failure, and thereby bolstered their growing crisis of masculinity. The political institutions and military methods that trained men in hegemonic masculinity, most especially the standing army and its professional officer corps, were now denied them. The Freikorps and other

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84 StAH B16 letter of Böckenhauer to SA-Gruppe Nordmark of April 10, 1933.
militias created in the immediate aftermath of the war were also soon disbanded. But the honored male role of family patriarch was still available. One way to affirm a sense of wounded masculinity was therefore to get married, which many of Hamburg’s future stormtroopers did in the immediate postwar years. In this they reflected a national trend. According to Bessel’s analysis of national census data from 1910-1924, Germany averaged just under 8 marriages per 1000 residents in the years leading up to World War I. This average plunged during the war, before rebounding in 1919. From 1919-1922, Germany averaged between 11 and 14.5 marriages per 1000 residents, as soldiers returned to civilian life and women sought to secure a match with a reduced number of available men. Many of these marriages resulted from unexpected pregnancies, which Hagemann has identified as the leading cause of all Weimar marriages. Of the early stormtroopers, those who had fought in the war were far more likely to get married than their younger comrades, who were not yet able to support families. (Image 5.4) In fact, men who were able to secure families and jobs for themselves were less likely to join the SA, or joined later, than those who could not. This suggests that the more successfully a potential stormtrooper took on the traditional, hegemonic male roles of father, husband, and family breadwinner, the less attracted he was to the SA.

The biographical data on Hamburg’s stormtroopers, as well as the homoerotic subtext of their daily lives, therefore presented a mixed message concerning their relationship to the family. While the older cohort had married and matured upon its

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85 Bessel, Germany After the First World War, 229.
87 NARA 3341 SA Kartei Wackerfuss sample.
Image 5.4

Marital Status of Hamburg Stormtroopers, 1911-1945

- Marriages when not SA man
- Marriages when SA man
- Single men


Values range from 0 to 120.
return from the front, the younger generation remained in a state of arrested development. They had met setbacks when trying to become husbands and fathers, and their relationships with their own fathers and mothers were strained. Economic woes, political tensions, and the intensity of their political lifestyle often drove deep wedges between the stormtroopers and the family members for whom they claimed to fight. These biographical realities troubled the SA’s claim to defend the German family and traditional German morality. Nazi propaganda attempted to counter the difficulty with loud public testimony about the stormtroopers’ relationships with women, children, and traditional families.

Mothers, Wives, and Girlfriends: Women and the SA

Women played a large but overlooked role in the SA. Though they could not themselves be stormtroopers, and though extreme proponents of the SA’s masculine ideology at times discounted their contributions, women filled a variety of support roles both for the movement’s official activities and in the stormtroopers’ everyday lives. Most support services were carried out under the rubric of the NS-Frauenschaft. The SA, never a rich organization, needed these supplemental services in order to keep its members in uniforms and boots.88 Local chapters of the Frauenschaft offered occasional re-soling of boots at reduced prices to unemployed SA men.89 When stormtroopers were hospitalized

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88 See Koch, 212-213, a self-portrait of the SA as poor youths wearing a rag-tag collection of patched and secondhand clothing assembled from women’s donations and repairs. “The faded, washed-out shirt; the dirty, crumpled cap; the spotted, gestoppte pants; the dirt-flecked, worn-out boots – all these fulfilled their revolutionary purpose.” 213.
89 StAH B184 f Rundschreiben Nr. 1 of May 24, 1932. In these cases, the SA sometimes instituted a ticket system to ensure the Frauenschaft would not be overtaxed by the undeserving.
for political injuries, the SA contacted the Frauenschaft to arrange that the wounded comrades received visitors and emotional support. Some women also went outside normal party channels, supplementing their official party work with personal offers of shelter in their own homes. Some offered a place at their Sunday supper tables for SA men for whom it would be more convenient to eat in the neighborhood than travel to an SA-Kitchen. The SA coordinated the match, which would further anchor individual stormtroopers to neighborhood families. The SA and Frauenschaft teamed up as well to provide temporary housing for out-of-town SA men who could find no room in the official Heime, or for whom a different location would be more convenient. In these ways, women leveraged their traditional roles as mothers, wives, and providers of the home to find a place in the political movement that would not challenge the traditional conceptions of the family the Nazis claimed to defend.

Behind every stormtrooper unit stood several women who helped keep the men dressed and fed, and who comforted them when sick. These were vital but limited roles. Women could not themselves participate in the central function and defining experiences of the SA: its homosocial male environment and its physical combat against political opponents. In general, unlike Communist and Socialist groups that did at times allow women more combative roles or leadership functions, stormtrooper women functioned as provisioners of the private sphere and bearers of cultural values in public life. Women

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90 See for example Böckenhauer’s letter to the Frauenorden of September 15, 1931 in StAH B154.
91 StAH B124 letter to Standarte 45, September 8, 1933.
92 StAH B152 letter of Böckenhauer to Paul Dorndorf of January 20, 1932.
93 Reichart identified three types of fascist women: the mother, the fellow-fighter (Mitkämpferin), and the desexualized woman. Fascistische Kampfbünde 672-678.
94 Women’s roles within socialist parties were not as straightforwardly positive as is often assumed. Though Marx and many of the theorists of the left have placed high value on women’s political activism, many of the practitioners of leftist politics traditionally did not. See William A. Pelz, The Spartakusbund and the German Working-class Movement, 1914-1919 (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1987), 42-47.
could not themselves be fighters, and this created some measure of tension in the stormtroopers’ psyche between their conception of women as objects to be protected and the reality of women as political subjects in their own right. SA rhetoric bridged this disconnect by inscribing feminine influence on stormtroopers as an essential element of the nationalist struggle. Nazi newspapers emphasized women’s role in the movement as moral exemplars and sources of spiritual strength for male warriors. They sought thereby to psychologically empower women who remained in their traditional roles. This would re-cast traditional femininity as a source of strength not only for the individual woman, but also for the movement and for the nation.

Stories of women’s subtle heroism in the *Hamburger Tageblatt* not only echoed the content of those describing stormtrooper heroes, but also the narrative form of the anonymous, unknown hero. One such example described a stormtrooper narrator’s encounter with a comrade’s mother and revealed the woman as the source of the family’s strength. The family was poor; both “Heini” and his father were unemployed and the sister earned only “a pair of *Hungergroschen*” from a job at Karstadt.95 The narrator never knew where Heini was able to get the sandwiches he brought to SA marches and gladly shared with hungry comrades. But he was enlightened after visiting Heini’s home and meeting his mother. He’d resisted the invitation to coffee, not wanting to deplete the family’s meager resources. But to refuse would be to offend.

What can I say about how Heini’s mother laid the table? A fat-bellied coffee pot on the pretty and colorful tablecloth, cute little cups from grandmother’s time, and as the pride of the day an actual fragrant cake. “Baked it myself,” commented the mother offhandedly. And it tasted wonderful.

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The stormtrooper kept his astonishment to himself until late in the evening. As Heini escorted him home, the narrator finally asked, “Tell me, how do you guys do it at home?” Heini, “as if it were self-evident,” replied: “Je, Mudder kann allens!” The earthy dialogue with its rough dialect portrayed a timeless domestic scene in which a stormtrooper’s own plucky attitude originated in generations of female domestic ingenuity. The story ended with an explicit statement of the importance such women provided to National Socialism: “If in later years someone should write a history of today’s difficult times, then the mothers must take a place of honor in that book.”

Nazi speakers discussing this essential female influence referred to women as “culture-bearers” [Kulturträgerin]. Party member Maria Adelheid Konorath spoke on this subject during a special NSDAP lecture series on culture during June 1932. According to the Hamburger Tageblatt’s report on the speech, she struck a special chord with the women attendees, who sympathized with her call for a return to a gender order supposedly present among ancient Germans. Both women and men, she argued, must be “links in the chain” connecting past and future generations. But it was women who bore the special role of not only creating new generations through childbirth, but also of transmitting unchanging cultural values from one generation to the next. Both women and men had “become estranged from their essential natures.” But the situation, she claimed, was far worse – “catastrophic” even – for German women. “Our forefathers’ worldview held that women should be held as man’s highest ideal,” Konorath explained. In this view, women existed to inspire men’s idealism, their victory in combat, and their defense of a threatened homeland. Konorath mobilized a gendered version of the

96 Ibid.
97 “Die Familie als Kulturträgerin,” Hamburger Tageblatt, June 3, 1932.
Dolchstosslegende against women who had during the First World War supposedly failed in this duty: “The slogan ‘the woman lost the war’ is all too true. Through her complaints at having to stand in line she perplexed the men on the front.” But if women’s failure to uphold supposedly timeless notions of inspirational femininity had caused Germany’s defeat, recovery of this function could bring Germany’s resurgence: “The German renewal can only come through the woman. The man can surely achieve the outer manifestations, but still the inner spiritual freedom will be won only by the woman.”

Women’s equivalent of male heroism was therefore to provide material and psychological support for their men, to encourage in men a militant attitude, and to bear with pride their own sorrow when their men should fall in battle. This combination of emotional investment and emotional detachment was necessary to bridge the gap between the stormtrooper’s conflicting roles as macho warrior and family father. As the Ehrenbuch der SA explained:

One might think that the SA-Man who is also a family man would become soft and slack off. Certainly, it is hard for an SA-Man to see his family suffer because he fights for the Führer; his dependants have to sacrifice much, or his marriage comes into difficulty. It is a silent and great heroism, what the women of many SA-Men bear, when they go through years of unemployment, when every time their husband leaves the house they must ask, ‘Is he coming home? Is he going to land in the hospital or dead in the morgue? Where and how will I see him again? Will I ever see him again, or will he lie beaten to death in a river or canal?’

These were very real concerns for stormtrooper wives and mothers, even if many had been socialized to embrace the role of mother or wife. In this, the stormtrooper myths gave them behavioral models of women whose aid to their stormtroopers were essential

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98 As demonstrated in women’s increasing political activism and subjectivity, seen in Belinda Davis’ “Food, Politics, and Women’s Everyday Life during the First World War,” in Hagemann and Schüler-Springorum, eds., 115-138.
in life, and whose loyalty after death won them the affection and allegiance of a far larger circle of men – the stormtroopers’ comrades.\footnote{As in \textit{Gotthard Kraft}, where the fallen stormtrooper’s comrades and his mother intensify their emotional bonds after his death.}

The best example of the proud sacrifice expected of women came from the only version of an unknown stormtrooper myth written from the woman’s perspective: Gudrun Streiter’s \textit{Dem Tod so nah… Tagebuchblätter einer SA-Mannes Braut}. This purported diary of an SA man’s wife described the marriage as drawing its passion and inspiration through the couple’s joint work for the party. The anonymous diarist met her stormtrooper fiancée through their work for the party, and when he asked her to marry him it was of the movement that they both thought. As she wrote:

“Before you give me your affirmation,” he continued, “think that to be an SA man’s wife demands sacrifice and doing without. Can you promise me that you’ll never put limits on my duties for the Hitler-movement, that you’re ready at any time to give your last and dearest for your Fatherland?” Never was God so near to me as at this hour. I felt fate’s hand burning in my soul. I knew that hard tests lay before me. Love for the Fatherland burned within by heart. But I never felt so strong as in the moment I gave my affirmation to this man, whom I loved with my entire soul, and swore to him to sacrifice everything for the Fatherland.\footnote{Gudrun Streiter, \textit{Dem Tod so nah… Tagebuchblätter einer SA-Mannes Braut} (Munich: self-published, undated), 14. The name Streiter (“striver”) is most likely a pseudonym, given its adherence to the mythic naming conventions common in SA literature. She purported to have been given the diary pages by an old school friend, who wanted her to understand the woman’s side of the stormtrooper struggle. Streiter published the diary with a foreword supposedly written by the un-named fiancé’s pastor.}

The fiancée’s words proved prophetic when her stormtrooper was shot and killed just before they could marry. The pastor who was to marry them helped maintain her strength by reminding her that she was an SA man’s fiancée, and she went to the funeral in full support of the movement:

\begin{quote}
Not in black garments of mourning was I clad. No, I walked as the fiancée of an SA man, as \textit{Hitlermädchen} behind the hearse, in Hitler’s brown garment. I will not dress in clothes of mourning. Only my brown Hitler dress, my fighting dress will I wear. I will not disappear in my pain. I need
\end{quote}
my strength for the fight. Nothing will separate me from Wolfgang. Our souls are forever united.  

The death of a stormtrooper was therefore an occasion for a woman to renew her commitment to the Nazi movement. She should not ignore her pain, but should channel it into an intensified commitment to the fallen stormtrooper’s comrades. In this, she would fulfill what national socialists believed to be the ancient role of Germanic women, to provide a model of virtue that would inspire intensified struggle in defense of the Vaterland.

Models of the stormtrooper family not only existed in the didactic and idealized myths and “honor-books” of the movement. As was the case with their acts of violence, the SA proved quite adept in staging events to reify their self-image as family men. To this end they hosted publicized gatherings designed to unite the male warriors of the stormtroopers with their female partners and child dependants. Events like feasts for area children were meant to prove that, as a Sturmbannführer in Barmbek declared at a “Feeding of Five Thousand” in September 1931, “The smallest of the small, the future of our Volk, should feel at home with us, should be the guests of the SA.” The children themselves, the article noted, paid no attention to the speeches surrounding the event: “They had to make sure first that the mountain of cookies, the dear donations that had been arranged for them, disappeared. And at the same time they had to apply themselves to drinking up the coco served to them by brown-clad Mädels.” After the evening grew late the children were put to bed, the adults held a singing contest, a German dance, and talked of the National Socialists’ plan to protect the future for the children they had just

101 Streiter, 40.
102 “Das Fest der Fünfthausend. Das jüngste Hamburg Gast der SA,” Hamburger Tageblatt, September 8, 1931. The appropriation of Biblical imagery would logically paint the stormtroopers as Christlike figures – an association less surprising than may first appear, and which will be examined in the following chapter.
entertained. Similar celebrations were held during the Christmas season of 1932, including a massive party hosted by the Frauenschaft and the Marine-SA in a hall near the Zoo.\textsuperscript{103} These occasions provided both men and women opportunities to perform the gender roles expected of them: women would provide for the food, decorations, and festive atmosphere of an interior space made safe by the presence of militant men protecting its borders. The events also encouraged courtship between National Socialist men and women so that young members of the movement could find appropriate spouses. One wife of a stormtrooper described decades later how she had met her husband in this way:

\begin{quote}
My cousin and her parents, they were avid Nazis. And I always went with to their dances… They were really upstanding young people there, not like the criminals who run around today. And if people say today that they too weren’t good for much, [I would reply that] yes, I came to support Adolf Hitler, but only because there was order in the land. You can really believe that. The whole thing that people complain about, I didn’t know anything about that. But that’s where I met my husband.\textsuperscript{104}
\end{quote}

Her whitewashing of Hitler and the SA’s crimes both before and during the Third Reich was not (or not merely) an artifact of the interview’s late date, but rather an essential component of her understanding of the movement. The SA, she thought, was populated with upstanding people. Its crimes were never in the forefront of her consciousness, because to focus on them would undercut her belief in people she had been raised to see as respectable. Her family supported her courtship and marriage to the stormtrooper, even if, as happened, she became pregnant before they were married. In fact, her marriage

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\textsuperscript{103} See “Grosse Weihnachtsmesse der NS-Frauenschaft im Zoo,” \textit{Hamburger Tageblatt}, December 12, 1932.
\textsuperscript{104} Forschungsstelle für Zeitgeschichte – Werkstatt der Erinnerung 131.
\end{flushright}
confirmed her membership in a respectable community: “My mother was happy, because I became an upstanding person [ein ordentlicher Mensch].”\textsuperscript{105}

Events promoting the SA family literally created such families. They could then be advertised in the Nazi press as figurative examples of the socially cohesive, integrated community promised after a National Socialist takeover. The Tageblatt’s description of a June 1931 “Hochzeit im Braunhemd” described how not only the bridal pair was united that day, but also the attendees of varying social classes and backgrounds, “the dock worker next to the student, the SA-Führer next to the SA-Mann.”\textsuperscript{106} The pastor’s wedding sermon echoed the National Socialist emphasis on community and collectivity, opposing it to a spirit of selfishness and decadence the party saw in other areas of life. According to the pastor:

There was a time in Germany, in which people sought to make their lives as ‘comfortable’ as possible. The interest of the Ego had become the priority, and that of fellow man and the nation had become secondary. It is, thank God, different today. A movement has arisen whose motto is: common good before private gain [Gemeinnutz vor Eigennutz]. This slogan embodies true Christianity. As the Nazarene said: ‘Whatsoever you do to the least of my brothers, you do to me.’\textsuperscript{107}

A “brownshirt wedding” embodied the NSDAP’s promise to heal a society broken by war, depression, and the struggles of modern urban life. The idea appealed both to potential stormtroopers – who themselves had experienced trouble forming the healthy families they felt to be their birthright – and to the larger voting public, whose dissatisfaction with the moral state of Weimar Germany had only intensified with the coming of economic depression. It both embodied and created the values of community, cooperation, and generosity that the Nazis claimed to support.

\textsuperscript{105} Ibid
\textsuperscript{106} “Hochzeit im Braunhemd,” Hamburger Tageblatt, June 19, 1931.
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid.
Stormtroopers were both rooted in and torn between two conceptions of family. First, they were – or tried to remain – loyal to the biological family that had raised them. They sought healthy relations with fathers and mothers, and held as an eventual goal the finding of a partner with whom they could begin a family of their own. Yet they were also drawn to their family of comrades, the homosocial environment of intense male bonding found in the SA-Heime and during endless rounds of party activities. These two families existed in natural conflict, which the SA tried to dispel through its emphasis on rituals of family and community that united competing members of the stormtroopers’ two families.

The two families, however, were bound to conflict so long as the stormtroopers spent their nights in barracks and their days as paramilitary fighters of an urban civil war. The conflict was especially severe during the Christmas season, when the day’s public violence conflicted with the night’s promise of peace among family. In the Christmas seasons of both 1931 and 1932, police imposed a ban on paramilitaries, marches, rallies, and other disruptive forms of political contest. Stormtroopers thus had time to consider in quiet their familial loyalties in light of the Christmas celebration, as one anonymous SA man did in an article for the Tageblatt in 1931:

‘And now go home to your houses, be joyful under the lighted trees, be joyful in the circle of your family. Christ is risen, peace on Earth, Christmas is here!’
So will the pastor speak in the church tonight. He’ll speak of the gospel, of the son of God, of belief.
And we men will go home and be joyful and will forget all else. We’ll remember that it’s Christmas, the celebration of love, the celebration of family.
And we? We of the SA?
We will try to be joyful, we’ll say to mother that we’re happy to be by her again, we’ll tell the wife that we’re at peace and try to wipe the troubles from her brow. We’ll tell the children happy stories – and nevertheless, always return in our thoughts to those whom we call comrades.108

The unknown stormtrooper recalled these comrades with sympathy for the disconnect between the promise of the Christmas season and the reality of their lives in the depression:

One of them sits on a cold floor. He stares out into the night, sees candles burning and people laughing. Sees his dear mother somewhere in his thoughts, and hears her thoughts. That it is Christmas today. Cold shivers in his marrow, hunger gnaws at his body. He goes restlessly here and there. Thinks about the hours with his comrades, through burning son and winter storms, in woods and fields with his comrades singing consoling songs and following with laughter Hitler’s red banner.109

Another, locked in prison for political crimes, drew strength from the fact that his comrades had not forgotten him. Another “had to leave his mother and father so that he may go toward Hitler’s banner.” A third lost dear friends and gave up his girlfriend “because he followed Hitler’s drumbeat.” Others lost jobs, lost their savings, or were “beaten and violated” for their loyalty. Yet they all had one consolation:

We have lost everything, we have gained everything. We gave up father and mother and fiancé and friend, gave up Geld und Gut und Blut. Some of these things we gave easily, some with more difficulty, but we have all gained one thing that no man or God can rob from us – we have gained our comrades.

Stormtroopers who so valued male camaraderie could only uneasily exist in a movement that ideologically promoted heterosexual marriage and nuclear family life. These men lived in barracks in the conditions of an urban civil war. The disconnect between their homosocial lives of impoverished violence and their hopes for a more stable existence

109 Ibid.
caused political and psychological tension that demanded release. Many stormtroopers came to see their conditions as a burden of suffering posed by the collapse of Germany, the incompetence of the Republic, and the plots of Communists and Jews. So long as economic strife and political conflict prevented them from growing into responsible maturity these men determined that the quickest way to become the “upstanding person” they envisioned was to end the struggle as quickly and violently as possible.
CHAPTER VI

THE MARCH TO POWER (1931-1933)

The establishment of consistent Nazi media, SA homes and soup kitchens, and the alliance with Lutheranism exerted great force to attract political converts for the NSDAP, and they influenced the experience of Nazism once a person had joined. They allowed members to perceive the Party as family-oriented and religiously blessed, and they drew in a second circle of members who saw the movement’s social networks as proof of its upstanding nature. The major effects were thus felt upon those who personally knew a stormtrooper and could therefore be convinced that a son, brother, co-worker, or fellow congregant acted for pure motives. Members of the general public, on the other hand, drew their conclusions about the SA and NSDAP from what they observed or read of the party soldiers’ public behaviors – and these were overwhelmingly instances of belligerence and violence. The Nazi Party nevertheless met with increasing electoral success from 1930 to 1933, based largely around the dynamism of the SA lifestyle and the efficacy of the Nazi media. Taken together, these forces shaped public perceptions of the stormtroopers in a way that made them seem more legitimate, better-intentioned, and safer to trust with political power than they otherwise would have been. It was a key development in translating a movement of increasing numbers, lingering tensions, and significant contradictions into a force that could stake claim to state authority.

From Word to Deed: The SA Subculture as School for Violence

Violent encounters emerged regularly out of the SA subculture, which nurtured and justified violent acts through a mediating web of newspapers, sermons, and social
isolation from dissenting views. Specific acts of violence then emerged from daily patterns of living: the men of the movement spent as much time as possible with their comrades, and their attitudes on violence and the limits of self-defense were thus stretched by their limited contact with the outside world. Many stormtroopers passed their time, some from morning to evening, in places built by the NSDAP for party work, relaxation, and ideological instruction. The Sturmlokale, and later the SA-Heime, were the first stop on an SA man’s daily schedule. If employed, he would visit his home tavern at the beginning of the day to greet his comrades before he went to work. In many cases, stormtroopers would gather to travel as a group to their places of employment, lest they come under attack by political opponents. Unemployed stormtroopers did the same for their trips to the Wohlfahrtsamt or Stempelstelle. These unemployed stormtroopers then returned to the Sturmlokal and kept themselves busy through the day:

Other comrades appear, each according to the time he has, to ask about how the Dienst is going or to learn bits of news. Some find themselves together over a game of cards, to pass free time. What else should they do? They’re registered seeking work, but since they’re known as SA men they receive no assignments. That’s all part of the system’s resistance; they weaken the SA and the movement through unemployment. Because of hunger and misery, the SA-men might fall out.”

Unemployment, however, had the opposite effect. Rather than fragmenting the stormtrooper community, economic need bound it together in both physical and social ways. The Sturmlokale and SA-Heime gave comrades who were out of work a place to spend the day where, away from the guilt-inducing stares of dependent family members and in the company of similarly down-and-out comrades, they could pass the time without feeling like failures.

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1 Koch, 215.
After working hours, the *Sturmlokale* and *Heime* again became meeting points for all stormtroopers. Stormtroopers were obligated to appear twice a week: once for a roll call, at which all members received orders from the commanding officer, and once for the more informal social *Truppabend*. The *Ehrenbuch* described these events as efficient and organized gatherings. It began in the evening:

The *Schar* gathers at the Post [to defend] against communist attacks, hangs up a swastika-flag and posts a double watch at the door. Once per week they have a *Truppabend* and once a *Sturmappell*, at which the *Sturmführer* makes known the most pressing issues and gives orders for the next march or assignment.\(^2\)

Both events could also provide formal ideological instruction from official party speakers and invited experts on national, military, and “racial” questions. These instructions had both ideological and practical elements. “At the *Truppabend,*” the *Ehrenbuch* told potential recruits, “you’ll be instructed in watch duty, and you’ll also learn how to keep the Commune and Reichsbanner off you in a streetfight.”\(^3\)

Stormtroopers – or at least, those on official duty – were forbidden to drink, and had to “stay sharp” the whole time lest they receive demerits or be assigned to punishment duties. While at their taverns, the SA men entertained themselves with card games – Skat, as it had been in the trenches, was the most popular – and conversation. Party-supplied newspapers, magazines, and books provided the raw materials for stormtrooper conversation, ideological training, and practical education. The most important of these were *Tageblatt*‘s special SA section and the national *Der SA Mann*. Each copy of *Der SA Mann* or the *Sturmkolonne* would be consumed by many stormtroopers, who shared issues and discussed articles while biding their time between

\(^2\) Ibid, 216.
\(^3\) Ibid.
official gatherings and sudden calls to alarm. The newspapers allowed them to teach each other, to take responsibility for cultivating their comrades’ knowledge and abilities. The newspapers combined with the formal mechanisms of SA service to teach the stormtroopers “how to engage political opponents in discussion” – but also how to “become hard, disciplined, and able to meet [opponents’] violence with violence of [their] own.”

Other articles taught the stormtroopers important political lessons, most especially new ways to justify their paranoia and “defensive” violence. Reading each day about violence in international, national, and local politics taught stormtroopers a paranoid sense of besiegement in their own cities. On one level, stormtroopers’ anxiety of encirclement and helplessness was generated by the postwar international order. Articles in the Sturmkolonne constantly reminded stormtroopers of the inequity of the Versailles system. Under the guise of technology reviews, articles reminded SA men of the latest military capabilities under development in Britain, France, and the United States – weapons and vehicles with which these countries could threaten Germany’s borders and economy. New French bombers, for instance, could attack an undefended Hamburg. The stormtroopers themselves could never get their hands on such deadly toys – either offensive or defensive – because of the Versailles Treaty. Nor could they receive the most basic military training because of the Treaty’s limitations on the German army. Articles in the SA section spoke of “the future war” as if it were already certain, yet German youths could not formally be trained in military technology or tactics. The SA presented itself as a solution to this problem. Its newspapers played to the stormtroopers’ adolescent male interest in vehicles, guns, and warmaking technology. The articles

4 Ibid.
6 “Der Tank im Zukunftskriege,” Hamburger Tageblatt, April 29, 1932.
presented the illusion of training stormtroopers militarily during a time when such knowledge was banned – and therefore, also had the allure of forbidden fruit.⁷ Such stories, especially in combination with articles in the regular sections of the paper on foreign-policy conflicts between Germany and the victorious nations of the First World War, reinforced the stormtroopers’ sense that they were under threat from foreign powers.

The stormtroopers’ newspapers also stoked their paranoia on the national and local levels, where coverage of urban political combat gave stormtroopers a sense of besiegement within their own city. Typical accounts included tales of stormtroopers’ being attacked while on the way home from meetings, robbed while on their way to work, or under siege in their homes and taverns by hordes of Communist attackers. But each incident was less important than the pattern created by repeated emphasis on the stormtroopers’ victimization at the hands of Reichsbanner, Communists, undifferentiated “socialists,” and the police. The 568 issues of the Tageblatt published from 1931 to 1932 included 352 reports of SA persecution.⁸ Averaged out over the entire period, stormtroopers learned of a comrade’s being attacked or otherwise persecuted in three of every five issues, and they could conclude that Hamburg’s stormtroopers came under attack every two days.⁹ The ebb and flow of violent political encounters tended, however, to rise as elections came closer, then to fall off for a period of weeks afterwards. The

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⁷ See, for example, the series on weapons of the Reichswehr, in the Hamburger Tageblatt of May 6, 13, and 20, 1932.
⁸ Wackerfuss Hamburger Tageblatt fight sample 1931-1932 (N=352). “Incidents of SA persecution” is defined as cases where stormtroopers, allied party or family members, and the homes or private spaces of the SA men were reported as coming under physical attack, as well as incidents of police harassment, arrests, and weapons searches. The number of incidents could have been even higher had the Tageblatt published every day during this period; it was banned several times, leading to only 568 issues in the two years rather than the 632 it would otherwise have achieved. It did not publish on Sundays.
⁹ Ibid.
weeks that led up to an election therefore seemed particularly dangerous to the
stormtroopers – as they were.

The Tageblatt increased the anxiety by playing violent events outside the city just
as prominently as those within its borders. In many cases, the stories were packaged with
headlines that encouraged Hamburg’s stormtroopers to think they were being targeted
when in fact the story concerned other cities. One article of June 17, 1932, for instance,
was Headlined “Warning! The Red Front is mobilizing! Through terror they plan to force
a new ban of the SA!”.

The article described events in Berlin, not Hamburg. The
Tageblatt highlighted incidents when stormtroopers outside Hamburg were fatally
attacked or seriously wounded in political combat – as they did 36 times in 1931-1932.

The paper gave periodic updates of the national tally of SA “martyrs” and wounded. It
told of 5 deaths, 134 seriously wounded, and 183 lightly wounded – in May 1931 alone.

Such reports were rarely accurate, for Nazi journalists tended to exaggerate the body
count. One article in May 1931 listed seven dead, 369 seriously wounded, and
“thousands” of lightly wounded comrades during the previous ninety days.

Raising the body count was itself the point of such stories. The inclusion of incidents across all
Germany increased the number of persecutions the SA could decry, and it raised the
stormtroopers paranoia that “red terror across the Reich” would strike them next.

The frequency of reporting on these events was as important as the specifics of the fights

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10 “Achtung! Rot-Front mobilisiert!” Hamburger Tageblatt, June 17, 1932.
11 Wackerfuss Hamburger Tageblatt fight sample 1931-1932. (N=352)
12 Hamburger Tageblatt June 10, 1931.
14 The “red terror across the Reich” formulation was a consistent theme, with variations appearing in
articles across this time period. See Hamburger Tageblatt articles of September 7, 1931; February 22,
1932; May 24, 1932; June 17, 1932; June 19, 1932; July 11, 1932; July 12, 1932; July 14, 1932; and
September 20, 1932.
themselves. It created a regularized, constant sense of insecurity and besiegement among the stormtroopers. As a result, they became more prone to aggression as a form of pre-emptive defense.

The sheer number of incidents was therefore its own message. But the violent encounters also provided categories of knowledge that the stormtroopers absorbed. Reports of local violence were the most effective vehicles to strike productive paranoia in the minds of the stormtroopers. The *Tageblatt*’s reporting from 1931-1932 reveals twelve categories into which violence or the alleged persecution of SA men could be placed. (See Table 5.0)

The plurality of violent encounters (107 incidents) were reported with short, generic descriptions, usually only a paragraph in length. The attacks could take place at any time – in the morning when SA men were on the way to work, while they

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15 *Hamburger Tageblatt* articles of April 6, 1932; May 9, 1932; and July 17, 1932.
distributed flyers or hung posters,\textsuperscript{16} or simply while they walked the streets. In addition to these short reports and accounts of combat outside greater Hamburg (36 cases), nine subtypes recurred. While each implied a specific lesson for the stormtroopers, all used everyday incidents to portray the SA man as an heroic individual who sought to protect himself, his family, and his home city of Hamburg.

Perhaps the most prominent sub-narrative of violence against stormtroopers told of attacks that were conducted by overwhelming numbers of opponents. While many reports (including those categorized in the generic category) did not contain the number of attackers, when such information was provided it almost always described overwhelming odds against the SA. If the articles were to be believed – and the stormtroopers, at least, did not question them – Communists and socialists regularly outnumbered SA men by ten,\textsuperscript{17} twenty,\textsuperscript{18} sixty,\textsuperscript{19} a hundred,\textsuperscript{20} or a hundred-fifty to one.\textsuperscript{21}

In one instance, 500 Communists reportedly stormed a Nazi news stand in broad daylight, destroyed it, attacked the proprietor, and battled SA reinforcements until police arrived.\textsuperscript{22} These reports reflected the reality of street combat during the late Weimar Republic: everyday attacks most often happened spontaneously, when one party found itself with enough numerical superiority to minimize the risks to its side. Alternately, perpetrators of planned acts of violence made sure in advance that they enjoyed a numerical advantage. Nazi aggression took this form as well, even if party papers did not

\textsuperscript{16} Hamburger Tageblatt articles of August 31, 1931; March 7, 1932; April 8, 1932; July 17, 1932; October 6, 1932.
\textsuperscript{17} April 6, 1932; July 17, 1932 (two incidents)
\textsuperscript{18} February 11, 1932
\textsuperscript{19} Hamburger Tageblatt articles of April 24, 1931; June 24, 1931; October 29, 1931; February 25, 1932; April 19, 1932; November 7, 1932; and December 16, 1932.
\textsuperscript{20} June 15, 1932; July 7, 1932; July 17, 1932
\textsuperscript{21} July 17, 1932
\textsuperscript{22} September 28, 1932
admit it in print. The Tageblatt’s penchant for reporting only those incidents in which the SA was in the minority boosted the stormtroopers’ sense of righteous suffering. This image of the beleaguered SA man had an ideological component as well, which tied into the masochism and martyr complexes most SA men held. Stormtroopers considered themselves among the few individuals willing to stand up to the red tide, a role the Freikorps-fighters had also proclaimed for themselves during the border skirmishes following World War I. Reports in the Tageblatt thus drew on standard tropes of the interwar right-wing mindset. They also increased the stormtroopers’ confidence in their own abilities, as SA victims usually fought off their attackers and escaped with only minor injuries. One SA man, the stormtroopers, could resist 50 or even 150 Communists – a fact emphasized by the jiu-jitsu course’s instructions on how to battle multiple opponents. (Image 5.1) The Nazi emphasis on Communist numerical superiority matched the movement’s insistence on their opponents’ cowardice. Tageblatt reports featured sardonic comments – usually with scare quotes – on the enemy’s “‘heroism,’” or “‘courage’” A description of 100 Communists’ attacking a sole party member exclaimed, “What heroism!” The Tageblatt described a similar pair of attacks later that year as a chance for the socialists to “show their heroism” by attacking with superior numbers. This name-calling diminished the individual enemy while still making them threatening as a mass.

23 Peter Merkl’s analysis of the Abel collection determined that masochists in the SA outnumbered sadists by three to one. Political Violence under the Swastika. 591.
24 Hamburger Tageblatt, April 24, 1931, June 24, 1931.
25 Hamburger Tageblatt, November 2, 1931.
26 Hamburger Tageblatt, July 17, 1932.
27 Hamburger Tageblatt, December 9, 1932. The social democratic Echo picked up the derisive use of heroic terms as a way to contest Nazi narratives. By 1932, the two papers’ sarcastic descriptions of their opponents sounded quite alike.
The narrative tropes of the Tageblatt’s fight reports cast the stormtroopers as powerful but vulnerable heroes. They were calculated to increase the stormtroopers’ self-confidence, attract new recruits, and win public sympathy for the SA’s struggle. Such sympathy could also be won by portraying political violence as Communist aggression against peaceful, private spaces of social and family life. According to the Tageblatt, SA men on their way home from meetings, rallies, and evenings at the tavern subjected themselves to special danger. The “attack on the way home [Nachhauseweg]” was common. One report from August 17, 1931 had many of the story’s typical elements: a lone SA man left his Lokal on a Sunday night, was attacked by overwhelming numbers of communists, and was rescued by 5 of his comrades who heard the battle. One of them, “a soldier,” was injured in the combat. As Conn wrote in his memoirs, “What the Communists could not accomplish indoors against the united SA, they sought to inflict on single SA men on their way home.” The archetypical attack of this kind spoke of the particular dangers of the late evening, as the stormtroopers’ official duties ended and they returned home to their families. Leaving the Lokal, perhaps slightly drunk, was particularly dangerous if they lived in a contested or Communist-dominated area of the city. Conn organized his units west of the Alster into escort troops to protect those men who lived in St Pauli. The troop traced a winding route that started in the most dangerous streets, which could then be navigated in force. As each man arrived home, the number of stormtroopers in the group would diminish, but as the group moved out of St Pauli and into friendlier neighborhoods of Eimsbüttel, Hoheluft, and Eppendorf, the dangers

28 Hamburger Tageblatt, August 17, 1931.
29 FZG 11C1 - Alfred Conn - Nachlasse, 55.
lessened as well.\textsuperscript{30} The escort duty made for long nights, especially for SA men who lived in the safest areas of the city. They often did not arrive back home until 1 or 2 in the morning. The schedule increased the tensions between party and family life, but the stormtroopers’ sacrifice of sleep and security highlighted the caring side of the movement. Accounts of the Nachhouseweg attacks were therefore particularly prominent in the \textit{Tageblatt}, because they showed the sacrifices comrades made to ensure each others’ safety, as well as the attention the leadership paid to the problems its men faced. This type of attack also carried great symbolic importance in that it represented a transition of violence from public, political life to the private realm. The Nachhouseweg was a liminal space that represented a shadowy border between political and personal life, and was thus especially dangerous for actual and symbolic reasons.

Nazi media also taught, however, that the stormtroopers were still vulnerable even once they reached the supposed safety of their homes. The \textit{Tageblatt} reported 63 attacks on private spaces from 1931-1932. Of these, more than half were against \textit{Sturmlokale} or \textit{SA-Heime}.\textsuperscript{31} The SA’s home taverns, though technically public accommodations, were like private clubs. Only stormtroopers, party members, and friends of the movement were welcome. Many stormtroopers spent more time there than in their actual homes. These taverns were of particular importance in the political combat over contested areas: they functioned as strongpoints within a neighborhood, where combat-ready stormtroopers could be housed until needed.\textsuperscript{32} Both Nazis and their opponents often called them “barracks” [\textit{Kaserne}]. Party members who came under attack in the area could call the \textit{Lokal} for reinforcements. Many of these pubs, including the Hotel Adler on

\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid, 67.
\textsuperscript{31} Wackerfuss \textit{Tageblatt} fight sample, 1931-1932.
\textsuperscript{32} On the role of taverns and neighborhood violence in Altona, see McElligot, \textit{Contested City}, 178-191.
Susannenstrasse and the Lokal Balzuweit at Eppendorfer Weg 175, sat on strategic corners that controlled vital cross-streets. These two buildings faced the street at an angle, which made them more defensible and reduced the number of attackable windows and entryways. Other taverns, such as the Sturmlokal Struck on Fruchtallee 60, protected themselves with fences and other barricades. All these locations were infamous as points of origins for ad-hoc attacks on neighborhood rivals, and thus came under assault themselves. Beginning in 1931, the KPD in Berlin, Hamburg, and other major German cities launched an “assault on the taverns” in order to root out Nazi “invaders” of Communist strongholds. The vast majority of such attacks consisted of acts of minor vandalism, windows smashed, or stones thrown at the building. At times, though, carloads of Communists fired shots at the tavern out of a moving vehicle. In two incidents, political opponents threw homemade bombs at SS taverns in Altona. Taverns were thus not only private spaces, but politicized locations whose contestation was a measure of success for political parties. Stormtroopers bragged, for instance, about converting formerly socialist pubs into Nazi venues. So while the attacks on Sturmlokale and SA-Heime were irritating and dangerous, they were within the Nazis’ own rules of the political game.

Other political intrusions into private spaces were more serious. Over twice per month – 27 times altogether – the Tageblatt reported of political enemies’ attacking stormtroopers at home, or attacking the homes themselves. These invasions took many

33 See photo in Schmid, Ed., 43.
34 Hamburger Tageblatt articles of May 26, 1932; December 9, 1932.
35 Hamburger Tageblatt articles of January 31, 1932; December 18, 1932.
36 As in a Hamburger Tageblatt article of March 14, 1932, which boasted that the Lokal von Habermann on Schellingstrasse 17 had just, after 25 years of hosting SPD events, turned Nazi.
37 Wackerfuss Tageblatt fight sample (N=352)
forms. Sometimes the attack began with stones thrown through a party member’s window; when he emerged to clean the damage, the enemy attacked in force, beat him, and destroyed parts of the house. On other occasions, the Communists waited inside the stairwell or in the shadows around the building. One stormtrooper was ambushed while climbing his stairs, thrown over the railing, then kicked repeatedly and thrown again – through his neighbor’s closed front door. Reports of such attacks prompted particular outrage because they represented Communist violence as particularly wild and untargeted: not only Nazi homes could come under attack, but the apartments of innocents nearby. One May 1932 incident saw the Communists demolish an apartment that belonged to an SA man’s neighbor. All these incidents created the impression that the Nazis’ enemies would not limit violent political combat to public realms, but would instead carry it into the most sacred areas of German private life. Vulnerable realms also included churches and religious celebrations. In novels written by SA authors, the stormtrooper’s enemies frequently attacked SA on Sundays, during the Christmas holiday, and at church. Though the Tageblatt never recorded any incidents of Communist attacks on church properties, it did report several Christmas eve attacks on stormtroopers and their homes. It also put great emphasis on Communist attacks on visitors to the Hamburger Dom, the Christmastime carnival set up annually at the

38 April 22, 1932 and May 23, 1932.
39 November 24, 1932.
40 April 26, 1932.
41 May 1, 1932.
42 Anonymous, 10 Jahre unbekannter SA Mann, 62.
43 Lohmann, 55.
44 Lohmann, 233.
45 December 27, 1932.
Heiligengeistfeld. The event, whose roots stretched back centuries, was traditionally a Christmas celebration for all citizens of Hamburg. But the Communists who dominated the neighborhoods around the field had come to see the site as their home territory, and they stalked the fairgrounds in search of political enemies. In 1931, Communists attacked and wounded an out-of-town SA man visiting the festival and participated in a shootout with police that killed at least one officer. Two similar attacks the next year reinforced the Nazis’ case that leftist criminals were attempting to appropriate for themselves a universal Christmas celebration.

Communist attacks on Nazi homes threatened not only the domestic peace of the private sphere, but also the sacred bourgeois notion of private property. The KPD had for years advocated “direct actions” to provide for the poor and unemployed, which included “proletarian shopping trips” to rob welfare agencies and private food stores for provisions. The Tageblatt’s fight reports emphasized these types of incidents along with attacks on National Socialists’ property, which often came under targeted assault. At least once a month, stormtroopers read of Communists who destroyed windows and otherwise vandalized buildings, tore down swastika flags, robbed SA men and party members of their backpacks and wallets, and pillaged newsstands that sold the Tageblatt and other Nazi papers. A Hitler youth paperboy was attacked, and his

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46 The Dom has since added summer and spring carnivals, in 1947 and 1948 respectively. See http://www.hamburger-dom.de/geschichte.html. Last accessed December 17, 2007.
47 November 19, 1931.
48 December 14, 1931.
49 November 24, 1932.
50 Rosenhaft, 53.
51 April 1, 1932, May 23, 1932, June 7, 1932, June 8, 1932, and 27 October, 1932.
52 July 13, 1932, July 31, 1932.
53 April 19, 1932, April 20, 1932.
54 May 11, 1932, June 1, 1931, May 31, 1932, June 3, 1932, June 5, 1932.
55 June 21, 1932
newspapers, money, and bicycle stolen.\textsuperscript{56} Another party member was forced at gunpoint into his apartment, which the Communists then looted of money, private papers, and anything with a swastika.\textsuperscript{57} These attacks were, on the one hand, political acts against the symbols of the Nazi movement – as seen in the high percentage that targeted flags, party badges, newspapers, and other swastika-bearing items. But they also reinforced Nazi narratives of Communist criminality and disdain for the hard-won rewards of individual industry. Thus the waves of Communist robberies that periodically swept contested neighborhoods – acts that filled the KPD’s coffers, but also allowed the NSDAP to pose as protectors of order, property, and small businessmen.\textsuperscript{58}

Taken together, these stories cast SA men as forces of order in dangerous neighborhoods. The idea was reinforced by three final conflict archetypes: stories of stormtroopers who helped the police or firemen, tales of the socialists’ treachery, and reports of attacks on women. The first category included SA men who assisted in the aftermath of car accidents, caught hit and run drivers,\textsuperscript{59} and helped firemen to evacuate buildings.\textsuperscript{60} The second narrative type emphasized the enemy’s criminal abandonment of moral limits on violence, or the use of deceit in ways incompatible with traditional notions of masculine virtue. One common trick in the Communist arsenal, according to the \textit{Tageblatt}, was to steal party badges and SA uniforms in order to entrap stormtroopers.\textsuperscript{61} Undercover communists also asked stormtroopers for cigarettes, after

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{56} September 4, 1932.
\textsuperscript{57} June 22, 1932.
\textsuperscript{58} McElligot, \textit{Contested City}, 174-176.
\textsuperscript{59} July 17, 1931.
\textsuperscript{60} June 21, 1932.
\textsuperscript{61} “Wie die Schlägerein vorbeiführen,” \textit{Hamburger Tageblatt}, April 16, 1931. See also reports of May 11, 1931 and January 12, 1932.
\end{flushright}
which the SA man’s generosity then put him in place for ambush and assault. The *Tageblatt* also warned stormtroopers of an underhanded tactic Communists employed to harm the SA’s reputation: groups of Communists attacked the SA in the streets, then fled to a Jewish house, turned off the lights, and called the police. When the police arrived, they interpreted the scene as an SA attack on Jewish homes. These incidents cast stormtroopers as the villains – and were therefore far more dangerous to the movement than physical attacks on SA men.

The *Tageblatt* responded by highlighting Communist attacks on the ultimate noncombatant: women. Some of these attacks were incidental: the wife of a party member encountered hateful graffiti or death threats directed at the family. Mothers of SA men and HJ youths received notice that their children were targeted for Communist reprisal, in the hopes that the woman’s fear would persuade her sons to leave the movement. The *Tageblatt* also warned that the Communists would attack women directly, and so the fiancées, girlfriends, and mothers of SA men should also fear to travel through the streets. The *Tageblatt* told of attacks on them after weekend outdoor events and as they walked through shopping districts. It reported their being called names in public – most commonly, “Nazi sow” [Nazisau], an epithet ensured to start a brawl should SA men be in the area to protect the woman’s honor. Nazi narratives of women at risk from Communist violence played into ideological fears of gender equality, which the socialist left advocated. If women were equal to men in the political realm, they too

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62 June 8, 1931.  
63 July 4, 5, and 14, 1931, August 27, 1931, and January 26, 1931.  
64 March 13, 1932.  
65 July 13, 1932.  
66 August 15, 1932.  
67 October 13, 1931, October 11, 1932.  
68 August 30, 1932.
could become victims of bloodshed. The Nazis, on the other hand, emphasized strict divisions between genders in order to emphasize chivalrous male violence. The more women could be shown to be under physical attack, the more violently the stormtroopers could behave in their defense.

The conflict archetypes analyzed here stressed the enemy’s violation of traditional morals in order to justify SA violence. The Tageblatt used such stories to cast the SA as outnumbered, vulnerable in the streets, under siege at home and in their taverns, defenders of property and of women, and assistants of the forces of order in resistance to dishonorable tactics of a revolutionary enemy. To narrate the SA in this way was to cast the stormtroopers’ violence as defensive, and to show them as guardians of the traditional elements of bourgeois German life: the state, the family, and private property. A final conflict archetype, however, stood in tension with the SA’s claim to such public virtues.

“The victims are guilty!”: Conflict and Sympathy Between SA and Police

The Tageblatt often told of stormtroopers who ran afoul of the police, a type of incident that appeared more often than any other single conflict archetype – 44 separate times between 1931-1932.\(^{69}\) Specific cases included arrests of SA men for peaceful political activities,\(^ {70}\) the arrest or harassment of SA men victimized by leftist violence,\(^ {71}\) police refusal to stop attacks on stormtroopers\(^ {72}\) or to allow SA reinforcements to help their comrades.\(^ {73}\) The police also frequently searched SA men and their buildings for

\(^{69}\) Wackerfuss fight sample (N=352)  
\(^{70}\) July 6, 1931; January 4, 1932; March 7, 1932; April 21, 1932  
\(^{71}\) July 31, 1931, August 24, 1932, September 20, 1932  
\(^{72}\) July 31, 1931  
\(^{73}\) June 6, 1932; October 12, 1932
weapons \textsuperscript{74} – even in cases where area Communists supposedly carried firearms openly and without punishment.\textsuperscript{75} Despite the armed violence of the Nazis’ enemies, the 

despite the armed violence of the Nazis’ enemies, the 

\textit{Tageblatt} claimed, the police did not even allow crippled stormtrooper war veterans their canes.\textsuperscript{76} In some incidents, the \textit{Tageblatt} told of police who attacked SA men\textsuperscript{77} and sometimes abused ones already in custody.\textsuperscript{78}

Nazi newspapers could not ignore the perpetual conflict between the SA and police, nor could they encourage the stormtroopers to avoid incidents of violence that would attract police attention. But they could minimize the tension by painting the police as misguided and naïve agents of a false regime. This portrayal could restore the SA man’s status as a persecuted victim. At times, the \textit{Tageblatt} described policemen who worked hand-in-hand with the Reichsbanner and even the Communists.\textsuperscript{79} Though the image of police and Communist cooperation is hard to swallow, even Lothar Danner, Chief of the \textit{Ordnungspolizei}, admitted that police functions during the Republic had become more bound to the protection of the regime than they had previously been. Whereas during the empire, according to Danner, the police were “an effective and reliable organ of the state, but no instrument of power,” after the Communist uprisings of the early 1920s the police were tasked not only with stopping crime but also with upholding the state’s stability.\textsuperscript{80} The Reichsbanner thus enjoyed the official support of Hamburg’s police captain.\textsuperscript{81} However, lower police ranks were filled with officers sympathetic to the parties of the right: former trench soldiers, \textit{Freikorpsmänner}, and

\textsuperscript{74} November 24 and 29, 1931; March 18, 1932; April 28, 1932; 26 July, 1932
\textsuperscript{75} September 15 and 20, 1932.
\textsuperscript{76} March 6, 1932; April 20, 1932
\textsuperscript{77} May 11, 1931; January 14, 1932; October 11, 1932
\textsuperscript{78} April 25, 1932; August 2, 1932
\textsuperscript{79} July 26 and 29, 1932; September 15, 1932.
\textsuperscript{80} Danner, 195.
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid, 206.
members of an array of rightist paramilitaries and sporting groups.\textsuperscript{82} As the SA and NSDAP came to dominate the nationalist parties by the early 1930s, policemen grew increasingly attracted. But open Nazis could not stay in police ranks, as Böckenhauer himself had discovered. The Senat renewed its official rejection of Nazi policemen in November 1930, after the Sternschanzeschlacht, with a statement that "Officers who support parties that seek the violent overthrow of the system of government [Staatsform] violate their oath of loyalty to the state and transgress against service regulations."\textsuperscript{83} Nationalist or right-leaning policemen therefore had to keep away from Nazi ranks lest they lose their jobs. Yet there was more sympathy for the SA within the police officer corps than could be openly displayed.

By 1931, according to Danner, many policemen voted Nazi and lived in respectable bourgeois areas that were the process of becoming the Party’s strongholds, and they voted in large numbers for the NSDAP as the Party’s rhetoric of responsibility gained salience.\textsuperscript{84} Goebbels’ talk of an “absolute National Socialist majority in Hamburg’s police-barracks” was still overblown, as few joined the Party or SA even after the Papen regime revoked a ban on such affiliations after August 3, 1932.\textsuperscript{85} Even sympathetic individual policemen could rarely show overt favoritism while on duty. They usually encountered SA men in the context of spontaneous street clashes, and most officers in the end applied the law. But their growing support for the NSDAP stemmed from a calculation that the SA’s violence was preferable to that of the Communists.

\textsuperscript{82} Ibid, 213-214.
\textsuperscript{83} Quoted in Ibid, 217.
\textsuperscript{84} Ibid, 222-223.
\textsuperscript{85} Ibid, 223.
SA literature further reinforced the common ground between the SA and the police by writing of sympathetic policemen who, when they could get away with it, helped the isolated stormtrooper. In Lohmann’s *SA räumt auf*, the anonymous SA protagonist who visits a small Mecklenburg town is accused of shooting at Communists near a church. This false accusation is particularly enraging, as the irreligious Communists had fired the shots. Warned not to leave town while the case is being investigated, the stormtrooper complies, until one policeman appears at his door, commands him to get into a car, and helps him get away. Before parting ways, the stormtrooper dares finally to clarify matters:

Rather than simply vanish into the shadows, I couldn’t let things go without asking my mysterious benefactor [the policeman] for an explanation…
“I still don’t know why you’re doing this.”
“Well, my boy, then I’ll say one last word to you.”
With that my secretive friend opened slightly the lapel of his coat, and showed me that on the inside he wore a badge I couldn’t fail to recognize. Then he made to leave. I’m sure you can think of what his last words were:
“Heil Hitler!”86

Elsewhere, fictional stormtroopers like Gotthard Kraft encountered policemen who could be persuaded past their stereotypes about the brownshirts through familial connections and an appeal to common morals. Gotthard’s conversion of one such officer, a relative of his girlfriend and a police captain in Berlin, featured one of the most extended intellectual debates in stormtrooper literature. Throughout the scene, the writer emphasized not only the similarity in the viewpoints and arguments of stormtrooper and policeman, but also their physical connection. The two look each other in the eye, lay hands on each others’ shoulders, and in the end clasp hands and swear their friendship.

86 Lohmann, 238.
The policeman then declared his conversion in religious tones that echoed the spiritual “Amazing Grace”: “I rejoice in this hour, which has taught me to see and again believe! [Ich freue mich dieser Stunde, die mich sehen und wieder glauben gelehrt hat!]”\(^{87}\)

Stormtroopers learned from such lessons that policemen were not the enemies they often appeared to be. They could – if the SA men and police could only come together beyond the barriers the Republic erected to separate them – find common ground, productive partnership, and a sense of family.

The inclusion of these episodes in SA literature chronicled personal moments of mutual understanding that had to remain off the record during the \textit{Kampfzeit}. Few sympathetic policemen appeared in the \textit{Tageblatt}’s pages, lest the paper risk exposing its allies. SA papers instead portrayed the conflict with the police in generational terms. The two groups, the \textit{Tageblatt} claimed, had the same worldviews and the same goals, but differed in their methods. In this narrative, the police naively tried to enforce the old laws and peaceful, outmoded methods of political conduct. But the Communists had inaugurated a new era of violence that could only be met with forceful resistance from the youths of the SA – who were thus the servants of a German (if not Republican) state.

The conflict between the SA and police was, in the stormtroopers’ view, one of the great tragedies of the early Nazi movement. SA men constantly complained of their treatment at police hands, unable to fathom how the two forces could be enemies. They also bemoaned the fact that any resistance on their part would provoke retaliation against SA institutions, carried out by policemen too naïve or corrupted to see their common interests. Communists even, the \textit{Tageblatt} claimed, sparked combat near SA taverns in order to trick the police into blaming stormtroopers. The paper sardonically praised the

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\(^{87}\) Witthuhn, 82.
tactic’s efficacy: “Es lohnt sich wirklich,” it wrote when the Lokal Balzuweit on Eppendorfer Weg fell victim to the ploy in May 1932. “Our people,” it cried, “even underage youths, are attacked and beaten down – and as a punishment for this, they close our taverns.” The SA men summed up their view of the situation with the slogan: “The victims are guilty!”

Policemen who sympathized with National Socialism tended only to be revealed by transgressions against public order or service regulations. Such transgressions could be severe indeed. In early 1931, Hamburg’s police president ordered a Regierungsrat Lassally to investigate accusations of anti-republican political activism within the police. Lassally began exploring a complaint lodged against Oberwachtmeister Friedrich Pohl, a 28-year old member of a police bicycle unit, for having made antisemitic statements. During a hearing on March 4, Pohl denied being a member of the NSDAP or SA. But after Lassally spoke with several witnesses he summoned Pohl again on the 13th. At the close of the interview Lassally, reading off a standard protocol, asked if Pohl wished to withdraw from police ranks. Pohl responded that “only socialists would be left” in that case. Seeing Lassally transcribe the statement into the record, Pohl drew his service revolver and shot Lassally through the chest. Lassally survived, and Pohl was charged with attempted murder.

The problems raised by this incident show the great difficulty faced by the NSDAP and SA during this period. Their media organs crafted a narrative of honorable stormtroopers, who were only out to protect themselves, their families, and their Vaterstadt. At the same time, these media fostered among the SA and its supporters a

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88 Hamburger Tageblatt of May 19, 1932.
89 “Die Überfallen haben Schuld!” Hamburger Tageblatt, October 20, 1931.
sense of crisis and paranoia that built over time to violence. If these acts could be placed into one of the narrative frameworks that the Tageblatt provided, supporters and sympathizers could accept the SA story about itself. But repeatedly SA men acted in ways that mocked the claimed rights of pre-emptive defense. Given that most incidents of violence grew out of the stormtroopers’ personal concerns and daily lives, the SA often lost control over when and how stormtrooper violence was triggered. In the Pohl case, as well as in several other fatal incidents in 1931, impulsive choices made on the spur of the moment risked collapsing the NSDAP’s carefully constructed political narrative.

“In public they play the innocents!”: Cycles of Restraint and Overreach in SA Violence

Pohl’s attempted murder of Lassally fit poorly with the image of a persecuted, downtrodden stormtrooper. Pohl was clearly the aggressor, having attacked by surprise and with instant resort to lethal force. He had violated not only police regulations but criminal law. As his personality became known during his trial later that year, he was shown to be an arrogant and unsympathetic character whose exposure to the public could only discredit the stormtroopers. When Pohl stood before the court on September 28, 1931, he denied remorse for his actions. He told the judge, “I do not regret the deed. On the contrary, if it were up to me Lassally and his spies would be the ones in jail.”90 It was not clear whether he was actually a Nazi. The Tageblatt announced that Pohl “was and is neither a member of the NSDAP nor ever in close connection with the Party.”91 It hinted that Pohl’s sympathies lay with the Communists, “since at least they were willing to

90 “Der Pohl-Prozess beginnt,” Hamburger Tageblatt, September 28, 1931.
91 Ibid.
disrupt the state with violence. Hitler is far too legal.”92 “We national socialists?” the
Tageblatt asked, “We know no Party-comrade Pohl, we do not count ourselves among his
friends and we denounce his deed. He is a stranger to us. [Er steht uns fern.] Our interest
in this matter lies elsewhere – and that is the monstrous methods of spying in the
Hamburger police.”93

At the same time, the Tageblatt still emphasized Pohl’s reputation as an
upstanding member of the community. His father was a doctor. Pohl himself had fought
in the trenches. He had served seven years with the police and enjoyed, until now, a
sterling record. He had even rented a room from two Jewish women.94 The Tageblatt
narrated the events that led up to the shooting as a litany of offenses the honor of Pohl
and all police officers, who merely sought to do their jobs in an politicized atmosphere.
Police spies had been sent to check where officers spent their evenings. They had
searched private lockers for copies of the Volkscher Beobachter and Tageblatt. They had
trailed off-duty officers and had attempted to listen in on their conversations. In the
Tageblatt’s telling, when Pohl learned that the case had been assigned to Lassally, who
was himself Jewish, he was so overwhelmed with fear that he was driven to drink. He
returned home early in the morning, “completely drunk and without a penny in his
pockets.”95 When he arrived to face Lassally, the inspector peppered the interview with
calculated insults, such as not offering the officer a seat. By the end of the interview Pohl
had become like a trapped animal:

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93 Ibid
94 The non-Nazi papers picked up on this fact as well. The Echo noted that “he saw one as a second
mother.” “Wer ist Oberwachtmeister Pohl?” Hamburger Echo, March 21, 1931.
95 “Der Pohl-Prozess,” Hamburger Tageblatt, October 8, 1931.
He felt as if he were already judged, and only the formalities remained. He knew therefore that he would not be allowed to defend himself. The “witnesses” were not made known to him. He fought against unknown forces. The only thing he knew is that formal expulsion would come. And then Lassally asked, per procedure, whether he wished to withdraw from the force.

In this moment, the hatred and unjust suspicions were a thing of the past. The alcohol pulsed in his blood. Something must happen. He pulled out his pistol and shot. Just once, then the attack of rage was over. The Regierungsrat was lightly wounded. Pohl turned himself in immediately.96

The Tageblatt put its readers into Pohl’s head and asked them to sympathize with how he was persecuted and driven by “unknown forces” to a deed he immediately regretted.

Even as the party denied any formal association with him, it still hoped to use his story to advance its complaints against the Republic and its guardians. The Tageblatt thus cast Pohl as yet another dutiful, patriotic, and well-intentioned innocent whose life had been destroyed by political persecution.

But Pohl was not the only victim – the NSDAP claimed itself among the injured parties as well. Pohl’s deed had brought false accusations against the Party. It had also brought to light the discrimination and persecution Nazis faced within police ranks.

Additionally, the police took such issue with the Tageblatt’s reporting of the case – the paper had called the words of one police witness for the prosecution “nasty denunciations” [üblen Denunziationen], and the man himself a “denouncing type of guy” [Denunziationsstyp]97 – that they banned the Tageblatt for eight days. Krebs, Okrass, and another editor were also charged with libel. These events only fed the Nazis’ sense of persecution. And they helped the movement retain, as it had tried from the start of the affair, the language of victimhood and moral authority. As the Tageblatt had written in its

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96 “Wie es zur Tat kam,” Hamburger Tageblatt, October 8, 1931.
first story on the shooting, “We neither minimize the deed, nor do we want to take responsibility away from the perpetrator. But it appears to us that the main guilty parties can be found among those who through the promotion of denunciation within police ranks laid the spiritual foundations for the act.”

Nazi reporting on the Pohl case showed another pattern to the Party’s narrative of violence: its press organs denounced acts of violence even as they tried to defend the perpetrators. They placed blame not on the perpetrators of violence, but on the forces that supposedly drove them to do so. Above all, they sought to reverse the positions of victim and perpetrator, so aggressors should be pitied for having no other avenues of self-defense than violence.

As was the case with the Battle of Sternschanze, the Nazi narrative of the Pohl trial found surprising resonance outside NSDAP circles. In this case, the court found Pohl sympathetic as well: though it found him guilty of attempted murder, the two-year sentence was less than half that recommended by the prosecutor. Danner complained later that the judge had found Pohl hot-headed but largely sympathetic figure: it was “understandable,” the judge said, that Pohl felt persecuted by spies among the police; his “impudence” [Frechheit] before the court was “a cry for attention” [Geltungsbedürfnis]. In general the judge found Pohl “at times short-tempered, but otherwise a pleasant, capable, and helpful person” whose wild pronouncements should not be taken seriously.

The verdict took a paternal tone, and portrayed Pohl as a “Kindskopf” whose confusion

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98 “Der Fall Pohl,” Hamburger Tageblatt, March 15, 1931.
99 Danner, 218.
and fear of “appearing unmanly” had led him to more belligerent actions than he could be blamed for, both in Lassally’s office and before the court.\textsuperscript{100}

The bourgeois papers’ coverage was also suffused with pity for a wayward youth. The \textit{Fremdenblatt} agreed that the young Pohl was from an upstanding family and of heretofore of good character.\textsuperscript{101} While it could not condone his “senseless deed,”\textsuperscript{102} it included a lengthy account from his sister, who explained that Pohl’s psychic distress came from the loss of his merchant employment, during which he felt fulfilled both in his work and through the company of a male companion who “was a source of true friendship and support.”\textsuperscript{103} The paper made no comment as to whether the relationship crossed the line into sexual intimacy, and instead portrayed it in the honored tradition of German male friendship. The relationship was of such emotional comfort to Pohl that its loss, combined with the loss of his job, drove him to drink and to a childlike desire for approval from acquaintances who spoke knowingly of political matters. The \textit{Fremdenblatt} also reported the assessment of Pohl’s landlady: he was “harmless, a good person… who was entirely trusting – like a big child.”\textsuperscript{104}

Nazi narratives of innocent and fundamentally good-hearted youths who fell into criminality resonated outside the NSDAP because of their appeal to middle-class values of respectability and family. And though Pohl himself was not a stormtrooper, the public coverage of the trail was often so confused on that point that most readers considered him a representative of the type of young man the SA attracted. In any case, he was cast from

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\item \textsuperscript{100} Quoted in Danner, 219-220.
\item \textsuperscript{101} See, for example, “Der Schuss auf den Regierungsrat,” \textit{Hamburger Fremdenblatt}, March 14, 1931.
\item \textsuperscript{102} “Das Attentat im Polizeipräsidium. Der Angeklagte schildert die Tat,” \textit{Hamburger Fremdenblatt}, September 29, 1931.
\item \textsuperscript{103} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{104} Ibid.
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the same mold as were the stormtroopers, and thus could both Nazi and non-Nazi papers defend him through use of the same narrative tropes. The more the image of wayward nationalist youths could be established in the public mind, the more likely the stormtroopers’ deeds could be justified or forgiven. When taken in by those men already in the SA, the coverage also taught that violence would be forgiven if directed at proper targets. The Nazi narrative therefore encouraged a spiraling cycle of violence.

In the darkness of an early Sunday morning, at half past midnight on March 15, 1931, the bus from Zollenspieker to Hamburg stopped to pick up three young passengers in Bergedorf. They climbed in without attracting notice, and they took their seats in silence. But as the bus drove slowly through the deserted small-town streets leading to the big city, the three suddenly stood, pulled out revolvers, and commanded the stunned passengers to put their hands in the air. One turned his gun on the driver and demanded the bus stop. The other two moved directly to a pair of middle-aged men and demanded of one: “Are you the Communist leader Andre?”

“No,” the man replied, “I’m Henning.” It was a case of mistaken identity: both Andre and Henning were Communist members of the Bürgerschaft. But Andre was also a founder of the Red Front Fighters Brigade, who had organized many attacks on NSDAP meetings and SA marches. These included, the Nazis claimed, an attack on a January meeting in Geesthacht, a town near Bergedorf that was known as a socialist stronghold. Andre was thus among the stormtroopers’ most hated enemies.

“You’re the one we’re looking for,” one of the youths replied, rudely using the informal address to the older man. Henning clutched at his briefcase, attempting to
produce his papers and prove his identity. Shots rang out in the crowded bus. They tore through Henning’s briefcase and then through his chest. Other bullets hit a schoolteacher in the leg. Henning’s traveling companion was wounded as well. Henning died in his seat.

The three youths fled from the bus and disappeared in the dark, but they were caught in time for the Monday papers to proclaim their arrests for this “cold-blooded political murder.”105 All three were stormtroopers. Here was another case in which the stormtroopers had overstepped the bounds of legitimate self-defense. They had attacked a member of the city parliament – an older man, and a non-combatant. They had done so with no overt provocation, and with the intention of stealing his briefcase so as to make off with “important political materials” that might be inside.106 Their wild actions had threatened another city employee – the bus driver – and had wounded an innocent female passenger. The attack was a breach of peace that was condemned by all political parties, including the NSDAP. But the shooting also provoked retaliatory violence from the Communists, which outraged Hamburg’s citizens and created sympathy for the Nazis.

The Hamburg Bürgerschaft met on March 18th to discuss this most recent wave of violence. Before the debate began, Communist members leapt from their seats and, crying “Throw the murderers out!”, assaulted the two NSDAP delegates.107 As members of the DNVP tried to separate the combatants, Communist reinforcements stormed into the room and engulfed all on the right side of the room in “senseless rage” [ohnmächtiger

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107 “Tumult in der Hamburger Bürgerschaft,” *Hamburger Echo*, March 19, 1931. There were three Nazi delegates at the time; one had not yet arrived in the hall when the attack commenced.
The Nazis were left with “bloody wounds”; one DNVP delegate was trampled and his glasses shattered, and several members of other parties received light injuries. This assault was not the only one that week on National Socialists – Communist forces besieged SA pubs across the city in the coming days – but it was an unprecedented breach of political norms for having taken place in parliament itself.

Meanwhile, the SA was again banned. Communist violence therefore once again engendered sympathy for the SA in newspaper accounts of the violent week. The Fremdenblatt reminded its readers that “it is essential that the deed [Henning’s murder] be considered in light of a certain political context – specifically, the Communist attack on a national socialist meeting in Geesthacht on January 28.”

Even the Echo agreed, though its writers presented the case as the problem of mutually escalating rhetoric of the NSDAP and KPD. As it observed shortly after the murder:

The cold-blooded and premeditated assassinations [Attentate] on Regierungsrat Lassally and the Communist Henning are the consequences of a months-long mutual incitement of murderous hatred. And if the national socialists have by now reached the high point of hatred, it must not be overlooked that the same hatred is also preached in the Communist press and from Communist speakers. Every act of bloodshed by one side is answered immediately by cries of revenge from the other side; and since cries of revenge soon lead to acts of revenge, the last weeks have seen ever-escalating conflict. Yesterday’s articles in the Hamburger Volkszeitung were a singular call for unmeasured repayment [Vergeltung] for the deed against Henning; the shots on an Altona Nazilokal on Sunday night were obviously a down payment.

The Echo’s assessment was correct. Both sides employed escalating violent rhetoric that prompted attacks on the other faction.

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108 Ibid.
109 Hamburger Fremdenblatt, March 16, 1931.
110 “Staatsgewalt gegen Mordterror,” Hamburger Echo, March 17, 1931.
The Henning murder came to trial in November 1931, shortly after Pohl’s conviction. The Tageblatt again tried to minimize the incident – but this time, it emphasized the SA’s rejection of the defendants. One of the shooters admitted under questioning by “the Communist lawyer Hergewith” that the SA’s own regulations banned the carrying of weapons. “The ban,” he testified, “holds for SA men as well as for Party members; we may not carry weapons either while on duty or while walking the streets. Whoever violates this ban will be expelled without exception.”111 When Hergewith suggested that the NSDAP had in fact furnished the gun used in the shooting, the defense lawyer rejected the insinuation as “an attempt to transform the courtroom into a place of political confrontation.” “It cannot be the case,” he insisted, “that this trial be turned into an anti-National Socialist trial.”112 The Tageblatt emphasized these passages from the trial in order to distance the movement from the trio’s deed. The paper also included all the exculpatory details that an observer of Nazi trials could by this time expect. The trio’s judgment was impaired by alcohol. Two came from good families. The other was an orphan and therefore to be pitied. As even the Echo conceded, he lived in a men’s home in the Salvation Army [Heilsarmee] and was so poor that he survived by begging or collecting clothes for resale. His own clothes were tattered and dilapidated, until he joined the SA and received a sharp new uniform that he thereafter wore as street clothes.113 All three assailants had endured years of Communist attacks, which the Tageblatt emphasized in order to justify their need to attack back. The murder, the paper

111 “Der Henning-Prozess,” Hamburger Tageblatt, November 4, 1931.
112 Ibid
113 “Wer ist Höckmair?” Hamburger Echo, March 17, 1931.
claimed, resulted from the Communists’ slogan: “Smash the Fascists wherever you find them”\(^\text{114}\)

Other newspapers again agreed with many elements of the exculpatory narrative, but press coverage and public perception of the Hamburg SA in the fall of 1931 was generally negative. In addition to the two trials, the SA served fresh provocations after Nazi victories in the September elections. This election broke for good the power of the Weimar coalition across Germany. The national socialist vote was rising, and it led to a sense of inevitable victory within Nazi ranks – so long as the party could keep the violent dynamism of the SA under control.

In 1932, the Republic’s final year, the SA and the NSDAP press worked together to spread narratives of violence that had met with success in 1930 and 1931. After the embarrassments of the previous year, the SA in 1932 kept its party soldiers under tight control. Though the tight leash at times led to resentment and resistance to the “legality course” within SA ranks, no serious resistance to Party leadership emerged in SA ranks after the quelling of Walter Stennes’ revolt of the Berlin SA in 1931.\(^\text{115}\) And even this uprising had never reached Hamburg. The political wing’s restraint of the SA was still a constant low-level struggle, but it proved its long-term success as the year progressed.

In the months preceding the crucial April 1932 elections for Reich president, in which Hitler and Thälmann challenged Hindenburg, the Hamburg SA provoked Communist violence through supposedly peaceful political performances. On February 14\(^{\text{th}}\), Communists shot and killed Heinrich Heissinger, a stormtrooper who was distributing pamphlets on a street corner. It was 10:30 on a Sunday morning; the act was

\(^{114}\) “Die Schuesse auf Henning,” *Hamburger Tageblatt*, November 4, 1931.

\(^{115}\) For the Stennes Revolt and its aftermath, see Bessel, *Political Violence*, 62-65; Longerich 103-109.
an extreme breach of public order and the Christian Sabbath.116 Two weeks later, only a few days after Heissinger’s funeral, the police fatally shot SS-Mann Henry Kobert while they tried to break up a streetfight. The Nazi press used the event to decry the Republic’s lack of control of the streets, and its “unbelievable behavior” toward the persecuted Nazis.117 Then, in the tense weeks before the April election, after the SA marched with over 5000 men through the center of the city. The Communists retaliated by killing two stormtroopers on election day, another Sunday. But, as in 1930, martyrdom benefited the movement. The SA again held elaborate and highly publicized funerals that brought together the families of the deceased, prompted allied pastors to call for God to bless the fighting stormtroopers, and allowed the Nazi press to vilify the Communists and the Republic’s increasingly ineffective security organs. In response to these attacks, and similar ones across Germany that pushed the state government to appeal for Berlin’s assistance, the Republic again banned the SA and SS through an Emergency Decree on April 13.118 National Socialists reflexively decried the “illegal robbery of freedom” [widerrechtliche Freiheitsberaubung] of Böckenhauer and other SA leaders whom police had arrested by bursting through the windows of the Party headquarters on Moorweidenstrasse.119 But the one-sidedness of the ban was criticized even beyond their circles. The Fremdenblatt disagreed with the police action as well, on the grounds that it unfairly singled out one faction, who in any case was already too strong to be crushed by

118 “Die Notverordnung zur Knebung des freiheitlichen Deutchlands,” Hamburger Tageblatt, April 14, 1932. See also Mommsen, 419.
simple prohibition. The paper thought that a ban at this late date would only generate more sympathy for the SA – especially given the specific circumstances that caused the ban, in which the stormtroopers had been the immediate victims of others’ violence.

The SPD tried to fight this narrative by highlighting acts of SA aggression, such as a “planned ambush on a Republican” that happened the same day as Heissinger’s death. The Echo’s story of this case spoke to the falsity of the stormtroopers’ claims of innocence:

The Nazis and their press still seek to create the impression, when reporting on fights and confrontations with political opponents, that the national socialists are the most peaceful people in the world, and that it’s always the other side that had provoked a confrontation. How little these claims speak to the facts is shown yet again by an incident last Friday on Stresemanstrasse, near the Nazilokal von Schulz.

The attack in question – in which seven SA men ambushed a lone Republican in his apartment building – was, the Echo claimed, “characteristic of national socialist fighting methods. They plan in advance attacks against Republicans; but in public they play the innocents.” By the spring of 1932, the Echo featured as many stories of Nazi violence as the Tageblatt ran of Nazi victimization. It also attacked the stormtroopers’ myths about themselves and their leaders. In February, the paper’s Sunday magazine, the Echo der Woche, ran prominently a photo of Karl Kaufmann. He looked young and strong in a uniform bedecked with medals, but the article challenged his “upstanding and honorable” image:

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120 Swett agreed with this contemporary assessment based on her reading of the same dynamic in Berlin. “If,” she wrote “the ban had been enacted earlier or had lasted longer, the SA might have experienced the same drop-off in participation that the RFB experienced after 1929.” 291.
121 Fromme, 116; 115-120.
123 Ibid
Doesn’t he look good, this youth? Doesn’t the honorable light of a true German shine in his eyes? … How he wears so proudly on his pristine uniform the mark of honor of one wounded in the field! And next to it the Offizierflieger-Beobachtungsabzeichen, only won for special exertions against the enemy! Yes, a capable hero Pg. Kaufmann must be, who fears neither death nor the devil.

Who wouldn’t follow such a man, if he calls for a battle against lies and corruption, for the purity of the nation? He stands for the party of upstanding people!

But wait – a dark shadow falls on this innocent angel’s face:
_The whole story of medals and uniforms is a pure fraud!_ 124

The article cited the results of the Nazis’ own investigation into this matter from 1929, which concluded that the medals were not rightfully Kaufmann’s. In the same spirit, the _Echo_ attacked the SA’s national leaders throughout the spring, focusing on Hitler and Röhm. It sought to undermine Hitler’s war record with unfavorable reports from men who had supposedly served with him in the trenches. “Enough with Hitler’s hero-legend!” the paper cried. It charged that his Iron Cross had been unearned, that he had never served under fire as he had claimed (“He was not in the front ranks, but in the last.”), and that his comrades scorned him as a blowhard and a coward.125 The articles reproduced documents from Hitler’s regiment and photos of a villa in which he and other members of the regimental staff stayed. This proved, the _Echo_ claimed, that he lived a comfortable life with the officers while the enlisted men he purported now to represent died in the trenches.126 The story was meant to remind stormtroopers of the Stennes revolt, which had broken out when Stennes and his followers concluded that Hitler’s purchase of a Munich villa to serve as the party headquarters made a mockery of the SA’s sacrifices. The _Echo_ thus sought to exacerbate existing tensions between the

125 “Schluss mit der Heldenlegende um Hitler!” _Hamburger Echo_, March 9, 1932. See also “Kamerad Hitler,” _Echo der Woche_, February 28, 1932.
126 “Hitlers Kameraden – Dokumenten sprechen!” _Echo der Woche_, March 13, 1932.
economically downtrodden stormtrooper masses and the movement’s better-off leaders. The *Echo* also attacked Röhm’s sexuality. It dug back up the embarrassing letters the *Munich Observer* had published the previous year - “Captain Röhm’s love letters,” the *Echo* called them in a banner headline on its front page of March 9.127

Stormtroopers were, however, not easily convinced by argument or evidence. They instead believed what they chose about themselves and their movement, and they worked constantly to manufacture violent confrontations that would fit their preferred self-image and thus make their beliefs into reality. Living within the pattern of such violence, they could then dispute their opponents’ attempts at reasoned discourse with reference to violent events that supposedly proved the SA view correct. In 1932, some stormtroopers’ successful pursuit of martyrdom ensured that their surviving comrades remained firm in their self-conceptions. As long as the most prominent incidents of political violence featured stormtrooper martyrs, not murderers, the SA’s claims to victimhood remained credible. Claims to victimhood at Communist hands also helped convince an increasing percentage of Hamburg’s bourgeois-conservative voters that the Nazis should receive a greater share of power in order to combat the threat of Communism. Though Hitler met with defeat in the presidential contest of March and April 1932, increasing political radicalization and sympathy from voters traditionally aligned with the DNVP and other bourgeois liberal parties soon delivered a Nazi landslide in the state and local elections of April 24.128 The election broke the power of the national SPD, in that a governing coalition could now for the first time be formed without it, and also fatally damaged the strength of the bourgeois parties. When Papen

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128 Mommsen, 411.
revoked the SA ban at the end of June 1932, as the price for Hitler’s toleration of his government, the SA returned to form. Papen had also dissolved the Reichstag as part of his debt to Hitler, thus granting the NSDAP a new election at a time when all its most effective political tools were again available.

“A whole city in unrest”: Altona Bloody Sunday and the Fall of the Republic

The major march and ensuing chaos that became known as “Altona Bloody Sunday” followed the model of the “Battle of Sternschanze” two years earlier. But if Sternschanze had resulted from a series of accidents and the SA’s poor planning, Bloody Sunday was a fulfillment of SA plans. The riot built on the cycle of escalating violence that the SA had promoted over the previous years, in which a series of ever-larger marches and increasingly frequent public demonstrations raised the tenor of political conflict and encouraged violent attacks on all sides. In June and July 1932, the SA targeted Altona with this tactic. After June 15, when the ban on uniformed marches and the operation of SA-Heime was lifted, the Tageblatt called for a return of the SA to the streets. The SA held several marches that month in both friendly and contested neighborhoods, in order to “to show the ‘antifascists’ how much work was cut out for them.” During the largest, on July 9, two thousand stormtroopers from Altona, Bahrenfeld, and Othmarschen strode through parts of Altona. The Tageblatt claimed they were greeted with flowers from the residents but with stones from antifascists who had infiltrated the area from outside. The Echo saw the same events as part of the “daily terror” of the Nazis, which included “daily attacks by SA men, daily arrests of and daily

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129 Ibid, 439.
130 Hamburger Tageblatt, July 10, 1932.
use of weapons by National Socialists.”\textsuperscript{131} It mocked the SA’s claims to victimization as “impudence,” and noted that each SA march left a neighborhood devastated:

“Innumerable victims… the rubble of destroyed windows, attacks against police officers, a whole city in unrest – that is the experience of a single propaganda march, a single event of the national socialists.” The SA, as always, painted itself as the victim. Its peaceful marchers had been attacked by Communists and persecuted by police. During the July 9 march through Altona, “two SA men were arrested by [Altona police president Otto] Eggerstedt’s police because they tried to defend themselves. SA-men have to keep still when the reds come. If they are struck on one cheek, they are to turn the other.

[Kriegen Sie einen ans Ohr, halten sie das andere auch hin.] At least that’s what Herr Eggerstedt seems to intend.”\textsuperscript{132} The SA’s marches in June and early July were the prelude to the epic march planned for July 17. As that day grew nearer, the Tageblatt gave its readers the impression that the Altona Nazis and their sympathizers stood under constant attack from their political enemies. Incidents included random attacks,\textsuperscript{133} robberies and muggings,\textsuperscript{134} attacks on SA leafleters and newspaper stands,\textsuperscript{135} and – most threateningly – the “apartment terror” of home invasions and destruction of property by Communists.\textsuperscript{136} By early July, the Hamburger Tageblatt had concentrated its alarmism on reports of Altona in order to focus the stormtroopers’ energy on reclaiming this city on July 17.

\textsuperscript{131} “Neue Blutschuld der Nazi,” Hamburger Echo, July 9, 1932.
\textsuperscript{132} Hamburger Tageblatt, July 10, 1932.
\textsuperscript{133} Hamburger Tageblatt, June 3, 13, and 15, 1932.
\textsuperscript{134} Hamburger Tageblatt, June 3, 21, 22, and 23, 1932.
\textsuperscript{135} Hamburger Tageblatt, June 21, 1932.
\textsuperscript{136} Hamburger Tageblatt, June 8 and 12, 1932.
That morning, around 7000 uniformed stormtroopers gathered at the Altona Hauptbahnhof. Most had been driven in from across northern Germany, including Hamburg itself, but also the rural towns and cities of Schleswig-Holstein and Lower Saxony. The Communists massed their forces as well. The KPD not only mobilized its local fighting brigades, but called in recruits from outside regions as well. They armed their troops with truncheons and massed them in back alleys and the inner courtyards of buildings along the SA’s march route. (Image 6.2) The SA set off around 1 pm, marching east along the broad avenues that led to the workers’ neighborhoods over which the Nazis and Communists had fought so intensely. Police controlled the situation throughout most of the day by closing streets and ordering residents to close their shutters and vacate their balconies. But as reports accumulated of minor confrontations and fights between SA, Communists, police, and onlookers, the police slowly lost control.

By 4:55 pm, the first thousand SA men had passed into the smaller streets that housed numerous SA and KPD pubs. The onlookers who lined the sidewalks and loomed on balconies overhead grew more numerous and aggressive, for this was the heart of red Altona. Stormtroopers from Sturm 2/31 – a local unit led by one of the most aggressive and combative Nazis, Hubert Richter – began to taunt their neighbors. They for once enjoyed a sense of numerical superiority, knowing that thousands more SA men marched at their backs. The men of 2/31 broke into their most provocative songs, which included “We’ll hang Karl Liebknecht from a tree” and the infamous “When Jewish blood sprays from our knives,” which had been banned by the Hamburg SA.137 The crowd surged against the police barrier and replied with taunts of their own, including “Röhmlinge!,”

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137 For these and other taunts delivered by the Richter Sturm, see McElligott’s detailed account of the event in *Contested City*, 191-194.
SA march route on July 17, 1932. (Brown arrows) The 7,000-strong column ran into barricades that neighborhood Communists had erected (red areas), after which the organized march turned into a chaotic street battle that covered most of the map area. Most members of the SA marching column fled in two northwesterly directions. (Source: Helmut Heines, et. al. Bruno Tesch und Gefährten. Erinnerungen an den Altonaer Blutsonntag. Hamburg: VVN Schriftenreihe. 1983.)
the ever-reliable derision of SA masculinity. At the corner of Grosse Johannisstrasse and Schauenburgerstrasse, the verbal confrontation turned physical. Investigations could not establish what sparked the ensuing conflagration. But most reports – and the police at the time – blamed sniper fire from Communists on rooftops. The shots prompted the SA to break ranks and storm the apartment blocks, which in turn brought forth Communist brigades that had been waiting in courtyards and alleys. The combat spread throughout the neighborhood. Newspaper reports from the melee, regardless of party loyalty, described images of horror. A young boy alongside the march route collapsed suddenly, shot through the neck; “an ocean of blood and tears” filled the fatal intersection where the fight began; civilians fled directionless over shards of broken glass from shattered windows; police- and firemen dragged their wounded fellows to safety in retreat. Reports of the utter chaos reached as far as the United States, where Time magazine described how “the good citizens in Hamburg cafes looked up from their beer and ice cream” as the armored cars of the police sped through the streets, bugles trumpeted a call to arms that summoned both policemen to restore order as well as doctors to treat the hundreds of wounded.

The peak of the battle raged for thirty minutes, after which the SA retreated to the relative safety of its taverns and the escape routes of local train stations. The police,

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138 Primary documents concerning the investigation can be found in the Landesarchiv Schleswig-Holstein (LAS 352). Witness reports in this file are contradictory and confused. The best secondary source for the incident remains Leon Schirmann’s Altonaer Blutsonntag 17 Juli 1932. Dichtungen und Wahrheit (Hamburg: Ergebnisse Verlag, 1994), and Justizmanipulation, Der Altonaer Blutsonntag und die Altonaer bzw. Hamburger Justiz 1932-1994 (Berlin: Typographica Mitte, 1995).
139 See McElligott Contested City 194; Büttner and Jochmann, 30-31.
140 “Das Marsch durch Feuerhagel und Pistolenfalven,” Hamburger Tageblatt, July 18, 1932.
141 “Die Blutschuld,” Hamburger Echo, July 18, 1932.
143 “12 Tote, über 60 Verletzte in Altona,” Hamburger Fremdenblatt, July 18, 1932
however, remained embroiled in efforts to pacify the neighborhood until after midnight. They set loose on the attacking Communists and on panicked residents alike with escalating force. At first, officers loosed their truncheons to keep combatants separated. When this failed, a few fired warning shots to scare off the crowd. But the ongoing chaos convinced the officers that snipers, hiding on rooftops and windows and protected by the street’s Communist residents, were now targeting police officers. The police then laid waste to a widening area of the neighborhood with rifles, armored cars, and tear gas. In the end, 18 people died in the riot – most of whom, aside from one stormtrooper and several policemen, were civilians killed by police after the outbreak of conflict. The dead included a female National Socialist. At least a hundred were wounded.

The rioting of Altona Bloody Sunday shocked not only Hamburg, but also Germany at large. Most significantly, the events fit a key narrative that the Nazis had worked to establish: that the Republic and its guardians were unable to keep order in the face of Communist criminality, blood lust, “brother-hate and brother-murder.” The SA had provoked the situation, but the main battle had been between police and Communists. Conservatives in Berlin saw an opportunity to blame the SPD for the lack of order, and on July 20 Papen deposed the Otto Braun government in Prussia, which had formally been in charge of public order in Altona. The so-called “Prussian coup” was a deathblow to the Republic. In removing the SPD from power in Prussia, Papen denied the most powerful and diligent defenders of democracy their “Prussian bulwark.” The lack of resistance to the coup demoralized Social Democrats throughout Germany and showed that not only the SPD, but also democracy itself, possessed a waning hold on the

145 McElligott Contested City 194; and Schirmann Altonaer Blutsonntag, 116-123 and 152-153.
146 Hamburger Tageblatt, July 25, 1932.
electedate. With the coup, traditional conservatives further signaled their willingness to cooperate with the NSDAP, which they hoped would help smash the Communists before themselves being “tamed” or otherwise neutered.

The conservatives’ acceptance of Nazism – a radical, revolutionary movement with a self-admitted preference for violent political solutions – came from the Nazis’ repeated emphases on family, spirituality, and defense of the nation against enemies foreign and domestic. Even if conservatives held the SA’s methods in particular to be too brutal, they acknowledged that the stormtroopers at least fought for a noble cause. After Altona, Hamburg’s conservatives tried to persuade Papen to repeat his coup in Hamburg. Though these calls went unheeded, the Hamburg Senate reacted with self-defensiveness and a caution not to provoke the right, lest it bring down Berlin’s wrath.\textsuperscript{147} This attitude neutralized all efforts to control the SA. In a symbolically crucial concession to the hopes for cooperation between the conservatives and Nazis, the Senate lifted its ban of November 1930 on state officials’ joining the NSDAP and its organizations. Hamburg’s Nazi policemen were allowed to form a Comrades’ League of Nationalist Police Officers [\textit{Kameradschaftsbund nationaler Polizeibeamter}].\textsuperscript{148} This group’s very existence argued that the NSDAP was on the side of order against disorder.

Conservatives’ growing comfort with Nazism, their susceptibility to Nazi explanations for rising violence across the Republic, and their increasing acceptance of Nazis as defenders of the German state – if not a democratic German state – presaged the conservatives’ handing of power to the NSDAP in January 1933. After the coup and the elections of July, in which the Nazis continued their electoral ascent, some form of a

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[B147] Büttner and Jochmann, 31-32.
\item[B148] Büttner and Jochmann, 32; Longerich, 155.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Hitler government became likely. The only questions were whether the Nazis would govern as part of a coalition, and what the relative power of the Nazis would be within it. The July 31 Reichstag elections, held in Bloody Sunday’s immediate aftermath, brought the National Socialists their greatest success to date. (Image 6.3) On August 13, 1932, Papen and Hindenburg offered Hitler the post of Vice Chancellor in a coalition of the NSDAP and Center Party. Hitler refused, wanting nothing less than his own government.149 The Nazis were thus forced to continue politicking through the rest of 1932. They did so with considerable tension between the SA and the political leadership – the stormtroopers were growing sick of restraint, and the political wing had thrown away its chance at governing in favor of a maximalist solution that many supporters feared might never come. For the rest of the year, the movement stuck to its tested formula of provoking conflict while blaming violence on the left. The tactic kept the Senat cowed and embarrassed at its lack of control, while also allowing an outlet for SA violence.150 But the SA and NSDAP seemed about to fall off the delicate tightrope they had walked for the last three years. In August, the Echo hyped reports of a brewing mutiny within the Hamburg SA.151 It also revealed that the September death of an SA Man Balzer had resulted from his unwise decision to participate in SA duty while still recovering from surgery.152 Stormtroopers across the Republic also committed a series of murders that fall – in Hamburg, of a Reichsbanner man during an otherwise normal streetfight on October 31 – that reflected badly on the movement’s pretensions to legality.

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151 “Hamburger SA mutiert!” Hamburger Echo, August 24, 1932.
152 “Wir ‘Reichsbanner’ inszeniert werden,” Hamburger Echo, September 14, 1932.
NSDAP support by electoral district,
July 31, 1932
Hitler’s movement might have fallen to pieces had not the conservatives handed him power in January 1933. One recent historian of the SA, Thomas Grant, has found evidence of tensions that he believes would have led to collapse by late 1932. But in Hamburg the continual deaths of stormtroopers gave the local SA renewed strength. Balzer’s death, plus the martyrdom of two more SA men and one Nazi youth before the year was out, reinforced stormtroopers’ sense of besiegement and their willingness to sacrifice for Hitler’s power. If there had been an SA mutiny brewing, in Hamburg or in other German cities, it would have been because the political leadership was not radical enough. The conditions of urban combat had only intensified since Bloody Sunday. On November 8, the Echo barely found room to record an array of bloody headlines. One, “Nazi terror on the streets” sardonically described “examples of National Socialist ‘respectability.’” Another decried the stormtrooper desecration of Jewish graves that had taken place across the city “while at the same time 40 SS- and SA-men had to answer to the court for their terrible crime, a bombing attacks against the lives and property of Schleswig-Holstein’s citizens.” The third, and far largest, reported on this sensational story of the “Altona bomb trial.” The trial generated headlines for weeks until the defendants’ surprise acquittal on November 17. The SA felt itself vindicated, and it strained anew at its leash. The Party faced the choice of conforming to the wishes of its most violent members, and thereby losing the votes of less radical citizens, or repudiating

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violence and losing its reason for existence. The November 1932 elections brought this dilemma into focus. In Hamburg and nationally, the NSDAP for the first time in years failed to gain votes – indeed, its percentage of the vote fell in each of Hamburg’s electoral districts. (Image 6.4) The setback could have been a crushing blow, and could

Image 6.4

**NSDAP support by electoral district, November 6, 1932**

- **NSDAP support by district**
  - 0 – 5%
  - 6 – 10%
  - 11 – 20%
  - 21 – 30%
  - 31 – 40%
  - 41 – 50%

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320
have led to precisely the crackup that Grant sees as latent in SA ranks. On one Saturday evening Christmas festival, stormtroopers and Stahlhelmers came to blows, knives, and pistols. Five people had to be brought to the hospital.¹⁵⁷

But the loss of votes for the Nazis paradoxically brought their final victory. It convinced conservatives in Berlin that the time had come to make a deal. Now that Hitler’s movement had reached its high tide, they reasoned, he and his followers could be harnessed to the cause of responsible government. The conservatives thought that Hitler’s wilder tendencies could be contained in the long run; in the meantime, he had proven that he could keep under relative control a dedicated mass of soldiers who could be set loose on forces of disorder. This kind of thinking reflected the conservatives’ own nationalist and antisocialist biases, as well as the success of the Nazis’ sustained work in developing narratives of violence that aligned them with conservative ideology. Papen, Hindenburg, and the other men who forged the back-room deal with Hitler estimated that he would keep his SA under control lest it embarrass the party and lead to further loss of influence. Instead, after January 30, 1933, Hitler let the SA off its leash.

¹⁵⁷ “‘Deutsche Weihnacht’ in Altona. Stahlhelm und Nazis verpruegeln sich unterm Weihnachtsbaum,” Hamburger Echo, November 8, 1932.
CHAPTER VII

THE REWARDS OF VICTORY (1933-1934)

Images from the first days of the Nazi takeover are among the most iconic of the 1930s. The night of Hitler’s appointment, thousands of brown-shirted stormtroopers marched through the Brandenburg Gate, a procession that the Tageblatt described as “an ocean of torchlight.”¹ The paper depicted the march as the youthful SA’s reunion with its natural partners, the elder statesmen of the nationalist movement. These figures included President von Hindenburg, who shook Hitler’s hand and allowed himself to be “surrounded with fiery celebration,” as well as Stahlhelmers who supposedly now flocked to SA ranks.² In Hamburg, stormtroopers greeted news of Hitler’s ascension with an outpouring of pent-up emotion. Okrass described the scene as one that united the movement’s disparate elements in long sought-after validation of their common purpose. “For a few hours,” he wrote later, “[the men of the SA] ran through the streets as if delirious; they screamed in the Sturmlokalen and bellowed their excitement. They pounded tables together: SA, SS, the men of the Party, the women and girls together, Hitler-youths in between them.”³

The efficacy with which the Nazis secured their hold on power came in part from the leftist parties’ inability to work together in effective opposition. On January 31, for example, the SPD-led police refused to allow a major Communist demonstration against

¹ “Nation im Aufbruch,” Hamburger Tageblatt, January 31, 1933.
² Ibid.
³ Okrass, 301.
Hitler’s appointment. The KPD responded on February 5 with a reminder of the Echo’s call in April 1932 for voters to vote for Hindenburg. In light of current events, the KPD argued, the article was “a document of the SPD leadership’s historical crimes.” Two parties in such conflict could hardly form a united front against the rising fascist threat. Their discord hampered resistance and eased the Nazi task. Acts of resistance did occur, which the Nazis’ later chronicles dismissed in order to celebrate the “people’s victory.” But the triumphal statements in Nazi history books obscured the actual mechanism of the NSDAP seizure of power in the early months of 1933 – the brutal removal of the Party’s political enemies from public life.

From Hansstadt to Führerstadt: The Nazi Takeover of Hamburg

The story of the Nazis’ suppression of political enemies after Hitler’s appointment is well known. Both in Hamburg and nationally, Communist and Social Democratic leaders were attacked, rounded up, and held in improvised jails. Some were simply attacked in the streets. At first the actions were largely spontaneous, as stormtroopers realized that they could now strike back against their old enemies with little interference from either the police or the party’s political leadership. But while much SA violence in 1933 was personal and self-directed, other deeds like marches, public demonstrations, and tavern invasions served overtly political purposes. Stormtroopers across the Reich violently settled personal and political scores, committed acts of spontaneous

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5 Ibid, 14.
6 Ibid. 36-42.
antisemitism, and generally created an atmosphere of terror that discouraged anti-Nazi political mobilization.\(^7\)

Nazi media in Hamburg from early 1933 were of two minds concerning the party’s triumph. On the one hand, the *Tageblatt* and other press organs depicted the victory as the inevitable result of the Party’s superior ideas and the SA’s hard work. But Party propagandists also had to keep the stormtroopers primed for battle. The *Tageblatt* thus highlighted the continuing physical danger to SA men, who, it claimed, had been targeted by enemies grown more savage in defeat. Its early February issues featured stories of “Marxist terror-murders everywhere,”\(^8\) “new murders by the Commune,”\(^9\) and caches of weapons being hoarded by socialists in preparation for an uprising against the new regime.\(^10\) The SA responded to these rumors of terror with violence of their own. As the month went on, the *Echo* reported increasingly numerous confrontations across the country between the socialists and the SA.\(^11\) The *Echo* could have considered itself lucky to be able to report on these events at all – 28 social democratic papers had already been shut down on February 10.\(^12\) Though interdictions of opposition newspapers were inconsistent and patchwork, a growing number of publications fell under Nazi ban. On February 16, the SPD’s main national paper *Vorwärts*, which had just returned to

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\(^7\) Longerich, 169-179.

\(^8\) “Marxistische Terrormord überall,” *Hamburger Tageblatt*, February 2, 1933.


\(^12\) “28 sozialdemokratische Zeitungen verboten,” *Hamburger Echo*, February 11, 1933.
publication after an earlier ban, was again prohibited. Almost 30 other papers in cities from Kiel to Koblenz were shut down as well. But there was not yet a blanket ban on the socialist and Communist press, nor on these parties’ political activities. Additionally, Hitler and Röhm tried still to keep the SA in check – an increasingly difficult task now that the SA had, in Longerich’s phrase, “tasted blood.”

On February 19, the Reichsbanner marched through Hamburg in one of its last public displays. The Echo reported “armed stormtroopers on every corner,” who watched the march’s progress “with provocative intent, approaching the column with visible weapons.” While the march itself proceeded peacefully, smaller groups of Reichsbanner men were afterwards attacked by SA men armed with daggers and pistols. Yet the Tageblatt continued to insist that the stormtroopers were the ones under siege. In some ways, they were. A Communist assault on the Hotel Adler had killed two people on February 21. Stormtroopers had heard warnings of potential “terror” attacks against themselves, their homes, and their families. The SA continued its own misdeeds, including a massive SA march in Hamburg and Altona on February 26, during which stormtroopers attacked political opponents and demolished at least one SPD tavern. But the provocation was obscured by the fatal shooting that same day of a Hitler Youth, Otto Blöcker, outside the Nazi tavern “Falkenburg,” in the quiet bourgeois neighborhood of Hoheluft. On February 27, Communists shot and killed another SA man, the final stormtrooper martyr of the Hamburg Kampfzeit. The murders, especially the killing of a child, Blöcker, allowed once again the Nazi and bourgeois press to portray the KPD as villains. The burning of the Reichstag that same day was thus the national confirmation

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13 Longerich, 166.
of what stormtroopers already believed on a local level: that, as Hitler had claimed in his speech on the fire, Communists threatened the nation with constant “terror.” The passage of the Law “for the Protection of the People and State” the next day gave Hitler unchecked power to unleash the SA on political enemies and to force the cooperation of local security forces still under republican control. In Hamburg, the fear of Communist criminality and “terror” was heightened by the murder on February 28 of a policeman during a fight with KPD elements. Combined with the KPD’s alleged role in the Reichstag fire, this killing seemed to justify severe measures. Even some non-Nazi officials acquiesced. Over the next several days, SPD Senator and Police President Adolph Schönfelder banned all communist demonstrations, occupied the party headquarters, and arrested 75 to 100 leading Communists. The SA leadership concluded that Communists who had escaped these raids would continue to resist from hiding, and it issued orders warning about Communist “preparation for bomb attacks” on stormtrooper homes. For its part, the SPD and its Reichsbanner tried to keep a public presence without provoking the new regime. They moved the Echo’s editorial office to Schleswig Holstein, and cancelled a large rally on March 3 in order not to conflict with a Hitler appearance that same day. These efforts, however, were in vain. On March 3, the Echo was banned by joint order of the national government and the Hamburg Senate. Its final issue warned against the “lying propaganda” circulated by the National Socialists against the Republic’s leading supporters. But after the Echo’s ban, no paper in Hamburg remained to counter Nazi lies. The only media organs that were allowed to publish, aside

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17 Bruhns et al., 24. and Garbe in Schmid, 519.
18 StAH B262 Gruppenbefehl Nr. 2 of 1 March 1933
19 Büttner in Schmid, 61.
from the Nazis’ own propaganda press, were Conservative and National-Liberal papers whose coverage of the political scene had long been compromised by their acceptance of key Nazi narratives.

These remaining newspapers reported tales of ongoing threat almost every day. Such stories primed the men of the SA to suppress political opponents in preparation for a new national election on March 5, which Hitler had called in hopes of gaining enough support to push his Enabling Act through the Reichstag. The national and local atmospheres of emergency allowed the NSDAP – working through both legal and illegal means – to remove from the streets the highest-ranking members of the KPD, as well as their election posters, newspapers, pamphlets, and most other means of spreading their political message and rallying its despairing supporters. While SPD delegates were not arrested en mass like the Communists, the loss of their news media, their canceling of large public demonstrations, and their refusal to engage in their own violent resistance left the socialists with few options.

In the elections of early March, both the national ones on March 5 and the state elections three days later, the NSDAP displayed its continuity with traditional elements of the “national front” across the center-right. The Party even picked a non-Nazi candidate for mayor – Carl Vincent Krogmann, whose venerable merchant lineage granted him instant respectability among Hamburg’s elite bourgeois circles. Deputy Mayor Wilhelm Burchard-Motz came from the same class: his father had been a patrician candidate for mayor during the imperial years. Neither man belonged to the NSDAP; their promotion as the leading candidates of the “national front” secured a new alliance with the DNVP, DVP, and Deutsche Staatspartei (DStP) that gave the Nazis control of

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20 Büttner in Schmid, 60-64.
Hamburg’s government. (Table 7.0) In the Bürgerschaft’s first meeting after the elections, this nationalist coalition held 79 of 160 seats. The 26 Communist seats were empty, their delegates either under arrest or in hiding. These members’ forced absence gave the NSDAP coalition a bare majority, and Hamburg’s republican form of government – among Germany’s oldest and most revered democratic institutions – perished. The Free and Hanseatic city became a “Führerstadt.”

Image 7.1:
Election results by political party, March 5, 1933

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Votes</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Comparison to 11.6.32 election</th>
<th>National percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NSDAP</td>
<td>317,783</td>
<td>38.9</td>
<td>+ 11.7%</td>
<td>43.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPD</td>
<td>220,570</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>– 1.7%</td>
<td>18.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KPD</td>
<td>144,095</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>– 4.3%</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DNVP</td>
<td>65,365</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>– 1.3%</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DStP</td>
<td>28,450</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>– 1.9%</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DVP</td>
<td>25,199</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>– 0.9%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Center</td>
<td>15,665</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>+ 0.1%</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other parties</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The NSDAP “seizure of power” came about from a series of back-room calculations made by conservative elites in Berlin and their counterparts in Hamburg. The mood inside the Rathaus on March 8, the day of the new government’s swearing in, was subdued and dry. The Nazis’ coalition partners were as yet unaware of the scale of political change about to be unleashed. But outside the Rathaus gathered thousands of Nazi supporters: uniformed stormtroopers, members of the Stahlhelm and other rightist paramilitary groups, nationalist policemen and civil servants, and thousands of citizens

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21 For the early details of this process, see Frank Bajohr’s “Die Zustimmungsdiktatur. Grundzüge nationalsozialistischer Herrschaft in Hamburg,” in Schmid, 69-77; also for the entire Third Reich Uwe Lohalm’s “’Modell Hamburg’ Von Stadtstaat zum Reichsgau” in Schmid, 122-153.
22 From Bruhns et al., 28. Shaded rows represent members of the Nazi coalition.
who were fed up with the economic misery, political strife, and chaos of the republic. As a giant swastika flag was raised over the Rathausmarkt – which a few weeks later was renamed Adolf Hitler Platz – thousands of stormtroopers cheered their moment of victory. It was, they believed, the result of their long, hard slog through the past few years’ continual political violence. Just as soldiers in the trenches of the First World War were largely unaware of the diplomatic negotiations surrounding the 1918 ceasefire, so were the stormtroopers ignorant of political calculations made outside their presence. Instead, they dwelled on their daily struggles, personal concerns, and expectations of future reward for their current service. In 1933, the stormtroopers interpreted the takeover of power as the fruit of their own labors. And they now presented the bill for their services.

“Nothing for Ourselves”?: The Stormtroopers Seek Reward

During the Kampfzeit, SA writers and speakers generally avoided discussing individual stormtroopers’ demands. Their rhetoric focused instead on the stormtrooper’s sacrifice, self-denial, and willingness to martyr himself for national renewal. Befitting their communitarian pretensions, stormtroopers claimed to struggle not for personal gain, but rather for the good of the Volk. Böckenhauer’s orders of the day for March 7, 1933 employed the SA’s rhetoric self-denial when it described the group as having operated

Always in the mindset: nothing for ourselves, but everything for our poor, persecuted people and nation [armes, gequältes Volk und Vaterland]. The only thanks we enjoy for our fighting operations is the consciousness to have faithfully executed our duty and have made the way clear for our Führer Adolf Hitler to rebuild Germany.23

But once the SA had helped the Party into political power, the stormtroopers believed that the time for their reward had come. Despite the claim that the National Socialist revolution was for the renewal of all the people, most stormtroopers felt that their service in the movement’s political trenches should grant priority to their own desires.

Stormtroopers’ demands on the new Nazi state fell into three broad categories: public displays of appreciation, access to jobs and increased economic stability, and acknowledgement of the individual stormtrooper’s position of authority in both public and private life. To be sure, these demands overlapped in many ways. They also corresponded fairly well – at least in theory – to the Party’s goal of securing a new political order. Insofar as the SA men asked to be rewarded with jobs, state positions, and public acclaim, the Party found it easy in principle to satisfy them. But as 1933 wore on, the stormtroopers grew constantly more numerous, more confident, and more demanding. They needed constant validation and frequent economic assistance, they were often difficult to placate, and they refused to rein in their often-violent assertions of authority in both political and private realms. These character traits laid the seeds of future conflict between the SA and NSDAP, even while it improved many stormtroopers’ personal economic positions.

The stormtroopers’ first demand was for the recognition of their struggles and sacrifices. This the Party found relatively easy to fulfill. NSDAP politics already featured mass public gatherings that were centered on the SA. Now that the Party controlled the state, the SA could assemble wherever it chose. Their gatherings now included symbolic takeovers of key public spaces, the rallies outside the Rathaus in Hamburg and Altona in
early March,\textsuperscript{24} and the subsequent occupation of trade union buildings.\textsuperscript{25} But these gatherings, while similar in outer form and appearance to those held before the takeover, now had the advantage of demonstrating that the new regime was backed by a paramilitary army. They also demonstrated that the stormtrooper was now the iconic hero of the state. His efforts, both past and present, were to be Germany’s new model of heroism and public service.

Public veneration of the SA was also generated by segments of society that were interested in showing common cause with the new regime. Tügel and the other members of Hamburg’s conservative Lutheran circles waxed poetic during the Easter season, when Christian images of blood sacrifice and spiritual renewal were generally emphasized. Tügel’s sermon to fallen soldiers during that year’s ceremonies for war dead linked national martyrdom to Jesus’ sacrifice and God’s plan for Germany. It also implicitly linked the martyrs of the war to the stormtroopers’ sacrifice, through which Tügel justified the national socialist revolution as God’s work.\textsuperscript{26} Tügel worked with SA leaders to ensure that Lutheran churches throughout the city were filled with stormtroopers during Holy Week in April. He held special Sunday ceremonies in the Michaeliskirche, named for the archangel commander of God’s armies who served as the patron saint of soldiers, of police officers, and of Germany itself. Visitors to the church, Hamburg’s most prominent point of navigation and the center of its religious life, passed under a bronze statue that depicts Michael’s victory over the devil. Tügel welcomed the stormtroopers to this key symbolic site, where they celebrated the Führer’s birthday and

\textsuperscript{24}“Hitlerfahnen über Altona,” \textit{Hamburger Tageblatt}, March 7, 1933.
\textsuperscript{25}“Hamburgs Gewerkschaftshause besetzt,” \textit{Hamburger Tageblatt}, May 2, 1933.
\textsuperscript{26}“Das graue Herr,” \textit{Das evangelische Hamburg}, April 1, 1933. Jg. 27, Nr 7: 93-94.
promoted an aid drive to help children in the German borderlands.\textsuperscript{27} SA leaders ensured stormtrooper attendance by clearing SA schedules of Sunday activities, so that the men could rejuvenate their strength through participation in religious services.\textsuperscript{28} The stormtroopers should, like the Apostles receiving the Holy Spirit, prepare for a new phase of missionary activity, in which they would spread the gospel of National Socialism. The \textit{Tageblatt} made similar words and deeds known throughout the city. Its stories about Easter exhorted readers to lower their egos and bask in the glory of unity with God and the state\textsuperscript{29} – which, one of Tügel’s allies later reminded local Lutheran pastors, was created by God and was thus owed similar levels of allegiance.\textsuperscript{30} The \textit{Tageblatt} also showcased photographs of stormtroopers in formation leaving church, having just been blessed by the pastors.\textsuperscript{31} These stories and images certified the SA’s sanction by Hamburg’s religious powers, and they lionized the stormtroopers as agents of God.

Tribute took place not only in the \textit{Tageblatt}, but also in a growing segment of the publishing industry that was dedicated to producing books for the Nazi consumer. In the regime’s first years, an array of literature by and about stormtroopers appeared. Wilfrid Bade, a leading Nazi writer and the author of two stormtrooper novels, declared that “a new Germany needs new authors,” hinting that the best of this new breed could be found in the SA.\textsuperscript{32} The German people, he said, “want to hear stories of those men who have been 10 years in the SA… bulletins \textit{Tatsachenberichte} of blood and of the heart, which we will use to raise \textit{erziehen} the German people anew, to win back for them not only

\textsuperscript{27} StAH B184f Tagesbefehl of April 21, 1933.
\textsuperscript{28} StAH B184b Gruppenführer Nordsee to Böckenhauer, May 1, 1933.
\textsuperscript{29} “Ostern” and “Deutscher Ostergläube,” \textit{Hamburger Tageblatt}, April 16, 1933.
\textsuperscript{31} \textit{Hamburger Tageblatt}, April 20, 1933.
\textsuperscript{32} Wilfrid Bade, \textit{Kulturpolitische Aufgaben der deutschen Presse} (Berlin: Junker und Dünnebaur, 1933), 15.
the political realm and the state, but also culture and Volksstum." For the next two years, Nazi newspapers throughout the country trumpeted Bade’s call in a variety of articles on party ideology and in reviews and excerpts of Nazi novels. One column in the Tageblatt claimed that Nazi literature meant stormtrooper literature:

> Only in works like these can it be made clear what we mean when we greet with ‘Heil Hitler,’ and what we call out, and what we confess, and what our Führer challenges us to accomplish in the name of the brown fighters left behind on the field, when we sing the song of the SA, the song of Horst Wessel. Only books in which this spirit lives can be called National Socialist.

These works had obvious propaganda value to the Party, as did the more straightforward histories of the Hamburg Party and SA that were published during this time. But stormtrooper literature also filled another purpose: to highlight the creative role of men heretofore famed only for their thuggery. Despite this stereotype - which in most cases was still true - some stormtroopers had produced works of literature, verse, and lyric. Many of the most famous Kampfzeit figures were aspiring writers, including Wessel, Conn, and Kessler, the Hamburg SA-Mann who penned two stormtrooper novellas as he lay dying of his wounds in 1930. Others wrote plays celebrating the SA, SS, and famous figures out of the German past, although these were rarely performed. As the Nazi state established itself, stormtroopers gained increased access to publishing houses.

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33 Ibid. 30. See also Christian Härtel’s Stromlinien. Wilfrid Bade. Eine Karriere im Dritten Reich (Berlin: be.bra wissenschaft verlag, 2004), 47-51.
36 National Archives Captured German Records Group, A3341 SA Kartei 089A. Several documents reference the novellas existence; the texts themselves, however, are unfortunately lost.
37 StAH B212.2 Böckenhauer letter of May 16, 1933; Kampfbund für Deutsche Kultur letter of August 18, 1933; Standarte 15 letter to Untergruppe Hamburg of September 6, 1933.
The first unknown stormtrooper novel had appeared in 1932. More were published each year after that, until by 1936 over a dozen were in print, heavily promoted in Nazi newspapers and publishers’ catalogues.\(^{38}\) Bookstores held promotions with uniformed stormtroopers on site to encourage sales. Some publishers promised – not always truthfully – to donate a part of the proceeds to the SA.\(^{39}\) Other publishers gave free copies of their stormtrooper works to high-ranking SA leaders, who offered discounted copies to their men.\(^{40}\)

The proliferation of stormtrooper literature in the form of adventure stories helped the Party promote a wholesome image of SA heroism. The stormtroopers themselves wished to see on paper the self-image they had long nurtured. And publishers wanted to tap a new market both within the SA and among the sympathetic public. Indeed, the initiative for publication often came not from the Propaganda Ministry, but from authors and publishers who saw a chance to earn easy money from a reading public hungry for Nazi adventures. Bade’s *SA erobert Berlin* ran serially in over 70 newspapers. Its popularity prompted its publication as a book a year later and encouraged further accounts.\(^{41}\) Bade’s work had sold over 60,000 copies by 1938.\(^{42}\) Teachers read it aloud to students. Some readers mistook its fictitious hero for a real person and sent postcard greetings to the publisher.\(^{43}\) Others wrote Bade to request the work’s translation into local

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38 See for example the glowing review of *Gotthard Kraft* in the August 14, 1932 *Hamburger Tageblatt* “Die Geschichte des unbekannten SA-Mannes,” in which a Nazi member of parliament describes it as the best of the “innumerable books of the movement [that] have gone through my hands.”

39 The Hamburg publishing firm Quitmann & Lindermann used both these techniques in promoting the 1933 work *Das Schicksalbuch des deutschen Volkes.* National Archives Captured German Records Group, A3341 SA Kartei 039.


41 Härtel, 104.

42 Ibid, 110 and 265.

dialects such as Plattdeutsch. Stormtrooper literature was thus a nexus at which the SA men’s egoistic idealism, the publishers’ profit motive, the Party’s propaganda agenda, and the public’s interest in the national socialist political and cultural revolution all met.

Similar interactions took place in other intellectual and cultural realms, including the stormtroopers’ enthusiastic participation in the American psychologist Theodore Abel’s “Why I became a national socialist” psychological study, as well as composition by civilians of songs honoring the Hamburg SA.

These acts established enduring structures of memory. The SA took a more literal approach to this project as well. Having already re-named the Rathausmarkt for Hitler, the Hamburg NSADP established several memorials to fallen stormtroopers. The most prominent was on the corner where Dreckmann died. After lengthy negotiations over how to memorialize this event, an elaborate ceremony in January 1934 dedicated a plaque at the fatal corner and transformed Susannenstrasse into Heinrich Dreckmannstrasse.

For a time, an SA honor guard kept watch over the site. Dreckmann and his fellow martyrs from the SA, SS, and HJ were also to be interned in a common grave site at the Ohlsdorf cemetery, though the plan came to naught at the objections of Blöcker’s parents, who wanted their son to remain in the family plot. At the same time, however, three fallen stormtroopers – Dreckmann, Brands, and Hahn – had ships named after them.

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44 Ibid., 108. Bade declined this invitation despite his empathy for its goals. He did not wish to open himself to criticism that he was using his position in the Ministry to broaden his publishing resume and enrich his bank account – charges of which he was not entirely innocent. Härtel 123-125.
45 StAH B197 Hamburger Tageblatt to Untergruppe Hansa letter of May 24, 1933.
46 StAH B172 letter of Sturmführer 1/76 to the Hamburg Senat of May 29, 1933; Sturmhauptführer 1/464 letters of January 1, 1934.
47 StAH B175 letter of Präses der Baubehörde to Untergruppe Hamburg, August 22, 1933.; letter of Standartenführer Schorman to Baubehörde of September 19, 1933.; letter of HJ Oberbann Hamburg to Schorman, of October 7, 1933.
48 StAH B172 letter of Standartenführer Schorman to Hochbahn Aktionengesellschaft, August 3, 1933; Hochbahn to Schorman August 7, 1933.
Stormtrooper commemorations were not just symbolic. In addition to memorials to the fallen, living stormtroopers saw their institutions spread across the city. On April 1, 1933, the Marine-SA opened a new Heim in a former school on Mühlenstrasse. Kaufmann dedicated the home that July, naming it the Heinrich Heissinger House in honor of the Marine-SA’s fallen comrade. Sturm 21/45 dedicated a new Heim on the prominent Wandsbeker Chaussee. Not only were the SA-Heime spreading in number, but they were also becoming more elaborate. Sturm 21/45’s Heim enjoyed several sleeping rooms, two kitchens, an office, and a lounge. SA taverns spread across Hamburg as well in the months following the takeover. Impetus for the expansion came from the Party, which wanted to establish outposts of stormtroopers to monitor their neighborhoods, from the SA, which hoped better to provide for its fighters, and from National Socialist sympathizers and sycophants who wanted to curry favor with the movement. Tavern-keepers who offered their pubs to the SA were also pursuing their own economic interest; as had been true during the Kampfzeit, hosting an SA unit could provide a stable base of customers, many of them heavy drinkers prone to spending large amounts on beer. Tavern- and hotel-keepers could also use the SA presence as advertisements of national loyalty to attract other customers. This was the goal of the new proprietor of the Hotel Voss, who upon assuming management of the building offered to rent rooms and common areas as “a comfortable home” for SA and SS men. With this offer, 300-350 party soldiers could be kept in comfort and security. In such cases, party members and private citizens offered discounts to stormtroopers and at times turned public

49 StAH B189 undated notes on the history of the Marine-SA, p3.
50 “Sturm 21/45 weihte sein Heim,” Hamburger Tageblatt, April 4, 1933.
51 See StAH B5, especially: letter of Winkler to Untergruppe Hamburg, April 18, 1933; Boschmann to Untergruppe Hamburg, April 6, 1933; Böckenhauer to Ortsgruppe Billwärder, March 18, 1933.
52 StAH B5 letter of Böckenhauer to 28. SS Standarte, May 22, 1933.
accommodations to SA use. These alliances aided the Party in raising the SA’s profile throughout the city, and gave the stormtroopers firmer foothold on neighborhoods recently contested. The tactic also served a more practical purpose in solving one of the SA’s most longstanding problems: how to keep its masses of young, unemployed recruits fed, clothed, and lodged.

Finances were among the great woes of the *Kampfzeit* SA. Individual stormtroopers had felt threatened with the loss of food, clothes, and jobs. Organizationally, the SA itself often suffered financially because it was made up of so many poor members. Stormtrooper poverty caused innumerable tensions between Party and SA, between the SA and its men, and among the stormtroopers themselves. Unemployment and poverty were so high among SA men that Böckenhauer feared sending the Marine-SA on a collection drive in April 1933. The Party had offered the SA 20-30,000 copies of its latest pamphlet, “The Jew as Enemy of the State,” but Böckenhauer lacked confidence that the SA could make any profit. Even when selling the fliers at twice the cost of their purchase from the Party, Böckenhauer feared that, “as seen in previous experiences with pamphleting, “too many stormtroopers were so poor that they would likely embezzle much of the money for themselves.” Thus the SA and the Party recognized soon after the takeover that the stormtroopers did not seek just public acclaim, cultural validation, and the extension of their institutional centers throughout the city. They also sought to convert public triumph into private gain.

As the events of spring 1933 sealed the Party’s reign, citizens of Hamburg eager to curry favor with Nazi enforcers inundated the stormtroopers with offers of free goods and services. In some cases, single women and mothers offered free Sunday meals to

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53 StAH B220 letter of Böckenhauer to Gaupropagandabteilung, April 7, 1933.
neighborhood SA men.\textsuperscript{54} The Party encouraged private citizens and public buildings with cafeterias to provide these facilities to unemployed stormtroopers, as did the Lohmühlen Hospital, which supplied local SA work units with free lunches through much of 1933.\textsuperscript{55} Other individuals and firms donated hand-outs of trinkets and supplies, such as packets of assorted dried fruits, powdered milk, cigarettes, and socks, as well as gasoline, furniture, light bulbs, cigarettes, meat, beer, and coffee beans from Hamburg’s many overseas trading firms. SA men also received free tickets to cultural events that would formerly have been out of their price range. The Stadt-Theater offered a row of free tickets to uniformed stormtroopers at its showing of the “Meistersinger” on Hitler’s birthday.\textsuperscript{56} In this case, the theater allied with the SA to celebrate their leader’s birthday with a free performance for the stormtroopers of his favorite opera. Many plays to which stormtroopers received tickets were not yet themselves ideological works – at this point, a theater’s goal was to demonstrate allegiance with the new state through the exploitation of shared cultural capital.\textsuperscript{57}

Stormtroopers also scooped up tickets to soccer matches, as well as film screenings of both movement works and popular features. Some of these prizes were connected to SA service. One set of free library cards meant only for “\textit{gediente}” members of the SA who could be trusted to read ideologically appropriate material.\textsuperscript{58} These service-connected offers tended to be spontaneous, one-time only, and limited by nature to a set number. A “camaraderie-hour” offered by the pub Tirol on April 5, 1933, for

\textsuperscript{54} StAH B124 letter of September 8, 1933.
\textsuperscript{55} StAH B124 letter of Brigade 12 to Verwaltung des Lohmühlenkrankenhaus, October 6, 1933.
\textsuperscript{56} StAH B213.2 Böckenhauer letter of April 13, 1933.
\textsuperscript{57} After 1935, theaters offering free tickets to stormtroopers generally did so with more ideologically driven plays. Matching the general radicalization of the regime in that year, they included titles on the German homeland, racial science, and the necessity of eugenics and euthanasia. See StAH B213.2.
\textsuperscript{58} StAH 614-1-38 Hamburger Öffentliche Bücherhallen 12, Band 1, Document 120.
example, could only host 180 men. Marine-Standartenführer Boschmann therefore limited the evening of free food and beer to “especially needy, worthy, and deserving SA men.”

But many offers of free goods and services were open to all stormtroopers regardless of rank or length of service. Many private businesses that participated in this thinly veiled scheme of bribery and patronage had been enmeshed in the Nazi movement for years. Yet even businesses that had not been connected to the stormtroopers saw that donating free or discounted goods would serve them well in the post-1933 German marketplace.

SA leaders were themselves wary of accepting too many gifts – especially luxury items like cigars, cigarettes, and alcohol. These materials had been associated with Hamburg’s international trading houses and were hence markers of a Hanseatic, mercantile prosperity that the stormtroopers simultaneously sought and derided. As time went on, imported items such as cigars and coffee increasingly found their way directly to the highest-ranking officers. One gift of imported coffee beans eventually made its way to the highest ranks of the Brigade, where Sturmführer Behrens sent it in March 1934 with wishes of “guten Apetit” to his superior officer. SA leaders who passed donations upwards hoped to strengthen their relationships with their superior officers. A well-chosen gift demonstrated the giver’s attention to detail and his knowledge of comrades’ tastes, reaffirmed the SA’s social ethic of sharing and camaraderie, and

59 StAH B164 Tagesbefehl of April 4, 1933
60 As the Allgemeine Öl-Handels-Gesellschaft demonstrated in June 1934, when it refused to grant the SA further free supplies of petrol, but instead offered them a 7% rebate coupon for purchases at their stations. See StAH B132 letter of AÖHG to Brigade 12, June 7, 1934.
61 StAH B262
62 StAH B132 Standarte 76 to Brigade 12 letter of March 24, 1934.
confirmed the elite local identities of both giver and recipient by equipping them with items of Hanseatic prestige.

Such schemes, however, risked creating impressions of graft and favoritism, thus exacerbating tensions between officers and members of the ranks, who still suffered from the economic crisis. High-ranking SA officers who flaunted imported cigars and other luxury goods also strained relationships between SA officers and civilians – both the civilian leadership of the party and the public at large. Aware of the potential problems caused by allowing SA commanders to chase gifts and donations, the Party leadership therefore instructed Böckenhauer to forbid his SA officers from soliciting from firms.⁶³ SA leaders also sought to keep newspapers from mentioning specific goods in SA requests for supplies for official purposes – especially when those requests included cigarettes and beer, or were phrased in “Marxist” language that painted the stormtroopers as “the poorest of the poor.”⁶⁴ But as the Third Reich became more established, the SA needed to show little initiative in this manner. Businesses knew that to donate to the SA – or merely to its high-ranking leaders – was to curry favor with the largest and most publicly impressive of the NSDAP’s sub-organizations. And SA leaders still exerted pressures on both businessmen and bureaucrats. By 1934, even public agencies were being dragooned into supplying the SA: in February, police barracks were ordered to turn over spare bicycle wheels for SA use,⁶⁵ while other SA units requisitioned trucks from the Hamburger Gaswerks for a trip to the Baltic Sea.⁶⁶

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⁶³ StAH B231 Böckenhauer to Gau Hamburg, letter of June 12, 1933.
⁶⁴ StAH B262 Sturmbannführer 76
⁶⁵ StAH B44 letter of Standarte 464 to Brigade 12, February 15, 1934.
⁶⁶ StAH B132 Standarte 464 to Brigade 12 letter of July 26, 1934.
In many cases, it was often unclear whether items were used as part of official SA service or not. After all, food and beverages had long been integrated into the stormtroopers’ political rituals, as had sports, trips to the countryside, theatre performances and film screenings, and a wide variety of other activities that had drawn otherwise apolitical young men. But the SA’s pursuit of these activities in 1933-1934 carried different associations. The SA was no longer a private club, and it now encouraged – with varying levels of unstated threat – not only the Party, but also the state, local businesses, and private citizens to fund its widening circle of activities. SA leaders did fear that openly to court outside support would be to confirm negative public perceptions of the SA and its men – above all, SA leaders dreaded the refutation of their claim to fight not for their own gain, but for the benefit of the Volk and the nation. This slogan would hardly hold up should SA men be seen as corrupt, parasitical beggars. They had been accused of this before 1933; now, the very real danger existed that they would prove these charges true.

Hamburg’s SA leadership therefore not only tried to check suspicious contacts between businesses and the organization itself, but between individuals as well. A series of SA men were eventually expelled for seeking personal and financial advantage. Georg F., an Obertruppführer who had been involved in the SA since 1929, was one such example. He had lost his mother and never known his father, and typified the lost, young stormtrooper for whom the SA had become family. He thus leaned heavily on the group for financial support. He borrowed from comrades and used the money to buy jewelry for his girlfriend. The last straw came when he was caught begging in uniform (“for a little
lunch or something to eat; I’m doing terribly”). Uniformed begging either deceived people into thinking they were donating to the SA itself, or it gave the impression that the SA could not take care of its own. Georg was finally expelled for “repeated attempts to further his own personal advantage.”

Neither the SA nor the Party was opposed to stormtroopers’ gaining “personal advantage” per se. But they were greatly concerned that SA men might do so through corrupt arrangements. SA requests for donations rankled observers both in and outside the Party, and thus risked upsetting the NSDAP’s control of state and society in the new Reich’s fragile first year. Stabilizing stormtrooper finances, on the other hand, would also help stabilize the regime as well. Party and SA leaders therefore preferred to help stormtroopers line their pockets through more sustained and productive means of support – specifically, through the securing of steady employment. These policies not only rewarded individual stormtroopers for their service, they also placed loyal SA men into key positions in private businesses, public utilities, and police agencies. Such positioning would, Party officials hoped, secure Hamburg’s businesses, bureaucracies, and law enforcement agencies for the Party’s long-term purposes without alienating the public.

The Party at first sought to employ SA men itself. In the first half of 1933, it offered stormtroopers a variety of positions based on their skills. It sought painters, masons, and carpenters to build a new Gau house and asked multi-lingual SA men to work as interpreters. The plan continued the Kampfzeit tradition of mobilizing skilled

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67 NARA A3341 SA Kartei – 143 Georg F.
68 Ibid.
69 On the process of the NSDAP takeover of Hamburg’s public agencies, see Uwe Lohalm, “Garant nationalsozialistischer Herrschaft der öffentliche Dienst” in Schmid, 154-186.
70 StAH B139 letter of Arbeitsamt Hamburg to Brigade 12, October 7, 1933. StAH B140; the initial request for lists of “fremdsprachige SA-Männer” was sent out on July 17, 1933; other documents in this file portray the results of individual cases.
stormtroopers whenever possible and demonstrated the self-help aspects of the SA lifestyle. But such opportunities were limited. The Hamburg SA, over half of whose stormtroopers were unemployed at the end of 1932, pressured the Party for more stable assistance. Now that the Party had taken power, it could provide. From 1933-1934, the NSDAP worked with state employment agencies to place SA men in a variety of positions, including posts in agencies essential to big city life, such as the Gaswerks, the Hochbahn, and the Ohlsdorf cemetery. The total number of Hamburg SA men benefiting from these policies numbered in the hundreds, and perhaps thousands. The Party especially sought to place stormtroopers as public school teachers, where they would be invaluable in educating the rising generation in Party-approved virtues such as racism, militarism, and obedience. SA men also made sure that teachers who were not stormtroopers taught ideologically correct materials and enforced national socialist standards of behavior among faculty, staff, and students. Yet no public utility was too small to staff with stormtroopers. The SA pressured managers of Hamburg’s public swimming pools to replace lifeguards with SA men. One Social Democrat and licensed

71 Lohalm in Schmid, 165.
72 From 1933-1934, the Party placed over 1000 members with the Hochbahn alone, though it is difficult to tell how many of these were SA men. See Lohalm in Schmid, 165. See also StAH B49 and B64.
73 Oral histories conducted after the war with Hamburgers who had been children during the 1930s contain an unusual number of stories featuring sympathetic SA teachers. Jewish students described SA teachers who treated them nicely, did not single them out for ill-treatment as they were expected to, expressed regret for having to wear the uniform in class, and were less ideological than they were nostalgic for soldierly camaraderie. See FZG WDe 10, 365, 163T, 414, 453T, and 207T respectively. Such stories, however, most likely result from their quality as anomalous incidents that stood out in the memory of students who had survived Nazi persecution and the devastation of the Second World War. As interesting, counterintuitive cases, sympathetic stormtrooper teachers may therefore appear in postwar interviews with frequency out of proportion to their actual numbers. For general studies on the NSDAP takeover of education in Hamburg, see Uwe Schmidt and Paul Weidemann, “Modernisierung als Mittel zur Indoktrination das Schulwesen” in Schmid, Ed., 305-335, as well as Giles, Students and National Socialism.
74 Schmidt and Weidemann, 316-317.
lifeguard who lost his job this way described positions targeted by the SA as “coveted place[s]” [begehrte Ort].

The size of Hamburg’s public bureaucracies meant that they could absorb large numbers of stormtrooper job-seekers. One scholar has noted that Hamburg’s public agencies “showed nearly unbroken continuity through all political breaches of the 20th century,” including through the Nazi Gleichschaltung. Yet new bureaucrats, officials, and administrators now filled many of the topmost ranks of the service. Here the most “coveted places” were of symbolic importance that, like the lifeguard jobs, enabled stormtroopers to stand as agents of state authority whose vigilance and physical prowess protected the lives and well-being of their fellow citizens. Stormtrooper firemen had particular allure in this respect, but they were never great in number because of the profession’s skill requirements and time commitments. The top priority of SA job placement was instead with the police.

SA-Standartenführer Richter, who had long functioned as an NSDAP spy in police ranks, replaced the Social Democratic Schönfelder as police president on March 5. Richter began the political “coordination” [Gleichschaltung] of his department that very day by naming a fellow Nazi policeman the new head of the Ordnungspolizei. On March 15 the Hamburg Senate ordered the police to take on 310 stormtroopers as special “police auxiliaries” [Hilfspolizei]. The innovation, like so many changes to Hamburg’s police agencies, came via Prussia. On February 15, Göring, in his capacity as Prussian Interior Minister, had empowered Hilfspolizei to supplement police forces that the Nazis

75 FZG WdE 330T
76 Lohalm in Schmid, 186.
77 StAH B166. There were 190 stormtrooper firemen in Hamburg in 1935.
78 See his reports on political debates within the police department, which appear in StAH B260.
claimed were insufficient to maintain order.\footnote{In doing so they used a little known 1921 law that allowed for temporary officers to be invested during times of emergency. See StAH B262 Chef der Ordnungspolizei letter of March 17, 1933. On Göring’s development and use of auxiliary police in Prussia, see Koehl, 64-67.} Nationally, these new officers comprised 25,000 SA, 15,000 SS, and 10,000 Stahlhelm, whose names had been submitted by the leaders of those organizations. As the innovation spread outside Prussia after March 5, the SA encouraged applications from all its stormtroopers who were between 21 and 45, had a firearms permit, and could qualify as regular police officers. The use of these auxiliaries was left to the discretion of the regular police agencies.\footnote{Koehl, 65.} But the distinction became meaningless as National Socialists increasingly “coordinated” the police bureaucracy. Thus, the Hilfspolizei in Hamburg were men selected by SA and SS leaders, who were then put under the command of a police department headed by one of their own, Richter. The tasks of the Hilfspolizei resembled those long carried out by the SA: to protect political meetings and marches, to secure pubs, taverns, and other social spaces, and to put down “unrest” and other “states of emergency” caused by political opponents.\footnote{StAH B24 SA-Führerbesprechung March 27, 1933.} But the stormtroopers now gained new powers through their official status: they could blockade streets, “assume responsibility for the protection of important operations,” and, above all, carry firearms.\footnote{Ibid.} SA-Heime, Lokale, and other places of operation were allowed to stockpile weapons without limit.\footnote{StAH B24 SA-Heime, Lokale March 27, 1933.} They also were to monitor police units in which they were stationed for “red” officers who would then be expelled.\footnote{StAH B262 Gruppe Nordsee to Untergruppe Hamburg, March 2, 1933.}
The Senate’s initial order deployed 310 of these officers to police stations, the Rathaus and other prominent state buildings, post offices, and the harbor. Additionally, SA units in Hamburg’s adjoining suburbs furnished another 196 men, who guarded their home areas and the bridges over the Elbe, which the Nazis insisted were particular targets of Communist bomb plots. The numbers of SA-\textit{Hilfspolizei} in Hamburg itself fluctuated throughout the spring and summer of 1933, but peaked at around 600 in June.

\textit{A Hilfspolizist} received food and provisions, equipment and arms, and health-care benefits at public expense. Indeed, the benefits that volunteers received were as important to the SA as were the types of duty performed. Nearly half the paragraphs in Röhm’s initial orders on this subject concerned not the stormtrooper’s responsibility to the justice system, but rather the police department’s obligation to support the stormtrooper. Yet the \textit{Hilfspolizei} also held great political and symbolic importance. By linking regular policemen and their stormtrooper “helpers”, the Party sought to demonstrate two paradoxical qualities. The SA presence would show that the police were now under partisan control, would protect and obey the NSDAP at the expense of its opponents, and were willing to employ violence at higher rates. SA presence made the police feared as agents of National Socialism. Paradoxically, however, the \textit{Hilfspolizei} experiment was also designed to impart the opposite set of associations to the stormtroopers themselves. If the public display of cooperation between SA and police was meant to make the police more fearsome, the Party also hoped that it would make the SA more trusted.

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\textit{\footnotesize{86} StAH B262 Chef der Ordnungspolizei; March 17, 1933. The number increased over time, reaching as high as 358 at the end of April. See StAH B262 orders of April 27, 1933.}\n\textit{\footnotesize{87} StAH B262 Standartenführer J9 to Untergruppe Hamburg, March 24, 1933.}\n\textit{\footnotesize{88} StAH B262 April 27, 1933. This puts the number of Hilfspolizei officers at a level similar to other big German cities, such as Munich with its 650 officers. Other smaller cities, however, often had numbers approaching these, such as Nuremberg’s 500 men. See Reiche, 179, 185.}\n\textit{\footnotesize{89} StAH B262 Standartenführer J9 to Untergruppe Hamburg, March 24, 1933.}}
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Stormtrooper presence in the streets alongside regular officers was intended to confirm the SA’s long-sought association with the forces of public order, to lend the credibility of the police to the SA, and to encourage Hamburg to think of stormtroopers as upright citizens and vectors of legitimate authority. In short, the Party’s sought to prove that stormtroopers could command not only fear, but also respect. The program failed, however, on almost all levels.

The only aspect in which the Hilfpolizei policy was a success was the way it impressed upon citizens of Hamburg the new regime’s lethal intent. For enemies of the Party, Hilfspolizei officers – and SA men generally throughout all phases of the NSDAP’s life – remained associated with the violation of private spaces. SA men, using their knowledge of their neighbors and neighborhoods, led house-to-house searches carried out by the police against Social Democrats and other political opponents.\(^90\) The special threat of the SA-police alliance, however, came in the ways SA men reminded potential victims that state authority now knew no limits. Stories swept the city of residents rounded up, held in “protective custody” in the basement of the police headquarters at Stadthausbrücke, and abused by police and stormtroopers alike.\(^91\)

The concentration camps set up at the end of March, run by the SA, bolstered this effect even as they offered new places to install stormtrooper job-seekers. Konzentrationslager Wittmoor, a hastily established jail in a peat factory to Hamburg’s north, was among the earliest of the “wild camps”, as was a larger one in the Fuhlsbüttel prison. At Wittmoor, 36 SA guards oversaw 140 prisoners, mostly Communists.\(^92\) But the facilities were inadequate and small, and Kaufmann deemed the camp’s conditions too

\(^90\) FZG WdE 330T and 99T.
\(^91\) On the Gleichschaltung of the Hamburg Staatspolizei, see Garbe 520-521.
\(^92\) Garbe 526.
humane after a visit in August. He ordered that KZ Fuhlsbüttel be remade as the main camp for the Hamburg metropolitan area, and named his trusted friend Paul Ellerhusen as commander. It opened officially on September 4.93

Kaufmann’s choice of Ellerhusen, with SS-Sturmführer Willi Dusenschön as commander of the guards, spoke volumes about how Kaufmann intended “Ko-la-Fu,” as it became known, to function. Ellerhusen was a man of unquestioned loyalty and longstanding service to the Party and SA. Yet, as seen in his disastrous failures of leadership during the Battle of Sternschanze, he could not be trusted to manage an organization and its finances, or even to keep discipline among his men. Now, however, his previous faults were virtues. Who better to oversee the lawless territory of a KZ than one who would turn a blind eye to abuse? Dusenschön, for his part, was chosen to ensure cruelty. The 24-year old had joined the Party and SA in 1928, but transferred soon after to the SS. Most of the SS leaders who came to run Hamburg’s concentration camp system shared this profile. There were differences between these men and those stormtroopers who did not switch to the SS, and in the coming years the stormtroopers-turned-SS men took charge of camp policy. Men such as Dusenschön, Max Pauly, Martin Weiss, and Bruno Streckenbach represented a wing of the Party that increasingly thought in terms of the large-scale, bureaucratic persecution of political and “racial” enemies.94 After 1934, they and their fellows led the systemization and extension of the far-flung camp system in a way the disorganized and neighborhood-oriented SA could not.95 Nevertheless, in the

93 Garbe 528.
94 See Garbe 522-523 and 538-539.
95 Pierre Ayçoberry labeled the difference between the two organizations as the contrast between “brute violence” and “systematic terror.” See The Social History of the Third Reich, 1933-1945 (New York: The New Press, 1999), 17-36. See also Longerich, 172.
time of the wild camps the SA *Hilfspolizei* were vital in lending the stormtroopers’ air of
dread to the entire justice system.

The program’s other two goals, to furnish SA men with lucrative positions and to lend the stormtrooper the policeman’s aura of authority and respect, met with less success. Financially, stormtroopers were frustrated that the *Hilfspolizei* positions were – despite the care taken to supply room, board, health care, and weapons – generally unrewarding. *Hilfspolizei* officers complained about their pay rates, even as these included bonuses for dependents.\(^\text{96}\) Worse for morale, benefits were slow in coming. Many SA men complained that they had to train in their own uniforms and boots, which became worn out, unusable, and went un-replaced by the police.\(^\text{97}\) Complaints about uniforms and clothing persisted.\(^\text{98}\) After all, as Böckenhauer noted, since most of the men involved were unemployed, they sought to avoid spending their own scarce resources.\(^\text{99}\) Guards at Wittmoor complained that they were only given bread and coffee for breakfast, little for lunch, and dry *Bratkartoffeln* for supper – with nothing to drink.\(^\text{100}\) Nor did the guards get medical care. There were no doctors posted at KZ Wittmoor – even for the guards. Sick or wounded SA men had to be sent to Wandsbek for medical treatment.\(^\text{101}\)

Before the end of April, both the police and the SA had to deal with increasing complaints from stormtroopers.

The experience of one young SA-Mann and *Hilfspolizeibeamter* at Wittmoor encapsulated the problems that the police had in turn with the SA men. One SA Man

\(^\text{96}\) StAH B262 Polizeibehörde Hamburg to Untergruppe Hamburg, May 27, 1933
\(^\text{97}\) StAH B262 Sturmbannführer der Standarte 45 to Untergruppe Hamburg, April 28, 1933.
\(^\text{98}\) See StAH B262 Böckenhauer to Richter, letter of 8 May 1933; Richter to Untergruppe Hamburg, letter of May 13, 1933.
\(^\text{99}\) StAH B262 Böckenhauer to Richter, letter of May 8, 1933
\(^\text{100}\) StAH B262 doc #26
\(^\text{101}\) StAH B262 Römpagel report of May 15, 1933.
Sartory, who was “very well judged by his Sturm, and despite his youth a service-ready and conscientious SA Mann”, was dissatisfied with the conditions of service at Wittmoor. His father also disapproved of his service there – not because of the camp’s reputation for brutal depravity, but because it placed his son too far from his family. Sartory lived with his parents in the old Nazi stronghold “Beim Schlump,” and both father and son preferred that the younger Sartory serve with the *Hilfspolizei* in the Bundesstrasse. The SA dragged its feet on the matter and advised Sartory to submit a transfer application, which he failed to do. Instead, he vanished. One Sunday morning, according to the SA report, he “left his equipment, weapons, munitions, and armband neatly laid out on his bed, and made off without notification.” The SA caught up with him in Hamburg a month later. He admitted deserting his post, but claimed that upon his arrival at Wittmoor for a weekend shift, he had been promised he could return to Hamburg “in order to pick up important items of clothing from my parents’ house.”

When leave was then denied him, and after he was posted on a 24-hour watch that overlapped into the May 1 holiday, he decided to return home without permission and pursue his case directly at Bundesstrasse. The SA had little sympathy, and he was fired from his duties as a *Hilfspolizist*.

Sartory’s story showed the immense difficulties the police had in retaining SA *Hilfspolizei*, who were sensitive to the location, conditions, and rewards of their work. Wandsbeker SA men who had responded to an Altona unit’s request for 70 *Hilfspolizei*

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102 StAH B262 Schormann to Untergruppe Hamburg, June 15, 1933. Several documents in the series misspell his name as “Satory”.
103 StAH B262 Kissener report of April 30, 1933
104 StAH B262 Sartory testimony of June 13, 1933.
lodged similar complaints. The Altona SA not only failed to appreciate their service, but they also proved combative, insulting, and threatened even the Wandsbeker SA men with violence. The farther away stormtroopers were posted from their homes, the more difficult it was to integrate them into the local community, the unhappier they were, and the less effective they became as agents of order. Even when SA Hilfspolizei were stationed locally, many showed up late to training sessions, failed to appear for duty, disappeared before they were supposed to, or were generally unreliable officers. The problem was especially bad when Hilfspolizei duties conflicted with other political and personal priorities. On April 20, a day on which most SA men were engaged in wild celebration of their Führer’s birthday, 52 failed to report for duty. The next day 37 stayed home, most likely nursing hangovers. Others avoided specific assignments because of conflicts with their regular employment. Even formal SA obligations often took time away from a Hilfpolizist’s duties. SA leaders made the problem no easier by issuing conflicting orders. On the one hand they told their men that the police service was part of SA service, mandatory for those who had been sworn in, and not to be treated as a free-time activity. However, many SA leaders still ordered their men to attend competing events and meetings during times they should have been training with the police. Böckenhauer reminded his sub-officers that they should not place rank-and-file members, from whom obedience was always expected, in this situation. But it was clear already by late April that many SA men lacked the interest or discipline to function as auxiliary

105 StAH B262 Polizeipräsident Hinkler to Untergruppe SA-Hamburg, letter of May 29, 1933; Böckenhauer to Hinkler letter of May 20, 1933.
106 StAH B262 Standarte 15 to Untergruppe Hamburg, May 19, 1933; Standarte 15 to Untergruppe Hamburg, June 9, 1933.
107 StAH B262 Böckenhauer circular of April 21, 1933.
108 StAH B262 Untergruppe Hamburg to Standarte 76, April 21, 1933
109 StAH B262 Böckenhauer circular of April 21, 1933.
police officers. Fifty-five were removed from the program on April 27, most because they had failed to report for duty, missed the swearing in, had been deemed unreliable by superior officers, or had withdrawn from lack of interest.\(^{110}\) Although new ones could always be found – including a second and third wave of recruits in May and June – they could never be counted on to perform reliably. Generally, the police criticized “a noticeable lack of discipline” on the part of the *Hilfspolizei*.\(^{111}\)

However, the worst outcome of the Party’s attempt to link SA and police came from the behavior of SA men who embraced their new positions. From the start of the *Hilfspolizei* experiment, the SA issued strongly worded orders that stormtroopers control their tempers – and especially their firearms. One early *Gruppenbefehl* decreed:

> The use of firearms must come only when they are actually needed. The *Standarten* have issued strong warnings that shoot-outs resulting from a certain need for attention, or from other reasons, are unconditionally banned. All groups are advised that, apart from conditions of emergency, firearms must be used only under orders and on the responsibility of the *Führer* in question. Lack of fire discipline hurts the reputation of the SA and damages its operations. Every SA man must be clear that unauthorized use of firearms will call down disciplinary penalties. We owe it to the state power that now finds itself in our hands that our conduct does not counter the regime’s orders and laws.\(^{112}\)

The fact that the SA leadership felt compelled to issue such warnings showed that members still violated principles of restraint.

The *Hilfspolizei* experiment proved only that the stormtroopers were incapable of acting responsibly. SA *Hilfspolizei* quickly became known as sources of trouble. They demanded free rides on public transportation,\(^{113}\) even when not on duty, and carried their weapons openly and in a threatening manner. In some cases, they drew their revolvers on

\(^{110}\) StAH B262 April 27, 1933  
\(^{111}\) StAH B262 Truppführer K. to Untergruppe Hamburg, April 21, 1933  
\(^{112}\) StAH B262 Gruppenbefehl Nr. 2 of March 1, 1933.  
\(^{113}\) StAH B112 Hamburger Hochbahn to Untergruppe Hamburg, July 17, 1933.
train conductors who requested fares. (“Either you drive or we will. There’ll be no paying today.”)\textsuperscript{114} The availability of firearms had been one of the great attractions of SA men to the Hilfspolizei; they claimed they needed guns to protect their families from Communists and criminals.\textsuperscript{115} But the stormtroopers proved unrestrained with their weapons. Part of the problem was that the SA exercised little moral oversight in choosing stormtroopers for these positions. Instead, most were chosen on the basis of loyalty and need, rather than discipline or reliability. Many had long criminal records, with one particularly seedy specimen boasting thirty-three separate criminal convictions spanning 35 years.\textsuperscript{116}

Before 1933, the SA was relatively uninterested in tracking down its members’ criminal pasts. Stormtrooper recklessness and criminality nevertheless carried dangerous consequences. One SA Mann Küppers had even been temporarily expelled from the SA for his criminal carelessness. In January 1932, sitting in the SA Lokal after “5 grogs and some beer,” he had gotten the Schnappsidee to pick up his motorcycle from a repair shop.\textsuperscript{117} Two other SA men were ordered to accompany him in a borrowed truck. Küppers, who had a reputation as a fast and dangerous driver, drove so recklessly that his two comrades clasped hold of one another for safety.\textsuperscript{118} The younger one pleaded to get out of the vehicle. Küppers responded by stepping on the gas, waving both hands out the window, and asking “You guys are soldiers? Are you afraid?”\textsuperscript{119} At that point the truck crashed, killing the young SA man who had pleaded for caution. Küppers vanished into a

\textsuperscript{114} StAH B112 Hamburger Hochbahn reports of March 5, 1933.
\textsuperscript{115} StAH B59
\textsuperscript{116} StAH 241-1 Justizverwaltung I. XII Cb 3 vol 1: Carl Franz Josef M.
\textsuperscript{117} StAH B170 undated Schäfer statement
\textsuperscript{118} StAH B170 Schäfer statement of February 19, 1932.
\textsuperscript{119} StAH B170 Bericht des Sturmbanes IV/45, January 1932; Schäfer statement of February 19, 1932.
pub. He later turned himself in to the police and withdrew from the SA. Küppers’ own Sturmbannführer called him a man of “unbounded ignorance and recklessness,” yet the SA in 1933 gave him, and many others like him, positions of responsibility and authority.\textsuperscript{120}

Such men now abused their powers. They burst unannounced into taverns and declared them closed (“Feierabend, Hilfspolizei! Wenn in 5 Minuten das Lokal nicht leer ist, knallt’s.”).\textsuperscript{121} They appeared on the doorsteps of private citizens and extorted money.\textsuperscript{122} And many considered their badges as weapons with which they could manipulate and rob their fellow citizens. One SA Mann Blab regretted selling two motorcycles to a dealer on Grindelallee, so he returned to the store with 7-8 uniformed SA comrades, two of them Hilfspolizei. They refused to display their badges (“Wir brauchen kein [sic] Ausweis”) demanded the motorcycles, and told a girl at the register to “shut up” when she asked for a receipt.\textsuperscript{123} They confiscated the motorcycles and left. The owner complained to the SA that Blab took the machines “through base robbery, under the protection of the brown uniform, the Hilfspolizei-officers’ uniform, and the open carrying of weapons.”\textsuperscript{124} The worst aspect of this incident from the Party’s perspective was that the shop owner had himself for years been a loyal Party member, whose store had been one of the anchors of NSDAP growth in its earliest neighborhood stronghold.

Incidents like these were an unacceptable threat to the Party. They undermined propaganda efforts to paint the SA and NSDAP as bulwarks of order, calm, and bourgeois prosperity. By August, the OSAF, Interior Ministry, and the police decided to

\textsuperscript{120} StAH B170 Bericht des Sturmbanes IV/45, January 1932
\textsuperscript{121} StAH B112 Sturmführer 2/76 to Sturmbann I/76, March 22, 1933.
\textsuperscript{122} StAH 214-1 Justizverwaltung I. XII Cb 3 vol 1: Carl Franz Josef M.
\textsuperscript{123} NARA A3341 SA Karthei 050 Blab
\textsuperscript{124} Ibid.
end the failed *Hilfspolizei* experiment.\textsuperscript{125} Officers were still needed to guard the concentration camps, which that same month were consolidating in Hamburg in the new facility at Fuhlsbüttel. By August 14 only 110 *Hilfspolizei* remained.\textsuperscript{126} At the end of September Richter instructed the SA to prepare for the dissolution of the *Hilfspolizei* entirely.\textsuperscript{127} A note from the police in November claimed that in a great number of cases “members of the NSDAP” had overstepped the bounds of the law and created conflicts with the true guarantors of order, the police.\textsuperscript{128} The police asked the SA to take notice of the fact that

without police presence and permission, anyone who conducts house searches, orders arrests, uses firearms (when not in an emergency), threatens others with firearms, or takes advantage of people in any way will by charged without reservation with impersonating an officer, unlawful entry and breach of the peace [*Hausfriedensbruch*], kidnapping, and coercion [*Nötigung*].\textsuperscript{129}

The change in policy signaled that SA men wishing to exercise public power had to join regular agencies. The SA and Party had long pursued this goal, even before the takeover.\textsuperscript{130} Simultaneous with the *Hilfspolizei* experiment, the Party sought to place stormtroopers in more permanent positions in the police, Reichswehr, and navy.\textsuperscript{131} It was harder, however, for SA men to gain permanent posts in jobs with strict requirements. The police mandated that applicants be unemployed, between 18 and 20 years old, at least 1.68 m tall, single, without children, and able to prove their “Aryan descent.” They had to be members of a nationalist *Verband*, which limited the applicant pool in ways

\textsuperscript{125} Longerich, 83.
\textsuperscript{126} StAH B262 Polizeibehörde Hamburg to Reichsminister des Innern, July 19, 1933; Chef der Ordnungspolizei orders of August 7, 1933. The earlier order planned a reduction to 104 officers.
\textsuperscript{127} StAH B262 Richter to Fust, September 27, 1933.
\textsuperscript{128} StAH B262 Schormann brief of November 10, 1933.
\textsuperscript{129} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{130} See Röhm’s plea for more NSDAP members, especially SA and SS men, to apply for posts in the Prussian police. StAH B260 Röhm Abschrift of January 12, 1933.
\textsuperscript{131} StAH B24 SA-Führerbesprechung of March 27, 1933.
favorable to SA men, but they also had to possess a “spotless” criminal record. This last requirement was a significant problem for many stormtroopers, including Friedrich Pohl, who had been thrown out of the force in 1931 after his conviction for shooting a Jewish fellow officer. He had after his release from prison joined the SA, and in March 1933 he applied for reinstatement with the police. He employed for this purpose his old defense attorney, the longtime Nazi lawyer Dr. Raeke, who noted that “Pohl is certainly no church-mouse, but he is a very useful soldier who was hacked into pieces for the sake of his National Socialist leaders.” Böckenhauer supported the request. After all, Pohl seemed the perfect candidate for a newly Nazified police force. Yet Richter responded, “to my regret,” that he was in no position to help Pohl: “The re-appointment must be denied, due to requirements of law that I cannot overcome.” Pohl’s conviction, even if it had been for the Nazi cause, was still on the books. The injustice of this situation in Nazi eyes led to a general amnesty for political crimes – at least, those committed by the right. But Pohl’s rejection showed how the Party and its appointed Police Presidents were becoming, unlike in the case of the Hilfspolizei, less willing to ignore criminal backgrounds among applicants. Many police presidents also sought to isolate the police from the Party’s paramilitaries. Richter, in order to consolidate control over his officers, declared in June that all members of the Ordnungspolizei had to withdraw from the SA and SS. Henceforth, policemen were to be only policemen. Many SA men who had

132 StAH B260 Merkblatt für den Eintritt in die Ordnungspolizei Hamburg. In theory, SA Hilfspolizei had to qualify as regular police officers in order to receive their posts. In practice, the number of Hilfspolizei officers with criminal records predating their service suggests that the police did not conduct their own investigations of the men whose names they received from the SA as potential Hilfspolizei. They did, however, conduct thorough checks when hiring regular officers.
133 StAH B260 Raeke to Böckenhauer, March 15, 1933.
134 StAH B260 Richter to Raeke, May 8, 1933.
135 Kershaw, Hitler: Hubris. 383.
136 StAH B260 Böckenhauer circular of June 17, 1933.
joined the police, like Richter himself, increasingly felt themselves members of that more respected agency. They began to see their former comrades as threats to public order, and they resisted efforts of SA leaders to interfere in law enforcement. Some eventually denied their identity as stormtroopers altogether. “We aren’t SA men anymore,” said one during a dispute with SA leaders who had been “sniffing around” his patrol area by the docks, “We are now policemen.”  

Whether with the police, with public agencies, or in private firms, efforts to employ stormtroopers took until 1934 to reduce the thousands of unemployed SA men, many of whom had been jobless for years. But by 1934 the SA was placing men in steady work. These efforts dovetailed with the attempt to help SA men find and furnish their own apartments and start families. But the SA’s successes in this realm only caused further problems. The more stormtroopers enjoyed access to permanent jobs, private housing, and stable families, the more distant they grew from the SA subculture that had formerly supported them.

“Old Fighters” and Opportunists: The Triumphant SA’s Identity Crisis

SA men had always defined themselves based on their foes – primarily Communists, Social Democrats, Jews, and effeminate homosexual men. They also

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137 NARA A3341 SA Kartei 074 Hermann B.
138 Longerich, 188. Historians disagree about the success of SA job placement programs. Mason found that 40 to 60 percent of unemployed stormtroopers had found jobs by October 1933. (Tim Mason. Arbeiterklasse und Volksgemeinschaft: Dokumente und Materialien zur Deutscher Arbeiterpolitik 1936-1939 [Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1975], 53.) Kater came to far more pessimistic conclusions in his description of stormtrooper employment; he described the SA as having by far the weakest success among Nazi sub-organizations. (Michael Kater, “Zum gegenseitigen Verhältnis von SA und SS in der Sozialgeschichte des Nationalsozialismus von 1925 bis 1939” Vierteljahresschrift für Social- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte 62:3 [1975]: 364-372.) Fischer presented a mixed report: while SA job placement programs largely failed in the aggregate, he concluded, individual SA men and small groups of stormtroopers found effective relief from their contacts in the SA. See Fischer, Stormtroopers, 82-102.
embraced a collective, cliquish lifestyle that focused on small groups, close friendships, and proximity to their comrades. This identity contained many paradoxes and contradictions. Stormtroopers claimed to oppose the Communists, yet they recruited within Communist spheres. They agitated against homosexuality in public, yet embraced same-sex affection within their own ranks. They sought strength, but embraced a martyr’s victimization. They claimed to stand for responsibility, propriety, and order, but used illegal and violent means to promote these ideals. As long as the NSDAP remained in political opposition, such paradoxes with the SA man’s sense of self could be overcome through political struggle, constant activity, ostentatious self-sacrifice, and the quest for martyrdom. Stormtroopers struggled with these contradictions throughout the Kampfzeit, whose victorious end brought hope for psychological resolution. After March 1933, however, success brought its own dangers.

In the minds of the “old fighters” in the SA, foremost among these dangers were the new SA men called Märzgefallene – the “March casualties” who flooded into the Party and its sub-organizations following the takeover. The name, a reference to the late-joiners of the 1848 revolution, marked these new recruits as egoistic, self-interested, weakly committed, and more sedate than the rough-and-tumble types whom the SA had earlier attracted.\(^{139}\) There were approximately 500,000 stormtroopers nationwide when

\(^{139}\) For the term’s full etymology, see Cornelia Schmitz-Berning, *Vokabular des Nationalsozialismus* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2000), 399. Several studies discuss, but do not agree on, differences in social composition between the “old fighters” and those who joined after the takeover. See Herbert Andrew’s “The Social Composition of the NSDAP: Problems and Possible Solutions” (*German Studies Review*, 9:2 [1986], 293-318), which includes a useful comparison of literature on the subject to date.
Hitler was appointed Chancellor on January 30. By August the opportunistic
\textit{Märzgefallene} had swelled this number 2,500,000.\textsuperscript{140}

New SA men came from three categories, none of which fit well into the
organization. The first comprised former members who had quit, been expelled, or
otherwise drifted away from the movement in previous years. Many of these now wrote
in plaintive, self-pitying tones to ask that the writer be allowed to return to the fold. A
typical plea asked:

Brigadeführer Schorrmann, be a \textit{Mensch}. Turn off your suspicion for a
moment and place yourself in my situation. By everything that is holy to
me, for the sake of the Führer and our Vaterland, I ask you if I have
deserved all this – to still be branded a traitor at the moment of victory.
Help me please… rehabilitate me and let me again be an SA man.\textsuperscript{141}

The SA welcomed some of these back men with open arms. Those who had left the group
because of other National Socialist duties, like Okrass and several of his fellow
journalists at the \textit{Tageblatt}, had little trouble getting back in.\textsuperscript{142} Other stormtroopers pled
a variety of employment and family conflicts that had led them away from the SA during
the difficult depression years. The SA often took these men back at their old ranks, with
little bureaucratic obstruction, and in some cases “with the warmest support.”\textsuperscript{143} These re-
joiners climbed to still higher ranks in the following years.

Others met with cooler receptions. The SA rejected many re-applicants, especially
those whose reputation within the close-knit movement had come into question. The tone
of the correspondence shows that the SA still clung to its self-image as a network of

\textsuperscript{140} Bruce Campbell, \textit{The SA Generals and the Rise of Nazism} (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1998), 120
\textsuperscript{141} StAH B73 Zagst to Schorrmann, September 17, 1933. Zagst’s use of the servile “Sie” in this letter
breaks with SA tradition, which generally favored the informal, soldierly “Du” even between comrades of
different ranks.
\textsuperscript{142} StAH B73 Schormann to Gruppe Hans, November 1, 1933.
\textsuperscript{143} StAH B73 Stirmführer Biedermann to Scharführer Lampe, March 23, 1933. See also the cases of
stormtroopers Henze, Hoyer, Krüger, and Wesel in B73.
small groups and cliques. Almost all former SA men who sought re-entry appealed to a shared sense of membership in a common nationalist community, and they expressed fears that their continued detachment from the SA would harm their standing in their neighborhoods and families. One former SA Mann Henke described both his exit and re-entry into the SA in familial terms. He had left, he claimed, because his father was “otherwise aligned politically”.144 The two had had unceasing arguments, through which the father persuaded Henke to leave the SA for the KPD in 1932.145 But the father had since died, and Henke pled for re-entry as a way to re-establish the ties he had broken with the rest of his family. “My mother, brother, and entire [remaining] family are nationally oriented people,” he wrote, “and I would like to ask you again to take me into the SA so that I can get my life in order again, and not run around any more as a pariah rejected by my family and everyone else.”146 In this case, SA leaders were torn between a son’s filial piety and his defection to the KPD. They eventually judged him to be “downright psychopathic” in his political and familial wanderings.147 Böckenhauer suggested he seek medical attention for “his psychopathic qualities.”148

In evaluating applicants for re-entry, officials combed the movement for relatives, comrades, and others who had dealt with the former stormtrooper, and they judged the application on this testimony. Many applicants came up lacking, especially those who had ill-treated National Socialist women. One former stormtrooper was revealed to have taken 125 RM from Dreckmann’s wife a few days before the famous martyr’s death.149

144 StAH B73 Henke to Oberführer [sic] der SA Hamburg, March 8, 1933.  
145 StAH B73 Sturmführer Loff to Sturmbann I/76, March 14, 1933.  
146 StAH B73 Henke to Oberführer [sic] der SA Hamburg, March 8, 1933.  
147 StAH B73 Sturmführer Loff to Sturmbann I/76, March 14, 1933.  
148 StAH B73 Böckenhauer to Sturm 2/76, March 18, 1933.  
149 StAH B73 Böckenhauer to Paschke, March 25, 1933.
Not even 8½ years of service to the movement and friendship with Böckenhauer could offset this moral failing. Several other former stormtroopers were found to have committed acts of fraud against their comrades, their comrades’ wives and girlfriends, and the SA itself. Another was rejected when his wife revealed that the man had avoided street actions out of doubt that his comrades would protect him – words that, to the SA, proved he had been “instinctively avoided” by his comrades and should not be allowed to return. In all these cases, former stormtroopers were judged loyal or disloyal on the basis of their interactions with their superior officers, comrades, relatives, and other members of the extended local network that was the stormtrooper family.

The numbers of men who tried to re-join the SA paled in comparison to the new applicants. This group comprised the opportunistic and job-seeking new faces, the Märgzelfallene, whom the old stormtroopers universally disdained, and its numbers swelled as the SA’s success in job placement became established in the public mind, even if the actual record was mixed. The new stormtroopers caused greater problems for the SA because of their sheer numbers, lack of grounding in the SA’s traditional neighborhoods, and uncertain ideological commitment. Old fighters resented having to compete with the new recruits for jobs and favors that they felt they themselves had already earned during the Kampfzeit.

A typical complaint came from Truppführer Preuss, who fought a “Papierkrieg” for over a year in a quest to distinguish himself from the crowd of latecomers. He had

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150 See the cases of SA-Men Meyer, Nehls, Pföb, and Preibe found in StAH B73.
151 StAH B73 Obersturmbannführer Meyer to SA-Brigade 12, June 15, 1933.
152 Longerich: “Every success in the sphere of securing work must only have raised the attractiveness of the SA for further numbers of unemployed.” 188.
watched several new members gain promotions before him, and in 1934 made a final plea to the Brigade:

Since 1928 I have not asked what I am going to get out of this, but instead entered the ranks out of pure idealism for the idea of our Führer. I was ready for action any time, whether was day or night. Wherever there was “dicke Luft” you knew where to find me. But today I must sadly conclude that I am no longer needed.

I know what I have borne for the movement as a National Socialist and an SA Mann, and I need neither recognition nor commendation for myself personally – in contrast to the new comrades who today are more highly esteemed than we old ones; we are the ones who lost work because of our membership in the Party, who now after 4½ years of unemployment are not in the position to do as others do.153

Other stormtroopers who had been involved in the movement before 1933 lodged similar complaints. Some tried to appeal to the top of local SA leadership.154 But their complaints were lost in the chorus of new voices swelling the SA’s ranks.

Nor could SA leaders rely any longer on “combat” to keep the group integrated. One complained, “after the takeover of power, a special means for evaluating a man and judging his leadership qualities has disappeared – namely, the trial and judgment of combat.”[emphasis in original]155 While the SA remained a bombastic group, and a significant minority of them received camp positions ensured to include violence, the days in which the SA had could pursue violent confrontation as a means of strengthening intra-group bonds – Reichardt’s “vergemeinschaftung durch Gewalt” – were over. Now, with hundreds of thousands of opportunists flooding the ranks, SA leaders no longer knew how to apportion promotions or divide the spoils of jobs, housing, and support payments. Increasing numbers of old fighters concluded that their new comrades were competitors. One old fighter complained that he was “very disappointed” with the
behavior of a new recruit whom he had helped establish in a part-time job. “[I] must assume,” he wrote the SA, “that he did not become a National Socialist out of true conviction [aus ehrlichem Herzen], but rather for material advantage; the expectation of such gain moved him to join the movement and SA.”\textsuperscript{156} The letter writer advocated caution in meeting the newcomers’ demands before those of trusted old comrades. But the NSDAP could hardly allow the SA to discriminate in this way if it were to serve as a vehicle for integrating vast numbers of German men into the movement.

The problems of expansion intensified throughout the year as the SA absorbed the other nationalist paramilitary organizations.\textsuperscript{157} The process was initiated in April by one of the Stahlhelm’s co-leaders, who hoped to gain favor with the NSDAP by bringing over his men. But by July the Party had decided that the SA should be the Reich’s only paramilitary. Other nationalist groups were thus transferred into the SA – forcibly, but on favorable terms. These men possessed the fighting spirit, nationalist ideology, and paramilitary experience that stormtroopers valued, but they also came with different backgrounds and outlooks on the nationalist struggle. Stormtroopers considered them – Stahlhelmers especially – members of the “reaction” decried in Wessel’s stormtrooper anthem.

Together, the three types of new recruits – exiled stormtroopers, Märzgefallene, and forcibly assimilated members of other nationalist paramilitaries – bloated the SA into a form almost unrecognizable to the old fighters. Röhm and the other OSAF leaders had already restructured the SA in the summer of 1933 to take account of the unwieldy membership. SA leaders consequently tried to absorb the new recruits and youngest

\textsuperscript{156} StAH B103 Band 2. Hassenkamp to Untergruppe Hamburg, April 21, 1933.
\textsuperscript{157} Longerich, 171 and Bruce Campbell 123-126.
members of other paramilitaries into the SA proper, awarding them high ranks. Röhm also shunted most of the older Stahlhelmers off into an SA-Reserve. But the OSAF also had to increase the size and number of Brigades, Standarten, and other units. The restructuring was necessary to manage an SA organization in which the SA’s traditional emphasis on small groups and personal connections had been weakened. Therefore, while the restructuring solved the some of the organizational problems of increased membership, the social and psychological problems of expansion could not be resolved so easily.

At its height in the summer of 1934, the SA it numbered around 4.5 million men nationally. About 30,000 of these were in Hamburg. The rapid and incomplete absorption of so many new members created an existential crisis in the minds of many stormtroopers. They had long lived in a subculture in which the small group was bound by mutual ties of service, sacrifice, community, and kinship. They were accustomed to knowing their fellow fighters closely. While there was still a great deal of suspicion and paranoia concerning police spies and Communist infiltrators, in general the stormtroopers could be confident a comrade was sincere – at least while the movement was still in opposition and the costs of wearing the uniform were high. After the takeover, however, many SA men no longer knew how to tell friend from foe.

SA leaders had to deal with increasing verbal and physical confrontations between old fighters and new recruits. Few stormtroopers believed that the Reichsbanner had seriously infiltrated the SA. Things were worse with the Stahlhelm. A song popular with the SA in late 1933 went: “When the Stahlhelmer comes into the room / hit him

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158 See Bruce Campbell, 124-125.
159 Bruce Campbell, 120; and Kater “Ansätze” 799.
Stormtroopers continued to greet their new Stahlhelm comrades with this verse even after repeated warnings that it was, in the words of a Stahlhelmer’s complaint, “unsoldierly and uncomradely conduct in full opposition to the clear and unambiguous will of the Führer and the Stabchef.”\textsuperscript{161} Conflict came through overt mutual insults. Stahlhelmers made “mean jokes” \textit{[üble Witze]} about Göring, “stupid pronouncements” \textit{[blöde Äusserungen]} about the fallen Dreckmann, and general insults directed at the SA itself.\textsuperscript{162} One stormtrooper took personal insult when a Stahlehler claimed, “if somebody hung Hitler from a tree we’d have political peace in Germany.”\textsuperscript{163} Generally, the somewhat older and more traditional Stahlhelmers considered the stormtroopers “stupid boys” \textit{[dumme Junge]},\textsuperscript{164} and at times employed the types of homophobic insults long used against the SA.\textsuperscript{165} For their part, SA men considered the Stahlhelmers “monocle fops,” \textit{[Monokolfatzken]},\textsuperscript{166} “cursed Stahlhelmers,”\textsuperscript{167} and “shitty Stahlhelmers” \textit{[Scheissstahlhelmer]}\textsuperscript{168}.

Both stormtroopers and Stahlhelmers placed great emphasis on proper forms of address. Proper etiquette meant more than avoiding “stupid pronouncements.” A large number of confrontations began with disputes over the formal greeting, in which the lower-ranking member raised his arm in the Party salute and cried “\textit{Heil Hitler}” or, more

\textsuperscript{160} StAH B197 Sturmführer Lüssenhop letter of November 18, 1933.
\textsuperscript{161} StAH B197 Kriegsverbandführer to SA-Brigade 12, January 6, 1934.
\textsuperscript{162} StAH B37 Sturmbannführer Meier Abschrift, undated.
\textsuperscript{163} StAH B37 Pfefferkorn to Standarte 15, September 20, 1933.
\textsuperscript{164} StAH B37 Brigade 12 to Marinestandarte 1, June 21, 1934.
\textsuperscript{165} These insults – the old “Röhmlinge,” for instance – grew even more popular after June 1934. See StAH B37 Pol.Mstr 6249 report of September 15, 1934.
\textsuperscript{166} StAH B37 Meldung of Rudolf Milter, February 9, 1934
\textsuperscript{167} StAH B37 Pol. Obw 2729 report of September 15, 1934. The policeman described the confrontation in question as a “mutual slugfest \textit{[gegentseitiger Schlägerei]} between members of the SA and Stahlhelm.”
\textsuperscript{168} StAH B37 Brigade 12 to Marinestandarte 1, June 21, 1934.
popular by the Stahlhelmers, “Fronheel Hitler” or simply “Fronheel”. The appropriate 
Heil was then returned by the higher ranking officer. But sometimes a man who wished 
to insult a would-be comrade either ignored his presence or refused to greet him properly. 
Conflicts over greeting were especially common in late 1933 and early 1934, when the 
absorption of Stahlhelmers, suspected Reichsbanner men, and myriad other types into the 
SA lumped together men who had formerly been in competition. Refusing to greet was 
one sign that a stormtrooper refused to recognize the equality of SA and the other 
organization. One outraged Stahlhelmer complained to the SA that a stormtrooper 
“passed on the street with his right hand in his pocket, without finding it necessary to stop 
and greet.”

To the honor- and status-conscious men of the nationalist milieu these 
slights were mortal insults that sparked many violent confrontations. Stormtroopers flew 
into rages when Stahlehlmers, supposedly on purpose, pronounced a “Heil Hitler” in “a 
taunting and provocative tone” [im höhnischen und auffordern Tone].

By March 1934 the violence within the SA – between its older members and the 
new recruits, especially Stahlhelmers – prompted a reaction from the Party. Hamburg’s 
SA leadership banned Stahlhelmers from SA taverns after 1 am. The ban curbed the 
fighting to some extent, but did little to mitigate the larger problem. The SA’s growth had 
destroyed the sense of community on which the group had always thrived. It dissolved 
the group’s utility as a tool with which to build a better life. And it harmed the SA’s 
ability to provide jobs as quickly as the desperate stormtroopers wished. This last issue 
stemmed from long-term structural problems of the world economy and could not be

169 StAH B37 Obersturmführer S to NS Frontkämpferbund, May 22, 1934. See also the case against 
Rottenführer Meyer.
170 StAH B37 Oberruppführer M to Brigade 12, December 10, 1933.
171 StAH B37 Polizeistunde für Angehörige des “Stahlhelms” March 29, 1934.
solved by an act of will. Now that so many German men were stormtroopers, job placement was most effectively done through measures that affected all workers, not just SA men. Many stormtroopers, especially the longest-serving ones, concluded that their service to the movement was not being honored as had been promised. This state of affairs only increased the stormtroopers’ insistence on the remaining reward they had sought: recognition of their personal authority over neighbors, family members, and potential spouses. Old SA men felt that control over those around them was now backed by the Party’s authority. The problems inherent in this belief appeared almost immediately after the takeover of power.

“Nicht vergemeinschaftend”: Frustration and Backlash Against the Unrestrained SA

A Professor G. Deuchler wrote to the SA on March 13, 1933 to report a disturbing incident. He had been sitting with other patrons on a pub patio, enjoying the spring weather and a glass of beer. They had arisen for the Deutschlandlied. After they had sat back down, the Horst Wessel Lied was played and the SA men in the crowd rose again. One of them became angered at the other guests and barked “Aufstehen!” - an “order” that was “gradually obeyed” [man folgte seinem Befehl allmählich].172 Deuchler and the other patrons took offense at the public commitment demanded here. Some even left - and “they weren’t wrong to do so,” said Deuchler. Yet these café patrons were not angry Communists, resentful Social Democrats, bourgeois liberals, or retrograde monarchists. Deuchler himself was an ardent National Socialist, and he spoke eloquently in his letter

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172 This and other accounts of the incident from StAH B197 Deuchler to NSDAP Hamburg, March 11, 1933.
to the SA about the importance of the movement’s larger projects. He felt that communal singing of the Party anthem was to be “greeted with the highest regard,” and that “it cannot be overlooked as a factor in building a true Volksgemeinschaft.” But he felt it must arise from custom [Sitte] and conviction, not coercion:

It is not conducive to building a community [nicht vergemeinschaftend], but rather the opposite, when SA-people believe they have the obligation to stand up as in the barracks yards… and command the guests to sing the Horst Wessel Lied.

Deuchler suggested how things should have gone:

[The SA man should have said,] ‘To honor our heroic Vorkämpfer Horst Wessel, let us all rise,’ and then the whole problem would have been solved. It wouldn’t have ruined the mood – quite the opposite, the majority of the good and worthy Bürger would have caught the sense of it and been glad; they would have experienced in that moment an aspect of Volksgemeinschaft. This is how one works through the ideas of the Führer and the leadership, and thus builds Volksgemeinschaft.

In the end, even if the stormtrooper in question acted with the best of intentions,” the whole affair “made an embarrassing impression on many members of the National Socialist movement” among the patrons. Deuchler specifically criticized the stormtroopers’ resort to their “old barracks-yard” mentality, which was “absolutely sure to destroy the rising Volksgemeinschaftsgefühl, and thus do unholy damage to the NS-movement and its great tasks.”

SA leaders did not need Deuchler’s warning to predict these very consequences. Disputes had already occurred in which the rowdy SA’s taste in songs came into conflict with the staid public norms of Hamburg’s Bürghers. In February, an SA man had seized the baton from a beerhall’s band-conductor and directed his comrades in the Party anthem, while the musicians stalked out. When after 15 minutes of disruption, the conductor and musicians attempted to resume playing, the SA man grabbed their music
sheets and threw them into the crowd.\textsuperscript{173} As for the stormtroopers’ choice of songs, Böckenhauer had already issued orders banning “bloodthirsty songs,” which were still being sung even though they had already been proscribed.\textsuperscript{174} The SA also opposed singing both the Deutschland- and Horst Wessel Lied in public – though less for Deuchler’s reasons than out of a desire to keep sacred songs in private realms and prevent them from losing potency through repetition.\textsuperscript{175} The SA made several other attempts to clean up its public reputation, including monitoring more closely the SA taverns.\textsuperscript{176} But their problems in controlling off-duty stormtroopers remained.

As 1933 drew on, most citizens of Hamburg believed that they had earned freedom from political terror. The Nazis themselves had held out this hope – the restoration of order in the streets and other public places – as a reason to vote for the National Socialists. Seen from the perspective of citizens who were not Jewish, homosexual, partisans of other parties, or among the Party’s other enemies, the SA men were least dangerous in public. In these roles, discipline prevailed and leaders could control behavior. But when in private settings, alone or in small groups, stormtroopers knew that their uniforms commanded obedience backed by implicit threat. And many used this effect to impose their authority in quotidian, personal interactions that leaders could never fully monitor.

Stormtroopers abused their authority – official and implicit – in a variety of ways. The \textit{Hilfspolizei} waved pistols, pressured merchants, and bullied their way onto trains. Other stormtroopers still tried to leverage their political authority in personal situations.

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{172} StAH B109 February 20, 1933. \\
\textsuperscript{173} StAH B197 Böckenhauer to Standarte 31, February 8, 1933. \\
\textsuperscript{174} StAH B197 Böckenhauer to Deuchler, March 29, 1933. \\
\textsuperscript{175} StAH B5. SA leaders, however, seemed more concerned with overseeing a pub’s political history and reliability than with any moral issues. \\
\end{flushleft}
The most symbolically fraught occasions were their attempts to pressure women into relationships or otherwise control their sexual partners. Stormtroopers took particular offense with mixed Jewish-“Aryan” couples, the male Jewish halves of which they assaulted on the streets whenever they felt they could get away with it. Such behavior was problematic enough – if not for the SA leadership, for Hamburg’s citizens who wished to stroll through their city without witnessing violence. SA men pursued girls with such zeal that they risked resembling the predatory stereotypes they had long decried. They stalked women after dances and pressured them for favors. They asked girls on dates in cafes, bars, and other public places where the waitresses and *Toilettenmädchen* might hesitate to refuse the SA man’s advances out of fear. Stormtrooper saw increased access to women as one of the rewards of battle. Nazi ideology emphasized the idea that the stormtrooper’s best chance of attracting a mate was to be a warrior for the movement. His performance would prove his commitment to the Volk and make him an attractive candidate for pure German girls who hoped to start Aryan families. In pursuing women after the takeover, stormtroopers also hoped to make good on the Party’s implicit promise that the Nazi order would allow them to start families of their own. But their abuse of the uniform to force women’s attraction risked reversing the stereotypes that had propelled them to power. In the worst cases, verbal confrontations turned physical. One stormtrooper publicly struck a female party member who had quarreled with his girlfriend. The unrecorded nature of most personal

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177 See Bruhns “‘Deutsche und Juden’ Antisemitismus im Hamburg” in Bruhns, Ed. 122-123.
178 One such story had a comedic end: the girl in question was “so mighty” that she lifted the SA man up and hung him by his jacket on a fence. The others “ran away in fright.” FZG WdE 269T.
179 See for example the story “Will und das Mädchen” in the *Tageblatt* of December 28, 1933.
180 StAH B103 Band 2. Meldung an die SA Unterguppe Hamburg, February 9, 1933. In this case, the SA Mann in question first implied that the woman was a prostitute, in which case she presumably had only
interactions makes it difficult to tell if stormtrooper abuse of power increased or
decreased over time. The former seems plausible. Either way, however, it was clear that
the patience with which the public greeted the SA’s abuse of authority was wearing thin.

Stormtrooper disruptions raged increasingly out of control, and the SA was
flooded with complaints. SA men tried to arrest motorists on their own authority while
simultaneously flouting traffic law themselves.\(^{181}\) They abused drugs, drunkenly
disrupted church services, and littered in the streets.\(^{182}\) They attacked foreigners with
little provocation except that their victims “looked Jewish” – though the victims usually
turned out to be Greek, Turkish, and even Danish or British.\(^{183}\) In a less violent but still
offensive incident, residents near the Sturmlokal at Grevenweg 10 were awakened at 1:30
a.m. by a group of drunken stormtroopers on their way home - and who stopped here and
there along the street to urinate on houses, garden walls, and even a children’s
playground.\(^{184}\) The “celebration,” as the complainant called it, lasted an hour, and
reinforced the man’s resentment at the local SA rowdies, who he claimed began such
behavior every night “punctually” at 10:30.

In their constancy, their unpredictability, and their violation of public propriety,
these incidents threatened the SA’s and NSDAP’s grip on power by harming their
reputation among supporters and neutral citizens. The Party allowed, and encouraged, SA
violence against enemies of the regime, but it knew that its pose as a protector of
Hamburg’s “responsible people” was belied every time a stormtrooper abused his power

\(^{181}\) StAH B114.
\(^{182}\) StAH B112
\(^{183}\) StAH B112 consists almost a dozen such incidents.
\(^{184}\) StAH B109 Wilhelm Kremer to SA-Kommando, May 19, 1933.
or forced his will on fellow citizens. The stormtroopers’ impositions on their neighbors placed the Party in a difficult situation. It still needed to bolster the SA’s reputation as a founding force of the movement and its regime, but any attempt to do so seemed only to encourage the stormtroopers to behave as they had during the *Kampfzeit*. The era was fading further into the past, but many stormtroopers refused to moderate their behavior. Such stubbornness risked turning people against the regime at the very points the Party tried to increase their loyalty.

A particularly embarrassing episode outside the Passage Theater in March 1934 transformed an event designed to increase support for the Party into a public relations disaster. The Party had produced a film, *Hans Westmar*, honoring the SA. It was a powerful, heroic retelling of Horst Wessel’s story, which peaked with the protagonist’s martyrdom and a victory for the movement. At the end of the film, SA men marched through the Brandenburg gate in Berlin accompanied by “Die Fahne Hoch” and the fallen Westmar’s ghostly spirit. Stormtroopers and civilians alike had received the film with great acclaim, but it remained a problematic work because of the emotions it unleashed whenever it was screened.\(^{185}\) The screening in the Passage Theater ended in a violent confrontation instigated when an SA Truppführer Böhl took offense that some members of the crowd had not risen in salute to the party anthem and fallen hero. Böhl centered his rage on a comrade whom he recognized by a badge of the NSKK, an SA sub-organization for motor vehicle enthusiasts. After an argument that drew in other patrons of the

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\(^{185}\) Goebbels, however, found the film far more problematic, and he ordered it withdrawn from circulation despite its positive reception. See Robert Herzstein, “No Second Revolution: Joseph Goebbels and the Röhm Crisis, 1933-1934, the Cinematic Evidence,” *Proceedings of the South Carolina Historical Association* (1984): 53-66. Herzstein claims that the film was “suppressed for good [after December 1933], though a special screening may have taken place in Munich in March, 1934.” (54) Evidence of the Hamburg screening that same month calls into question this assessment, as well as the speed or efficacy of Goebbels’ ban.
balcony, the two men left the theater accompanied by a large number of onlookers. As the crowd emptied onto the upscale shopping street outside the theater, the NSKK man lost track of his girlfriend and slowed down to wait for her. Böhl took this as a sign of resistance, tore off the man’s NSKK badge, and beat him about the head.  

Böhl later complained, “Too bad I didn’t give that guy a few more in the face.” But he took a more demure stance once his SA leaders investigated the incident. To them, he justified his actions in terms he thought his superiors would understand:

I noticed a very clear movement, as when a man intends to free himself from a grip through the application of force. But I prevented this and gave him several (2 to 3) blows on the chin. After that, he followed me without further incident to the police station.

Böhl had learned through many street battles how to recognize the signs that an opponent was making a move. He had learned how useful violence could be in preventing “further incident.” He had also learned how to justify violence by asserting defense of the law – in this case, through allegation that his opponent was resisting arrest. But the conditions of the Kampfzeit, when stormtroopers could seize upon an enemy’s violation of social or political codes as a way to justify the stormtroopers’ violent assertion of authority, no longer applied.

Böhl’s conduct embarrassed the SA. He had caused a scene during the film, created a violent public spectacle on the street outside, and had broken the unified front that members of the movement were expected to maintain in the presence of civilians. Several stormtroopers tried to calm the situation and bring the opponents to the police station, but Böhl insisted on his privileges as an old fighter to blunt their efforts. An SA-medic [San-Sturmführer] who had attended the screening with several fellow

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186 Böger’s version of the incident was confirmed against the testimony of five other SA men who had witnessed the incident, all of them doctors or medics at the nearby St Georg Hospital.
stormtrooper doctors described Böhl’s conduct as “confrontational” even with other stormtroopers and policemen, whose authority he challenged as inferior to his own as an “alter Kämpfer”. The medic also pointed out that Böhl’s insistence on standing for Wessel’s anthem violated the Party’s own recent orders. He himself hadn’t stood up for the song either, as

A Jan 1 notice in the paper had made known that one shouldn’t stand up in theatres when the Horst-Wessel Lied is played – for example in the newsreels, where the Horst-Wessel Lied is often played multiple times – because this would disturb others. Böhl’s aggressive behavior caused an even more extreme disturbance than the orders had envisioned. Especially given the bevy of insults he hurled not only at Böger but also at the NSKK itself, his attitude conveyed the belief that the SA was the superior organization within the Nazi state, that the oldest and most habitually violent stormtroopers within it reigned supreme, and that they would not hesitate violently to enforce their conceptions of honor and party patriotism, even against other members of the movement. Such behavior contradicted the regime’s message that citizens could prosper if they gave up resistance and joined the movement. In the end, a film screening intended to bolster public respect for the NSDAP, SA, and old fighters instead made such esteem seem forced. As the medic said, “Truppführer Böhl, through his undisciplined behavior, ruined any good feelings within the theater.” Truppführer Böhl was allowed to quit the SA on his own accord, an option only available to old fighters. But he was hardly the only stormtrooper who sought to impose rude and invasive expressions of party patriotism on his fellow citizens. The problem had begun almost as soon as the Party took power, and it only grew worse over time.

187 This medic also claimed not to have noticed the playing of the song, “weil ich durch die Handlung des Filmes zu sehr gepackt war.”
In some cases, the SA itself policed its members and tried to curb their disruptive behavior. But its leaders simultaneously insisted that the SA men – even when they flouted the law – be treated with respect. After an episode in which a stormtrooper had tried to start a fight with a Jewish man who was walking arm-in-arm with an “Aryan” girl, Böckenhauer wrote that the SA man should not have allowed himself to be publicly taken to the police station. The police, Böckenhauer insisted, should handle stormtroopers more discreetly, “with consideration of the stormtroopers’ place in the state, their backgrounds [Werdegang], their sacrifices, and their work in service to the Volk and movement.”

Other Nazi leaders, especially those whose agencies competed or conflicted with Röhm’s SA, were not so forgiving of stormtrooper excesses. By mid-1934, pressure had built among non-SA Party elites that the stormtrooper problem had to be resolved, lest it destroy support for the regime, both among the general public and with key economic and military leaders. True to the Nazi form, their solution was sudden and murderous.

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188 NARA A3341 SA Kartei – 036 Johann Friedrich B.
CHAPTER VIII

DEFEAT AND DOWNFALL (1934-1935)

As the stormtroopers caused trouble in everyday situations across Hamburg, larger political tensions brewed elsewhere between their leaders and other high-ranking Nazi officials. The conflict between the SA and the Party was nothing new; it had been a potential rift in the movement throughout its life. But, with exceptions like the 1930-1931 Stennes revolt in Berlin, the fissures had been bridged by the SA’s reliance on Party finances, the individual stormtroopers’ loyalty to Hitler, and the hope that at any moment the Party would turn them loose against their enemies. These centripetal forces kept SA men in line politically even as they still acted out as individuals. Röhm also kept the organization closely tied to Hitler and the Party leadership even as his own personality cult within the SA grew.¹

Röhm also announced his own plans for what the SA should become. He sought to build his paramilitary army into an official military force that would first supplement, then replace the Wehrmacht with a younger, more dynamic, and ideologically pure SA corps.² In practice, the Army and SA cooperated well in the regime’s first years. The SA assumed responsibility for light military training and “Wehrsport” as a way of re-militarizing German men outside the terms of Versailles. One scholar has described this “fairly comfortable and smoothly functioning modus vivendi” as “so advantageous for the army that it continued long after the Night of the Long Knives.”³ Röhm even signed an agreement giving up his military ambitions in a meeting with Hitler and leaders of the

¹ Longerich, 200.
² On Röhm’s plans, see Longerich 183-188
Reichswehr in February 1934. Many military leaders, especially General von Blomberg, still watched the SA carefully, and their suspicion contributed to the coming purge.⁴ Röhm’s loud advocacy of the stormtroopers’ economic demands also played a role. These calls came from the left or socialist wing of the National Socialist movement, and they unnerved business and industrial leaders whose cooperation would be needed to fight the war Hitler already planned to begin. This unease among economic elites combined with the distrust many high-ranking Nazis – Göring and Himmler especially, but also Himmler’s deputy Reinhard Heydrich and Interior Minister Wilhelm Frick – held for Röhm, his personal ambition, and his millions of wild followers. Furthermore, the more traditional members of the Nazis’ “national coalition” – whose support and cooperation were necessary to rebuild the German war machine – would not countenance rule by the SA.

Thus, national political considerations combined with the stormtroopers’ lawless behavior to encourage Hitler to tame the SA. Hitler’s own thoughts on the matter are difficult to divine, though he seems long to have considered the SA a barely controllable mob when compared to the elite guard of the SS. In one famous anecdote, Hitler claimed that the SA’s popularity in Protestant areas signified its rebelliousness and iconoclasm, while the SS spread in Catholic areas because of it matched this group’s supposed obedience and servility to a single ruling figure.⁵ Hitler had embraced the SA rebels so long as he preached revolution; now, he needed servants. In the end, Hitler allowed Göring, Himmler, and Heydrich to convince him that Röhm planned an SA coup and a

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⁴ As in Kershaw’s account of the purge in *Hitler: Hubris*, 499-524, which takes a broad view of the purge’s origins in the tension between military, economic, and political elites.

radical “second revolution.” Historians generally agree that, though disorganized and piecemeal, the SA’s demands did challenge Hitler’s leadership and strain the nascent Nazi state. In Kershaw’s words, they were “the greatest threat to Hitler in the early phase of the Dictatorship.” The threat, however, came not from specific plans Röhm had laid, but from the daily disruptions that the stormtroopers caused in everyday life. These incidents were the local corollaries to the national tensions that bred resentment and distrust of the SA. As citizen complaints about stormtrooper abuses resonated up through the Nazi hierarchy, a growing number of military, economic, and political elites joined forces to argue that Hitler put an end to their independence and arrogance. As long as the SA continued to rage unchecked through the streets, cafes, and public spaces of German cities, their actions negated Hitler’s claims after July 1933 that the revolution had ended, and order had been restored to the German polity.

**June 30, 1934: The Night of the Long Knives**

By June 1934, Hitler arrived at a decision. True to form, his hesitation ended suddenly in a violent resolution. He had Röhm order the SA on a month-long vacation and promised to attend an SA leadership conference set for June 30 in Bad Wiesee, a Bavarian resort town. The SA vacation – the very fact of which negates accusations that Röhm actually planned a coup, as Hitler’s subsequent justifications claimed – distracted

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6 For a gripping but semi-fictionalized account of the deliberations among this circle in the weeks leading to the purge, see Max Gallo’s *The Night of the Long Knives* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 11-107.

7 See for example, Willaim’s Shirer, 213-226. More recent works such as Kershaw’s have followed this line as well, as have several specific studies of the purge itself. See Karl Martin Grass, “Edgar Jung, Papenkreis und Röhmkrise 1933/34,” dissertation with Rupprecht-Karl Universität zu Heidelberg, 1966; Heinz Höhne, *Mordsache Röhm. Hitler’s Durchbruch zur Alleinherrschaft 1933-1934* (Hamburg: Rowohlt Verlag, 1984).

8 Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship*, 82.
SA men and leaders from politics and hid the scale of the plot against them. Röhm’s personal circle and SA high command spent the weekend of June 30 at an increasingly debauched party at the Pension Hanselbauer, at which beer flowed, clothes were shed, and SA men paired off to enjoy each other’s company. Around 6:30 a.m., Hitler and a column of SS men burst into the hotel, arrested the SA leaders present, and shot to death one whom they found in bed with his driver. The act inaugurated a three-day massacre of hundreds of stormtroopers across the Reich, conducted by the SS with the assistance of the Reichswehr and Himmler’s security forces. Röhm himself was left in a cell, given a pistol, and told to take a soldier’s way out. He refused, and was shot. According to legend, he and many other SA leaders died with Hitler’s name on their lips. SS assassins also settled scores with a variety of other adversaries, including Gregor Strasser, Hitler’s old rival for the affections of the Party’s populist northern wing, General and former Chancellor von Schleicher, who was shot in his home along with his wife, and Gustav von Kahr, who had opposed Hitler during his ill-fated 1923 putsch and whose hacked-up body was later found in a swamp. All told, at least 85 people - and possibly as many as several hundred - fell victim to the purge, only half of them SA leaders. Over 1,000 were arrested as well.\footnote{Richard Evans, \textit{The Third Reich in Power: 1933-1939} (New York: Penguin Press, 2005), 39, and Kershaw, \textit{Hitler: Hubris}, 517.} The true figures cannot be calculated because of the deliberate destruction of all records on the operation, which Göring and Himmler ordered burned on July 2 – the very day Hitler declared an end to the “cleansing action” – as well as the general atmosphere of secrecy and paranoia surrounding the event.\footnote{Gallo, 275 and Kershaw, \textit{Hitler: Hubris}, 517.}

For these reasons, the course of the purge in Hamburg and the number of its victims there are difficult to determine. Though the killings were greatest in and near
Munich, Berlin, and Silesia – the oldest party strongholds where Himmler and Heydrich had nurtured many rivalries\textsuperscript{11} – some measure of violence came to Hamburg as well. At least 11 people were reportedly killed.\textsuperscript{12} Several high-ranking SA leaders and police officials were arrested and sent to Berlin, including Ellerhusen. His friendships with Kaufmann (Heydrich’s old rival) and Bisschopinck (whom Conn had driven out of Hamburg over the issue of homosexuality) made Ellerhusen a target.\textsuperscript{13} But he and most others were soon released on the urgings of Kaufmann and Krogmann, who went to Berlin to argue their cases. Some stormtroopers fled the city in fear of their lives, including Plasberg, Jaworski, and several other homosexual stormtroopers who disappeared from the SA’s sight during the purge.\textsuperscript{14} These men were later expelled, but they remained alive. Bisschopinck survived the purge unmolested in his new position in Golar.\textsuperscript{15} In general, the purge in Hamburg seems not to have caused many outright casualties, but instead to have sent a clear and threatening message to the city’s stormtroopers.

\textbf{Justifying the Purge: The Mobilization of Homophobic Panic}

The Night of the Long Knives’ significance did not lie in the number of stormtroopers killed. The SA’s decapitation was a targeted action that primarily killed members of Röhm’s clique, as well as others who had been identified as sources of

\textsuperscript{11} See Koehl, 99-100.
\textsuperscript{12} See NARA 3341 086 Georg C. – This man claims to have shot “the 11” Hamburg victims of the purge. SA leaders investigating this claim determined that the man was a “habitual criminal” and a liar, and presumably they would have known who the true killers were. Regardless of the claim’s truth, the statement demonstrates that it was held common knowledge that at least this many had been killed.
\textsuperscript{13} Carl Vincent Krogmann, \textit{Es ging um Deutschlands Zukunft 1932-1939} (Leoni am Starnberger See: Druffel-Verlag, 1977), 147-152.
\textsuperscript{14} See NARA 3341 104b and 108b
\textsuperscript{15} NARA 3341 104b.
trouble or had opposed the purge’s architects. The vast majority of stormtroopers could not be murdered, both because of their numbers and because of the group’s historical importance to the Party. The purge’s significance must therefore be seen in Hitler’s rhetorical defense of the killings, which he justified as an executive action to defend the state and restore the Party’s moral standing. In the weeks after the purge, Nazi speakers and newspapers mobilized public panic against the homosexuality, decadence, and vice displayed by the victims in order to win support for their illegal murders and the general spread of unchecked state violence.

Goebbels set the tone in his radio address that Monday morning, in which he painted the supposed threat to the state in moral as well as political terms. Röhm, Goebbels claimed, had planned a coup against Hitler, a second revolution, and an SA state. These were reasons enough for his elimination. But Goebbels also added harsh words about the SA leaders’ immorality. He mobilized the language of moral outrage in order to paint the killings as an act for the protection of the Party and the nation:

[Röhm and the SA leaders] have discredited the honor and prestige of our Sturmbteilung. By a life of unparalleled debauchery, by their parade of high living, by their feasting and carousing, they have damaged the principles of simplicity and personal decency that our Party supports. They were close to tainting the entire leadership with their shameful and disgusting sexual aberrations.  

This was a clear reference to stormtrooper homosexuality. Goebbels presented the action as a “storm of purification,” which was required to cleanse the Party of degenerate elements by extraordinary – and extra-legal – action. “The Führer,” he said in his radio address, “has decided to act without pity when the principles of decency, simplicity, and

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16 Gallo, 264. See also Hancock, Ernst Röhm, 162-163.
public propriety are at stake; and the punishment must be all the greater when the persons concerned occupy the highest positions.”

The Tageblatt reported these remarks, as well as “Göring’s statement on the cleansing”. But most importantly, the paper printed 12 orders for the new SA given by Hitler and his new Stabchef, Victor Lutze. The seventh point on the list addressed homosexuality within the SA more directly and openly than Nazi leaders had ever done. Here Hitler made clear that any toleration for homosexuality in the SA was a thing of the past:

I expect from all SA-leaders that they assist in keeping the SA a pure and clean institution. I wish especially that every mother be able to give her son to the SA, the Party, and the Hitler Youth without fear that he could be ethically or morally ruined [sittlich oder moralisch verdorben werden]. I therefore wish that all SA-leaders exactingly punish all offenses against P175 with immediate expulsion from the SA and the Party. I want men as SA leaders, not ridiculous apes.

Hitler’s public address to the Reichstag on July 13 followed up on these themes. The speech itself was long-awaited. Hitler had uncharacteristically kept from the public eye since the murders, nor had he addressed the Nazi faithful outside of a few minor appearances. The mood was uneasy in the Kroll Opera House, where the Reichstag now met since the Fire. The parliament was missing thirteen members who had just been killed by the very SS that now guarded the hall. The event was, in Kershaw’s words, “a vital speech, one of the most difficult [Hitler] had ever given.”

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17 Gallo, 265.
18 “Göring spricht über die Säuberung,” Hamburger Tageblatt, July 1, 1934.
Hitler addressed his remarks not only National Socialists, but also to “members of our leading bourgeois circles,” and specifically to women.\(^\text{21}\) He claimed that the Nazi state was built on the backs of its women supporters, who believed in it because of its moral values. “Millions of women love our new state,” he said. “They sacrifice, work, and pray for it. They discover in their natural instincts its mission the preservation of our people, which they themselves have given a living pledge in the form of their children.”\(^\text{22}\)

The “crimes of the high SA-leaders” thus threatened to undermine both Hitler’s own position and the Party’s larger base of support. “One thing is clear,” he declared. “the work to renew our Volk… is only possible if the German people follow their leaders with calmness, order, and discipline - and above all, when they can trust in their leadership.”\(^\text{23}\) Accordingly, Hitler’s speech moved quickly from a description of the SA leaders’ supposed political ambitions to a cataloguing of their alleged moral failings. Stabchef Röhm, Hitler claimed, had “distanced himself from the Party” through the lifestyle “he and his circle” pursued, which was “unbearable to all conceptions of National Socialism.”\(^\text{24}\) Röhm’s homosexuality and his propensity to promote his own thus bred a conspiracy to overthrow the state for the advantage of a secretive homosexual clique:

> It was not only terrible that [Röhm] himself and the circle around him broke all laws of decent conduct, or that – even worse – this poison began to spread itself in larger circles. The worst was that within the SA grew a sect sharing a certain, common orientation [Veranlagung], who formed the kernel of a conspiracy not only against the moral conceptions of a healthy Volk, but also against state security. A review of promotions carried out in May led to the terrible discovery that, within certain SA-groups, men were being promoted without regard to National Socialist- and SA-service, but only because they belonged to the circle of this orientation.\(^\text{25}\)

\(^{21}\) “Der Führer der Nation gibt seinem Volke Redenschaft,” *Hamburger Tageblatt*, July 14, 1934.

\(^{22}\) Ibid.

\(^{23}\) Ibid.

\(^{24}\) Ibid.

\(^{25}\) Ibid.
The Tageblatt printed this last phrase in bold type. Hitler’s message, dutifully magnified by his loyal press, made the sexual transgressions of Röhm and his “circle” into the full explanation of their alleged political conspiracy. “A small group of similarly disposed elements,” said Hitler, placed themselves “blindly” in the hands of their conspiratorial, homosexual leader Röhm, who then began plans for his cult to take over the state. In the face of this alleged moral decay and its consequent political threat, Hitler claimed to have acted in defense of German morality. In the speech’s most famous passage, he said:

In this hour I was responsible for the fate of the German people, and thereby I became the supreme judge of the German people. I gave the order to shoot the ringleaders in this treason, and I further gave the order to cauterize down to the raw flesh the ulcers of this poisoning of the wells in our domestic life.²⁶

The speech succeeded wildly. Kershaw judges it “if not one of [Hitler’s] best rhetorical performances, [it] was certainly one of the most remarkable, and most effective, that he was ever to deliver.”²⁷ It exploited both political and moral justifications for his minions’ illegal violence. Many historians have called attention to the speech’s elaboration of the Third Reich’s guiding legal principle – that Hitler was the “supreme judge of the German nation,” and could by definition decree what was law. His actions were retroactively declared legal on July 3.²⁸ In this respect, the action was part of a larger strategy to reverse longstanding legal principles: in the Third Reich, rather than “no punishment without law,” the state installed a standard of “no crime without punishment.”²⁹ Under this view, Hitler and the Nazi security agencies could, as seen over

²⁶ Ibid. see also Kershaw, Hitler: Hubris, 517.
²⁷ Ibid, 519.
²⁸ Ibid, 518.
the weekend of June 30, 1934, define crimes, punish criminals, and legalize their own actions at a later date. Ironically, in June 1934 Hitler tamed the lawless SA through violent means that were only afterwards given a retroactive legal veneer. Nazi elites supported this project from the start, and it was they to whom apologists from Hitler to Lutze spoke when they laid out in great detail all the elements of the supposed political plot. But these apologists also laced their account with code words that carried double meanings of sexual shame. The secretive “sect” or “circle” of “conspirators” with a common “orientation” acted “against the healthy instincts of a moral Volk” with their “Treiben” – a word that means both sabotage and fornication.\textsuperscript{30} The public was thus won over to the view that state actions could be considered moral, no matter how violent or illegal they may have been, so long as their stated goal was the promotion of private morality and the elimination of homosexuality.

Astute observers of the German political scene saw through Hitler’s characterization of his actions. The SPD in exile (SOPADE) reminded readers that Hitler had never before found fault with the SA’s crimes, moral, political, or sexual:

Hitler accuses his closest collaborators, the very men who brought him to power, of the most shameless moral depravities... But it is he who required of them terror and assassinations.... He tolerated and approved of their atrocities, called them his comrades... Today he allows them to be assassinated, not because of their crimes, but to save himself.\textsuperscript{31}

Many people in Germany also saw through the scheme. One SA doctor was disciplined for saying “It’s all a show, and Hitler’s just a big actor.”\textsuperscript{32} But in general, Hitler’s

\textsuperscript{30} “Was wird aus der SA?” \textit{Hamburger Tageblatt} July 7, 1934; “Der Führer der Nation gibt seinem Volke Redenschaft,” \textit{Hamburger Tageblatt}, July 14, 1934
\textsuperscript{31} Quoted in Gallo, 274.
\textsuperscript{32} StAH B201 Truppführer D to Brigade 12, September 5, 1934.
explanation resonated in the public. As the SOPADE report admitted, “Our comrades report that Hitler has won strong approval and sympathy from that part of the population which still places its hopes in him. To these people his action is proof that he wants order and decency.”\(^3\) It concluded that charges of personal immorality against the SA leaders “divert[ed] the attention of the great mass of the population from the political background of the action, and at the same time elevat[ed] Hitler’s standing as the cleanser of the movement.”\(^4\)

Hitler’s mobilization of moral panic against the SA leaders succeeded because it tapped into a pre-existing opinions concerning homosexuals’ purported tendency to form conniving cliques at the highest levels of government, as had been charged in the Eulenburg affair. Drawing inspiration from this established pattern, rumors around Hamburg in early 1934 anticipated the purge’s course with uncanny accuracy. In one rumor, SA leaders and an entourage of “questionable women” held a champagne party in the ritzy Hotel Atlantic, Hitler’s preferred destination when in town. “News of this event reached Hitler in Berlin,” according to the story, who flew to Hamburg, appeared in the Atlantic’s dining hall, overturned the SA table, and ground the champagne glasses underfoot.\(^5\) The story lacked plausibility – Hitler’s speedy response defied the laws of physics – but it featured several key elements of Hitler’s post-purge justifications. The SA’s high-rolling and corrupt lifestyle, its sexual depravity (though heterosexual in this version), its public flouting of propriety and dignity, Hitler’s rage upon hearing of these events, and his personal intervention to correct the situation all featured prominently in


\(^4\) Quoted in Kershaw, *Hitler: Hubris*, 520.

\(^5\) StAH B201 Brigade 12 to Staatspolizei Hamburg, February 22, 1934.
the Nazi’s official purge narrative. Stories like this one caught hold because they connected with public perceptions of the SA’s immoral behavior. A variety of prominent figures thus greeted Hitler’s actions as a heroic defense of national morality. Hindenburg sent telegrams of congratulations to Hitler and Göring. General von Blomberg and other army leaders also praised the “military determination” with which the purge was carried out. In Hamburg, Krogmann was won over to the action through his longstanding dislike of Röhm, which stemmed from the SA leader’s visit to the city the previous April – Röhm’s party had supposedly eaten 4,000 sandwiches and drank over 1000 liters of beer at the official reception in the Rathaus, then retired to a St. Pauli bar infamous for its male homosexual clientele. In the weeks after the purge, Krogmann and other Nazi leaders received visits from high-ranking SS officers who shared manufactured evidence of Röhm’s crimes and emphasized his homosexuality as a danger to the state. The explanation resonated even within the SA, where late-joining members often resented the homoerotic old guard. One Marine-Stormtrooper smugly declared at the time of the purge that, “The entire SA is made up of Röhmlinge,” and that these corrupt perverts “will be cleaned out soon.” Even the Nazis’ enemies, who had long used the stereotype of homosexual Nazis as a propaganda image, portrayed homosexuality as central to the purge. Willi Münzenberg, a Communist writing from exile in Paris, claimed in his Weissbuch über die Erschiessungen des 30 Juni that the purge had targeted the

36 Gallo, 276.
37 Gallo, 266.
38 Krogmann, 149.
39 Krogmann, 150-151. Krogmann admitted in later passages that the evidence was, in retrospect, weak. But he maintained a credulous insistence that Hitler “must have had” some hard evidence against Röh. 152.
40 StAH 214-1 vol 4. Edgar H.
homosexual Nazi clique whom Communists claimed to have set the Reichstag fire.\footnote{Hekma, “Gay Men and the Sexual History of the Political Left,” 234. This view comes dangerously close to Machtan’s un-provable gay-blackmail explanation in \textit{Hitlers Geheimnis}, as well as the outright homophobic charges in Lively and Abrams’ \textit{Pink Swastika}. For the history of the charge as levied in the German exile community, see Anson Rabinbach, “Van der Lubbe – ein Lustknabe Röhms?” in \textit{Homosexualität und Staatsräon}, Susanne zur Neiden, ed. (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2005), 193-213.} Hitler and his apologists thus turned the socialist parties’ own narrative against them: the “homosexual enemy of the state” that lurked within Nazism, whom the socialist parties argued was a prime reason to oppose the NSDAP, had now been purged.\footnote{The term comes both from contemporary writings as well as scholarly examinations of the era. See for instance Susanne zur Neiden, who speaks of a “legend” or “idea” of the “homosexuellen Staatsfeind” in her “Aufsteig und Fall des virilen Männerhelden. Der Skandal um Ernst Röhm und seine Ermordung” in Neiden, ed. 147-192.} Hitler’s discursive trick thus resonated with Germans of all political parties and social backgrounds, who overlooked the real motivations for unchecked state violence. They instead breathed a sigh of relief for Hitler’s actions against a hated sexual minority.

Hitler’s mobilization of homophobic panic against the SA must be read as a political tactic rather than an honest expression of his opinions or morals. Hitler himself had no discomfort with homosexuality until it proved politically useful. The Night of the Long Knives stands as the final settlement of homosexuality’s troubled place in the SA and the Nazi movement more generally. During the \textit{Kampfzeit}, men who cultivated homoerotic ties with their comrades, whether homo- or heterosexual, could see themselves as the elite core of the SA’s all-male “fighting community”. They did so in consciousness of following a long tradition of homoerotic military leadership in Germany – even as this tradition was under increased threat in the later imperial and Weimar periods, and had in fact brought them much public grief. Hitler allowed the situation, despite growing discontent among more homophobic figures within the Party, because he knew these men to be loyal to comrades and leaders to whom they felt both political and
erotic ties. But after the takeover, as the lawlessness and criminality of the SA grew apace with its membership rolls, Hitler reassessed the significance of the homosexual minority within SA. It was now to serve as a scapegoat for the excesses of the movement as a whole. The strategy worked because it built on a pre-existing discursive framework that associated male homosexuality with selfish and elite cliques that lurked within militarist governments, where they sought to pervert state and society to their own ends while seducing new comrades into their midst. The strength of this frame nurtured genuine homophobia among such key figures as Himmler, whose unbounded loathing of homosexual men proved lethal to Röhm and to thousands of innocent Germans, while also allowing the Nazis to appear as resistant to the corrupt and militarist trends they in fact advocated. The mobilization of homophobic panic was thus a crass and calculating act of political “instrumentalization” by Hitler himself, but one that succeeded wildly by tapping into honestly held, if misguided, moral concerns.  

Whereas the Nazis’ public rhetoric concerning homosexuality in their own ranks had previously dismissed or minimized homosexuality, after June 1934 it highlighted – if through the coded language of the time – the sexuality of the expelled and murdered stormtroopers. Doing so allowed the remaining stormtroopers and the public at large to retain pride in the SA, now supposedly cleansed of depraved influences. This was a largely cosmetic redemption of the SA, but it was effective because it encouraged the view that the SA lawlessness came from sources other than its members’ economic...

43 See Susanne zur Neiden’s plea in this vein, which claims that pure political calculation is “insufficient” as an explanation for homophobic persecution. Instead, scholars must examine “a closely woven discursive net” that links homosexuality, masculinity, politics, and reasons of state. “Homophobie und Staatsrätion” in Neiden, ed. 45. Giles shows in detail Himmler’s practical solutions to this difficult problem – he loathed male homosexuality and wanted to exterminate it, yet was often confused when encountering the problem among those he considered his best men. “The Denial of Homosexuality: Same-Sex Incidents in Himmler’s SS and Police,” Journal of the History of Sexuality, 11:1/2 (2002): 256-290.
ambitions and lust for personal power. Greed and authoritarianism were traits shared by almost all SA men, and they abused their power to these ends once given a chance. Hitler, however, encouraged the public to overlook this behavior in favor of blaming a small, secretive sexual minority who could be easily purged. In this formulation, eliminating the minority resolved the problem for the entire group. It allowed Lutze to affirm that “the simple and unknown SA man and his leaders knew nothing about” the supposed plans of “the high leadership-clique,” and that the SA as a whole “really has nothing to be ashamed of.” Instead, “They were to have been mis-used by a small circle of their former leaders, but they stand today without blemish [makellos]. I can say with pride, that the whole SA is clean and may now again wear the brown shirt with heads held high.” In the future, Lutze meant “to make of the brown formation an unquestionably clean and – this is of special importance – a politically reliable instrument of the movement.” The SA’s unreliability, unpredictability, and disorganized use of violence were thus painted as problems resolved by the expulsion of homosexual “elements.”

“Cleansing the SA”: Expulsion from Public Life on Private Grounds

The Night of the Long Knives inaugurated a new era of persecution across Germany. Yet the persecution did not target at homosexuals as a whole. Instead, the witch-hunt focused on the SA men themselves. Adolf Brand’s prediction that homosexual

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44 “Was wird aus der SA?” Hamburger Tageblatt, July 7 1934.
45 Micheler, 109. Micheler finds that the widespread persecution of gay men under the Nazis “began in different times in different places” and, until the 1935 law was not widespread. Systematic persecution of gay men in Hamburg began in 1936.
stormtroopers had been “carrying their hangman’s rope in their pockets” had finally come to pass. Yet Brand’s warning had far broader implications: once the inquisition had begun, all stormtroopers found their private lives under scrutiny by an increasingly invasive Party apparatus.

The SA had already been engaged in some efforts to reform its ranks before July 1934. These, however, affected few and mainly concentrated on monitoring members’ physical health, fitness levels, and citizenship status. After the Night of the Long Knives, reform of the SA thus took the shape of a moral cleansing. A purge of the SA could never have been conducted on the basis of political loyalty – as Campbell observed, “since Röhm had very likely not been a traitor in the first place, virtually no one fitting this description was found in the wake of the purge.” Instead, stormtroopers who could be accused of moral failings were cast out. These included those who were suspected homosexuals, convicted criminals, poor husbands, fickle brothers, rude to women, or unreliable comrades. They had always argued that their lives should be seen politically, and that their personal choices reflected their political virtues. Now, they found that the Party would, for the first time, hold them to the standards of private life they had claimed to embody. If they failed to meet these conditions, the Party cast them out of public life.

The standards of evidence for successful accusations of homosexuality were predictably lax, especially in the denunciatory atmosphere that reigned for the first

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46 Brand in Oosterhuis and Kennedy, eds., 236.
47 See StAH B64 (physical fitness and health issues) and B72 (citizenship status).
48 Bruce Campbell, “The SA after the Röhm Purge,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 28:4 (1993): 660. Campbell notes that the post-purge cleansing “would have had to happen anyway” given the SA’s rapid expansion, though SA leaders certainly would have carried it out under different terms when left to their own devices.
months after the purge. SA-Mann Friedhelm S. was ejected on July 4 for “offenses against P175.” The incident, however, involved no allegations of sexual contact. The young accuser, whom Friedhelm S. had met at a café the previous March, claimed only that the stormtrooper had propositioned him. This was enough for both the police and the SA. As the SA investigated the incident in July, Friedhelm defended himself with appeal to his outward non-conformity with the stereotypes of effeminate homosexual men. But his objections were in vain. He had fatally weakened his case by signing a protocol admitting to the accusation, an act that he blamed on being hard of hearing and in a state of agitation. His explanations instead betrayed a degree of guilt for his interaction with the youth, whose accusation he initially admitted only to recant when he realized the newly heightened seriousness of the charge. There was no other evidence against him. Nevertheless, the arresting officer said he “would make sure [Friedhelm] was sent to a work camp.” The SA itself, which had sat on its hands concerning Friedhelm before the purge, now easily fit him into its new crusade against stormtrooper homosexuality. They expelled the SA Man on July 4 along with three other men whose presence with Friedhelm in the SA files indicates that the organization believed them linked.

In the weeks following the purge, rumor and innuendo were enough to mark a stormtrooper as an unwanted outsider, no matter the lack of actual evidence. One sport leader and Rottenführer “suspected of unnatural fornication” was forced to leave “on his own wish” even though there was insufficient evidence to convict him of any crime.

The SA then investigated every witness in the case for clues to their own possible

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49 StAH B103 letter of Sturmbannführer P to Brigade R11, July 4, 1934.
50 Ibid.
51 Ibid.
52 StAH B103 letter of SA-Mann Friedhelm S. to SA Gruppe Hansa, July 26, 1934.
53 StAH 241-1: Justizverwaltung I: XXII Ch3 vol 4: Adolf S.
“participation” in homosexual deeds. This investigative chain was quite common because of public stereotypes about male homosexual cliques, and it was abused to great extent in later years as persecution of all openly homosexual German men accelerated. The SA also monitored arrest records in other German states in order to catch those stormtroopers convicted outside Hamburg, and they forwarded this scandalous information to the men’s employers as well. Many homosexual stormtroopers who had been accepted or who had lived under cover now met with expulsion. This had not been the case for similar episodes before July 1934. Denunciations grew so frequent that after a few weeks Lutze and Hess warned that it was getting out of control. The articles, published not in the *Tageblatt* but in the conservative *Fremdenblatt*, cautioned against “rumor mongering” and “anonymous denunciations.” The public had taken heed of the call to drive homosexual Nazis out of the Party, but the Party preferred to do so behind closed doors.

In 1935, the regime chose the anniversary of the purge to publish its extended version of P175, which expanded the category of the crime far beyond “actions resembling coitus,” the previous standard. Now, judges could decree any act – even a simple touch or look – to constitute evidence of homosexuality. The situation had become so dangerous that denouncers even began to consider negative interest in

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54 Giles provides a concrete example of this technique in “Legislating Homophobia,” 345.
55 As was the case for Karl F - stormtrooper, Hilfspolizist, and then professor at the University of Hamburg - who had been arrested in East Prussia for crimes against P175. See StAH 361-6 Hochschulwesen - Dozenten und Personalakten IV 248
56 StAH 241-1: Justizverwaltung I: XXII Cb3 vol 2.: Friedrich M.; as well as NARA A3341 104b, 069b, 037.
57 See for example the case of an SA-Mann investigated for being caught in the woods with an underage boy, whose father “intended to have him investigated by a doctor for signs of sexual misuse.” He was not disciplined despite the statements of witnesses more detailed and reliable than, for instance, the testimony against Friedhelm S. StAH B109 files of May 27, 1933, June 24, 1933, and June 27, 1933.
homosexuality to be evidence of same-sex orientation. One Scharführer who had been in the SA since 1932 was thus expelled soon after the law’s passage. Despite the fact that he was married and had a child, the SA began to take his unusually strong interest in rooting out homosexuality in St Georg as a sign of his own inclinations. During a Kaffepause with a stormtrooper colleague at his office, Scharführer M. said that he knew of several local bars frequented by male homosexuals, and that they should visit these establishments in order to discover the patrons and report them to the police. On the one hand, it was the logical extension of the regime’s ever-escalating rhetorical and legal persecution of homosexual men. But the intensity of interest in his crusade struck his comrades and the Standarte as odd. As Standartenführer Trzebiatowsky, one of the oldest and most accomplished SA leaders in Hamburg, wrote in his report:

The mere knowledge of these bars that M. displays supports the suspicion that he himself has similar inclinations. His further suggestion to [his SA work colleague] that they should visit these bars and report their observances to the police appears as nothing other than a cloak under which M. hides in order to pursue his inclinations without danger.\(^\text{61}\)

As this case displays, it was as difficult as ever actually to determine which stormtroopers were homosexual and which were not. The SA had responded to these problems during the Kampfzeit by trying to ignore the issue altogether. They could no longer pursue this solution, and so instead decided to err on the side of expulsion. M’s case came to a head when a series of letters emerged from July 1935 in which he openly discussed “committing unnatural fornication” [\textit{widernatürlicher Unzucht zu treiben}] with a young worker in the neighborhood.\(^\text{62}\) M. claimed that he was merely trying to conduct a sting operation to cleanse his neighborhood of a man who had propositioned him many times.

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\(^{61}\) NARA A3341 SA Kartei – B022 Heinrich M.
\(^{62}\) Ibid.
The SA, given the combination of incidents and the intensity of M’s crusade against local homosexual men, found his excuses unbelievable:

Each isolated cause for suspicion against M. may not suffice as a reason for action. In their totality, however, they show that M. undoubtedly must have more than a criminal interest in these matters, and that his is himself same-sex inclined.63

M. Despite his impeccable record of military and Freikorps service, despite his long tenure in the SA, despite the testimony of several other old SA men whose lives he had saved during the Kampfzeit, despite no evidence he had ever actually had sex with a man, and despite his marriage and his child, M was found guilty of homosexuality and thus expelled. He appealed the decision three times without success.

As with most individuals in past eras, insufficient evidence exists to determine M’s actual sexuality. It is possible that his elaborate plans to spy on and entrap patrons of local bars was a genuine expression of his hatred of homosexuality and his desire to recapture the black-ops lifestyle he had led in the Freikorps and in the SA.64 However, the SA’s conclusion that M. masked his own desires through homophobic posturing is also plausible, especially given the stormtroopers’ history of deflecting attention from their own inclinations using such means – a form of “reaction formation.” At the same time, much legitimate homophobia existed within the Nazi movement – especially among

63 Ibid.
64 M. was active in Russia during their Civil War, where he operated behind Bolshevik lines leading an insurgency in cooperation with local farmers. He was also lauded during his time in the SA as an effective infiltrator of Communist meetings and spy on their tactical discussions. These experiences, however, led the SA to conclude that his clumsy correspondences with the local coal handler were genuine sexual propositions, since he would have known how to conduct such a sting operation “without putting himself in legal jeopardy.” Ibid.
the younger members and the Hitler Youth, some of whom even posed as “bait” in order
to root out homosexual men across the city.65

Regardless of M’s sexual orientation, or that of any other individual Nazi
homophobe, the movement as a whole after June 1934 engaged in the large-scale political
equivalent of reaction formation. The SA was determined to prevent any association
between it and homosexuality in the public mind. It did so first by hunting down its own
homosexual members, no matter how valuable their service had been. Stormtroopers
suspected of homosexuality could no longer rely for protection on Röhm’s example,
Hitler’s purposeful ignorance, the traditional lauding of homoerotic ties between fighting
comrades, or even their own homophobic self-positioning. Instead, Lutze followed
Hitler’s orders to cleanse the SA of any association with homosexuality, whether proven
or alleged. His resolution did not fade over time. One young stormtrooper wrote him in
1937 in the vain hopes of being welcomed back to the SA after his release from jail on
charges of homosexuality. Lutze replied:

To your complaint I have little to remark. You yourself admit that you
have earned your punishment. The foundational principles of the SA that
your misconduct violates are widely known. The Führer himself spoke of
a pestilence that must be rooted out with all necessary means and brutal
measures, so that a healthy German youth can be raised. Every SA Man
knows this, and every SA Man must be guided by it. He who makes
himself guilty of unnatural fornication must expect only the most
ignominious expulsion from the SA.66

65 These attempts were stopped, however, by the Hamburg police, who decried the “impudent” actions of
“amateur criminologists.” See Micheler, “Homophobic Propaganda” 125. These Hitler Youths may, of
course, have also been engaged in reaction formation – as Giles found, “an astonishing 25 percent of all
youths dismissed from the HJ between 1934 and 1939 were expelled on charges of homosexuality.” Giles,
“Straight Talk for Nazi Youth: The Attempt to Transmit Heterosexual Norms,” Education and Cultural
Transmission: Historical Studies of Continuity and Change in Families, Schooling, and Youth Cultures
(Gent: CSHP, 1996), 308-309.
66 NARA A3341 SA Kartei – 022 Johannes B.
It mystifies that even a young and naïve stormtrooper could after June 1934 believe that homosexuals had any place within the Nazi movement. Yet straight men also discovered that the Party and SA now intended to monitor their sexual lives and family relationships as well.

The first to fall under the Party’s new scrutiny were men who had been accused of molesting girls. The Party and SA had already pursued such allegations before the purge, but now, as was the case with allegations of homosexuality, the standards of evidence were relaxed. It seems that the Hamburg SA at this time also began to consider rural straight men as much of a threat to children as urban homosexual men. But the most important development came when the SA men’s neighbors realized that the Party’s new scrutiny of stormtroopers gave them a powerful weapon with which to influence, threaten, or take revenge against SA men with whom they came in conflict. One Oberführer found himself reported to the SA for supposedly hitting a local woman in the face. The two had long fought running disputes over their sons’ interactions and other neighborhood matters, which the Oberführer had been accustomed to resolving by grabbing her by the arm and “giving her a talking to.” She now accused him of battery—not to the police, but to the SA directly. Another wife who now lived separated from her stormtrooper husband reported him to the SA for his failure to pay alimony or child support. Other denouncers reported SA men of beating their wives, living in sin with unmarried girls whose fathers did not approve, conducting affairs with married women,

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67 See StAH 241-1: Justizverwaltung I: XXII Cb3: vol 2: docs 141, 404, and 405
68 StAH 241-1: Justizverwaltung I: XXII Cb3: vol 4: doc 34.
69 StAH B109 Obertruppführer Heinsen to Nachrichtensturm 12 letter of November 23, 1934.
70 StAH 241-1: Justizverwaltung I: XXII Cb3: vol 1: doc 155.
and interfering in their comrades’ marriages. Many of these cases involved acts that were not illegal, but violated the sense of honor the SA claimed to promote. In some cases, SA leaders displayed far more sympathy to stormtrooper wives than did the stormtroopers themselves. One member of the equestrian Reitenstandarte had so offended his unit by the way he treated his wife that the Standarte took the unusual step of involving the political Ortsgruppe. The Ortsgruppe, frustrated at the lack of cooperation from the victim in this case, reported that the man had “lived a life unbecoming an SA man.”

He had left his wife “to pursue his own pleasures” and beat her when she asked for money. When the woman was so driven to the brink as to try and gas herself, allegedly told a comrade, “Hopefully the cow is dead.” The Ortsgruppe and Reitenstandarte gathered testimony on this abusive husband from his many enemies in the neighborhood, but its weight was diluted by the positive testimony of his friends and ultimately the refusal of his wife to back the accusations. But the depth of investigation showed the lengths to which the SA now went to ensure its members’ marriages and personal relationships matched the exacting standards they claimed to uphold. Even Jewish women could accuse, and if the charge was severe enough – as were, for instance, allegations of child molestation – the SA felt forced to investigate. Jewish women could thus settle scores against stormtroopers who had attacked their male relatives. Even if such cases rarely came to positive conclusion, they were still investigated to the fullest – a far cry from the SA’s defensive posture throughout its history. Accusations from

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71 All these and other examples can be found in StAH B166, which includes dozens of examples of family problems reported to the SA. Though many occurred before the 1934 purge, the increasing attention paid by the SA after that event is clear through comparison of the cases.
72 StAH B166 Ortsgruppe Winterhude-Jarrestadt letter of November 6, 1934.
73 Ibid.
74 Ibid.
75 See for example NARA A3341 SA Kartei – 051 Arthur B. case of November 1935.
“Aryan” women and other civilians offended by stormtrooper actions were taken even more seriously. This proved a significant source of annoyance to stormtroopers, who had grown used to having the Party’s backing in their private disputes. Now, they faced its scrutiny. The public had learned the lesson that Hitler taught on the Night of the Long Knives, and it thus finally gained some measure of power over individual stormtroopers who could be denounced for their private sins.

Even within the SA, the sense grew that the insular, cliquish, and self-protective lifestyle the organization had long cultivated had become a danger. SA leaders admitted – at least to each other – that their embrace of “young and unripe people” had brought on the SA’s fall. The SA had taken young men under its wing with little oversight or guidance, and it had promised them material reward, emotional security, and political protection with few conditions other than loyalty to their comrades. This combination of reward without oversight, authority without responsibility, and power without control had ill served both the movement and the SA. That the SA granted young people of limited experiences “sudden and almost uncontrolled access” to these benefits not bred corruption, crime, and debauchery, and in the end finally revealed the group’s moral posturing as a lie. After July 1934, even other Nazi agencies had come to see the SA as a corrupt and suspect institution. One judge, in his sentencing of a stormtrooper convicted of embezzling money in order to “succumb to the alleged pleasures of the big city”, proclaimed openly that “the SA-Sturm leadership bears official co-responsibility” for the

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76 NARA A3341 SA Kartei 078 Fritz B. The phrase comes from court documents, but was underlined in agreement by an SA leader in charge of Fritz B’s SA file.
misled youth’s “mistakes”.

In this case and many others, the judge said, “the building of a life [Lebensaufbau] has been put in danger” by the SA’s failures.

Under these circumstances, the SA itself was no longer able or willing to provide cover for its members. As Lutze wrote concerning the case of a Truppführer and old fighter who had “brought open resentment against the SA” because of his conduct:

> It is not the duty of SA-offices to make good again the excesses of single insubordinate SA-men, nor to ask government agencies for lenience on their behalf [um schönes Wetter zu bitten]. This must finally stop. The Führer made this unmistakably clear in his 12 points. The SA must now act accordingly.”

The moral cleansing of the SA took several years to accomplish. But it was clear almost immediately that the SA lifestyle that had been carefully cultivated during the *Kampfzeit*, and that had drawn millions of youths into the Nazi movement, was permanently over. In the first year after the purge, the SA lost over a million men. More continued to be expelled in following years, and many others abandoned the now-purposeless organization, until by 1937 only around 1,200,000 remained. The purge of the SA in June 1934 ended its power and influence in the Nazi state. Many of the oldest and formerly most influential stormtroopers lost their lives. But they had performed one last act of martyrdom for the Nazi movement. Their violent exclusion ended an immediate threat to the state, and it gave a lasting template for Nazi actions against other sources of institutional resistance in the military and Catholic Church. The

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77 Ibid.
78 Ibid.
79 NARA A3341 SA Kartei 020 Emil B.
80 Campbell, “The SA after the Röhm Purge,” 671.
81 Ibid.
82 From 1936-1938, the Nazis mobilized the now-cemented link between sexual scandal and treasonous politics against both groups. National Socialists first undermined the Catholic hierarchy’s authority by
stormtroopers’ final blood sacrifice – this time, of their own prominence in the state they had created – was the most painful of all. But it was a necessary one given the impossibility of integrating them into an ordered and regulated post-revolutionary state. The SA was, for all effective political purposes, a spent force.

Epilogue: The Tamed SA in the Nazi State

Any responsibilities the SA carried after the Night of the Long Knives were largely unofficial. It conducted pre- and post-military training, which the Party found valuable so long as the German armed forces still felt the weight of Versailles. But these programs were purely voluntary, and other state agencies constantly encroached on the SA’s role in this area. SA leadership and sport schools also taught first aid and Morse code, and they offered a prestigious award for sports achievement. SA work in this area was many ways was a return to the organization’s early roots. But while the early SA had advocated its sporting activities as a preparation for taking political power, their efforts now had no political meaning other than as an aspect of the Nazis’ constant project to militarize the German people and prepare for a new war. SA sport schools and pseudo-military training were now, in two senses, past-times – they kept the SA busy and reminded them of their own glorified origins.

charging the monks with homosexuality and the priests with pedophilia. (Wolfgang Dierker, “Planmäßige Ausschlachtung der Sittlichkeitsprozesse’ Die Kampagne gegen kotholische Ordensangehörige und Priester 1936/1937,” in zur Neiden, ed. 281-293.) In February 1938, Colonel-General Werner von Fritsch, the Commander-in-Chief of the Army, fell into the Eulenburg role when trumped-up charges of homosexuality drove him from the military. The purge that the scandal produced cost 14 generals and 51 other officers their positions. It was, after the Reichstag Fire and the Röhm purge itself, the third and final step in consolidating Hitler’s absolute power over the army. (See Kershaw, Hitler: Nemesis, 51-60.)

Many SA men, however, concluded that the Party no longer cared about them. Most left, but the “old fighters” and any others who were so dedicated as to remain resented their treatment. Some even killed themselves. The SA’s internal reporting and investigations of stormtrooper deaths had traditionally been among the most highly developed aspects of the movement. Reporting mechanisms allowed SA leaders to determine if the SA could be held responsible for a man’s death, either in the courts or the media, or if an SA man had died under political circumstances, in which case the Nazis could propagandize his demise. SA reports on stormtrooper deaths typically included not only the cause of death, but also Party and SA history, marital status and family relationships, and employment. Even if the reports invariably concluded that the deaths were of “not official” or “purely private” natures, they still indicated the attention, interest, and respect the organization paid dead stormtroopers and their families – at least, until late 1934. The SA stopped tracking stormtrooper suicides by the end of that year, and by mid-1935, reports of deceased SA men became so terse as to include only the man’s name, rank, and Sturm.84 A short time later, the Hamburg SA leadership also put a stop to the morale reports that local SA officers had been ordered to produce for their superiors. The reports for the second quarter of 1935 expressed dissatisfaction on a variety of fronts - most especially, over the SA’s lack of role and prestige compared to the newly dominant SS and Wehrmacht.85 By the end of the year, the SA decreed an end to the “unnecessary works of writing.” In the future, he expected that local leaders contain moods of dissatisfaction by “working together in camaraderie” and other

84 See StAH B174 and B177.
85 See StAH B186 2nd quarter reports for SA Standarten 15, 45, 76, and Reserve-Standarte 76. A typical comment came from the frustrated members of Sturm 16/15, which had been named in honor of Heinz Brands’ sacrifice. Now, however, “the will and spirit of sacrifice seems to have lost all worth and meaning.”
informal means. The top levels of SA leadership no longer cared to hear their men’s complaints, which they were in any case now powerless to resolve.

But what became of the men who were once stormtroopers? Of the million-plus who left the organization, some sensed that better opportunities lay in other Nazi organizations. Many others, however, retreated altogether from public life. The years after the purge saw a marked increase in stormtrooper marriages. Many stormtroopers had always held the belief that their unusually intense political lifestyle, which often kept them from contact with potential mates, had always been a temporary measure that should be abandoned once victory was reached. In 1935 and afterwards, the employment and welfare benefits the SA men received now made marriage more possible than it had been since the postwar marriage boom. For the first time, the numbers of SA men getting married rose steadily, to ten times its Kampfzeit rate. (See Image 5.4) Thus did both the most committed and the most casual stormtroopers leave the organization after 1934 to pursue their own lives.

Even in this degraded state, the SA men still remained the most visible and pervasive public symbol of the Nazi reign. There were still 1.5 million brown shirts walking the streets, working in offices, and throughout public squares, and they remained an ominous presence despite their setbacks. The uniform’s continued ubiquity reminded every neighborhood that the Party’s thugs still existed among them, and that the Party re-activate them at any time it chose.

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86 StAH B186 Fust letter of December 10, 1935.
87 In this way, the stormtroopers embody the type of German described by Götz Aly in Hitlers Volkstaat, who believed that “authoritarian action had produced an economic recovery” between 1933-1935. Translated as Hitler’s Beneficiaries: Plunder, Racial War, and the Nazi Welfare State (New York: Henry Holt & Co, 2006), 36.
It did so at several critical junctures. In the spring and summer of 1935, the Party allowed supposedly spontaneous antisemitic actions by the SA, partly as an attempt to dissipate the continued alienation and disaffection since the purge. The actions, however, also laid the groundwork for the later introduction of more systematized persecution by heightening antisemitic tensions and generating increased conflict, after which the state stepped in with a more rational solution that again won the loyalties of those whose sensibilities were offended by violence. It was the same strategy the Nazis had used to gain power: The SA’s violence solidified public panic about a political problem to which the Party could then pose a solution. In this case, the SA’s limited license for antisemitic violence created a public outcry – not, however, against antisemitism but rather against the means with which Jews were being attacked. Hitler’s announcement in September 1935 of the Nuremberg Laws, which banned intermarriage and introduced a new distinction between “Reich citizens” of “Aryan blood” and “nationals” not possessing full rights, was thus seen as a compromise. It was, the public agreed, a pragmatic and moderate solution that reduced violence and solved an important problem through rational, legal means. His speech on the Laws insisted that they made possible “that the nation itself does not depart from the rule of law.” The stormtroopers had proved useful one last time. But this targeted re-activation of the SA also revealed that the organization had lost its leading role in the NSDAP, even in the realm of brutish antisemitic activism. As preparation for the campaigns surrounding the Nuremberg Laws, the NSDAP and SA made conscious efforts to replace Der SA Mann with Streicher’s Der Stürmer as the stormtroopers’ reading material of choice. The SA-leader in charge of the

88 Kershaw, Hitler: Hubris, 560-561.
89 Ibid, 562. See also Longerich, 227-230.
90 Kershaw, Hitler: Hubris, 569-571.
drive, Oberführer Schwäble of Ulm, claimed that it would “put a real antisemitic paper in the hands of SA leaders and educational officers” and thereby “to deepen the public’s antisemitic feelings and to further the struggle against Jews and their servants.”

The project, however, was needed because this spirit was lacking in some parts of the SA. Schwäble bemoaned the number of SA-leaders “who do not value Der Stürmer and have not pursued its distribution energetically,” and he claimed that while a normal SA man could exist within the movement without rabid antisemitism, SA leaders had to encourage hatred of Jews at every turn. Thus, the NSDAP promoted Der Stürmer as part of a re-training of the SA. The stormtroopers’ own newspaper, Der SA Mann, which had been written by and for the average stormtrooper, soon shut down in favor of Streicher’s primitive and bloodthirsty tabloid, which targeted the lowest common denominator with hateful propaganda. The SA had not only lost its power, it had also lost its voice. It could play no organizational further role in the Nazi state.

The stormtroopers could instead only wait for a call to action. The most spectacular of these, along the models of mid-1935, came when the Party organized them to attack Jewish property during the one-night pogrom of Kristallnacht. Otherwise, they were mainly asked only to be the movement’s positive face in its pro forma elections and plebiscites, during which they would use their personal example to strengthen the people’s resolve. As Fust ordered in February 1936,

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91 B220 Oberführer Schwäble to sämtliche Standarten und Sturmbanne, January 4, 1935; Oberführer Schwäble to Julius Streicher, January 4, 1935.
92 B220 Oberführer Schwäble to sämtliche Standarten und Sturmbanne, January 24, 1935.
93 The period coincides with a major ideological push by the Party to train SA men in racist antisemitism. In January and February, SA officers trained their men in such topics as “the Jewish character,” “culture and race,” and “racial lawmakers.” StAH B223 Band 1 documents spanning 11.1.35-2.28.35 Der SA Mann was then replaced altogether in 1936 by a smaller leadership newsletter, Der SA-Führer.
94 Campbell, “The SA after the Röhm Purge” 665.
The SA man must be able to give a positive answer to all questions of worldview. As a member of the National Socialist movement’s Kerntruppe, the SA man stands always in the public eye. His outer bearing must be a model - just as in the Kampfzeit, our best advertisement is the personal example of the individual man, whether in public, in the office, or in the family.  

Goebbels also hoped that the SA would represent well the new Germany in contacts with Olympians and foreigners during the 1936 games. The SA excused from their duties stormtroopers with hopes of making the Olympic team, which Goebbels hoped would display to the world that Germany had “raised a new race [Geschlecht], hard and unyielding,” in contrast to the peaceful image of Germans as Dichter und Denker.  

The brown shirt continued to be a significant marker of a certain type of Party man. Its implicit threat both kept the public in line and provided cover for legal radicalization. But the uniform also came to carry in the public mind a retrograde connotation. It was worn by men who were stuck in the past, resistant to progress even when it would aid their goals, and more concerned with living (or re-living) their exciting youth than with responsible participation in present-day politics. And in any case, most stormtroopers soon traded in their brown shirts for field-gray military uniforms. Through their participation in war, both as individuals and as a group, stormtroopers regained a sense of purpose and connection to the community. But the war soon rent these asunder as well.  

At first, it appeared that the preparations for and outbreak of war would again grant the SA a meaningful role in the Nazi state. The SA played key logistical roles for the Wehrmacht: it provided equipment and guarded supplies, inspected vehicles and

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95 StAH B200 Fust orders of February 1, 1936.  
96 StAH B246, Joseph Goebbels “Aufruf zur deutschen olympischen Schulung”.  
controlled traffic, built facilities, guarded prisoners of war, and at times interrogated captives.\(^98\) Behind the lines of the eastern front, SA units carried out paramilitary and antipartisan operations. Most stormtroopers of fighting age leapt at the chance for the long-denied chance for combat. Both at home and near the front, SA men also kept their role as local embodiments of National Socialist authority. Their ideological trustworthiness and local outlook made them ideal administrators in the captured eastern territories targeted for German colonization. Walter A. embodied the trend: he was of the SA’s first generation, an *alter Kämpfer* and veteran of both world wars, with two young children.\(^99\) In March 1940 he applied for a position in Zichena, a rural administrative district in occupied Poland. Walter A. had been working in his father’s firm selling house- and kitchen-wares, but he now - at 41 years old - saw the chance to have his own shop. After his SA references described his competence (as well as his taste in decorating), he joined thousands of German colonists who hoped to transform the east into a region of small German farmers and shopkeepers. It was what one recent scholar of the project called “a drive… to create model communities and a model domestic culture as the bedrock of the future Germanic nation.”\(^100\) SA men had begun their careers in the Third Reich through a type of local imperialism, which confiscated Jewish property in order to reward loyalists and generate business for “Aryans.”\(^101\) Many stormtroopers had benefited then, and those who had not now turned their eyes east.

\(^{98}\) Campbell, “The SA after the Röhm Purge,” 666.
\(^{99}\) NARA A3341 SA Kartei 005 Walter A.
\(^{101}\) Frank Bajohr, ‘*Aryanisation* in Hamburg: The Economic Exclusion of Jews and the Confiscation of their Property in Nazi Germany* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2002).
SA men had long tied their personal fates to their regime’s. After 1942, these fates were as cruel as the stormtroopers’ lives had been. SA men suffered casualties on the eastern front at a normal rate – in other words, sufficiently high to kill almost all who fought. The ultimate destiny of the unknown stormtrooper was therefore to die on the eastern front. He had embraced death during the Kampfzeit, when the movement could mobilize his martyrdom to national ends, and he entered the war in the same spirit. But National Socialism now needed a different approach to death.\footnote{102 The change reflects the general concern in Nazi regime over how to attach meaning to increasingly unmanageable numbers of soldier and civilian war dead. See Monica Black, “The Meaning of Death and the Making of Three Berlins: A History, 1933-1961,” PhD dissertation for the University of Virginia, 2006. 62-84 especially.}

Despite public pronouncements in the old SA tone, which honored violent death as a blood sacrifice to renew the German nation and a fulfillment of Christian redemptive mission, the Party decreed that individual stormtroopers’ deaths could no longer be lauded. The OSAF ordered that their names be held back from the public “until the war’s end.”\footnote{103 StAH B178 Jütter letter of February 7,1940.} In the meantime, the stormtroopers were to “train the Volk in the will to defense” through word-of-mouth propaganda among their neighborhood circles.\footnote{104 StAH B184b undated document.} They were ordered in discussions with their friends and families to “seek every opportunity to present positive thoughts,” which included such ideas as “The Führer is always right!” and “The German people will victoriously end this struggle!” A stormtrooper wife also had to be “as good a propagandist as the man himself.”\footnote{105 Ibid.} Together, they would ensure that the German people remained personally invested in the war.

But the war soon came home to Hamburg in a way that none could ignore. On the night of July 24, 1943, air raid sirens sounded as they had many times before. But the
bombing was more intense than any Hamburg had yet endured. Almost 800 aircraft, guided by clear weather and protected by the Allies’ new radar-deceiving chaff launchers, attacked Altona, Eimsbüttel, Hoheluft, and other areas in the cities central and northwestern districts. The devastation killed around 1,500 people in these areas - the first that had gone over to the Nazis in the mid 1920s - and also destroyed the Nikolaikirche, the central police station, and the famous Hagenbeck Zoo. But the worst of “Operation Gomorrah” had not yet occurred. Allied bombers returned each day and night for the next week, sometimes harassing and retreating to keep the public awake at night. On the night of July 27, the near-800 strong bomber fleet returned. Thirty minutes of concentrated bombing incinerated the southeastern harbor districts of Hamm, Hammerbrook, and Rothenburgsort. British pilots could see the fire’s glow from 200 miles away. Smoke, pulled upwards by the combined heat of the many fires, mushroomed over the city to a height of 23,000 feet. The heat drew in more oxygen, increased wind speeds, and created a new and terrible phenomenon known as the firestorm.106 Winds of up to 150 mph drove flames across roofs and over canals. Temperatures reached 1,500 degrees Fahrenheit. Tens of thousands of people suffocated in underground shelters as the firestorm’s flue effect sucked all oxygen into the inferno. Those not in shelters ran over burning asphalt or jumped into canals for refuge, where many drowned or were crushed by crumbling buildings. On that night alone, 40,000

106 Firestorms had taken place in several other major cities in the 19th century, including Chicago (1871) and Hamburg itself (1842). The 1943 firestorm, however, was the first to be recognized and studied as a discrete meteorological phenomenon. On the mechanics of a firestorm, see Gordon Musgrove, Operation Gomorrah: The Hamburg Firestorm Raids (London: Jane’s, 1981), 102-116.
people died and over a million more fled the city as refugees. 107 Allied bombers returned each day and night until August 3, and another 69 times before the war’s final end.

The firestorm burned the stormtroopers’ homes, killed their family members, and destroyed their city. It also marked their final psychological alienation from the communities they claimed to serve. Some SA men tried to save their wives and children during the attack, and the Party expelled them from its ranks for putting their own families first. Stormtroopers, the Party decreed, had more important duties to the community at large. 108 But this community increasingly looked down on the stormtroopers as men who had placed their loyalty to the Party above their fidelity to family or city. As a growing number of Hamburgers came to see the war as lost, those stormtroopers who still remained in the city looked increasingly alien. Some stood in the streets trying to rally the remaining populace to plainly useless defensive measures. One witness described “an angry old Nazi, who to the last ran around in his SA-uniform, and right at the end he hauled people out of their apartments to build tank-barriers in the streets. They had to rip up the cobblestones and pile them up. You could laugh yourself to death.” 109 Other SA men slowly realized that the war was lost, and that its pursuit had estranged the very families whose protection had justified war. One girl later recalled her best friend’s brother, a “firm SA man” who nonetheless was “kein Dummkopf.” 110 He

107 Jan Heitmann, Das Ende des Zweiten Weltkrieges in Hamburg (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1990), 21-22. On these and other aftereffects of the attacks, see Musgrove 162-170. Hans Erich Nossack has written a gripping first-person account of his experiences in the firestorm; The End: Hamburg 1943. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).
108 See NARA A3341 SA Karzti 048 Werner B., who had driven his car into the firestorm to rescue his wife and was expelled for “having during the catastrophe apparently laid aside all thoughts of enlisting his own person to assist the SA in their difficult operations.” Another SA man, Obersturmführer Hans C., was accused of “always putting himself first” for having prioritized his wife’s rescue during the attack, then allegedly failing to return to his duties.
109 FZGB – WdE – 88 CZ.
110 FZGB – WdE – 348 T.
realized “that what they had created was completely backwards.” Rather than a system in which “the little guy” could secure his economic prosperity and familial stability, the SA had created a monstrous leviathan that made war in order to enrich those at the top. Most stormtroopers did not realize this until the end. Even the “firm SA man” who recognized the situation “quite early on” did so despite a near-total lack of contact with others. His community feared him:

[H]e had no contact to anyone else. Anyone who was aware of how involved he was as SA-Man was somehow wary of getting too close to him. Anyone with different opinions. Because everyone still felt tangible fear. To knowingly put oneself in danger [by speaking honestly] would have been dumb, and nobody did it.¹¹¹

By the end of the war, the stormtroopers realized that even their closest relatives distrusted and feared them. Perhaps some then realized that this situation had long been true.

Some of the oldest stormtroopers, who generally did not see combat in the Second World War, survived long enough to see their city surrender to the British without mounting a defense. British forces then imprisoned them in some of the very camps that they had run. Ellerhusen, who had overseen the Fuhlsbüttel KZ with purposeful blindness, was himself imprisoned there before being convicted of crimes against humanity. Abandoned by his former network of male associates, who were all now either dead or themselves disgraced, he was forced to mobilize his wife’s pleas on his behalf.

She wrote to the new mayor and, in English, to the British “Secret Service” that her ill health and lack of ability to support their family alone justified her husband’s release. Her pleas fell on deaf ears.¹¹²

¹¹¹ Ibid.
¹¹² StAH 131-15 Senatskanzlei - Personalakten C608.
“SA-pastor” Franz Tügel had likewise been broken by the war. Through the early phases of the fight against Russia he had retained great commitment to the “final battle” that would bring “final victory.” Tügel still called Hitler “a man sent to us by God” – “a tool of divine providence” as he wrote in his birthday wishes to Hitler in 1941. But as Germany’s war fortunes turned, Tügel retreated ever more into doubt and reassessment. National Socialism had seemed the virtuous partner he had hoped for his church. He had held true to the Führer nevertheless, but the firestorm had shown him on which side “history’s judgment” lay. He greeted both the end of the war and of National Socialism as the end of a terrible mistake. This rejection of National Socialism came at too convenient a time entirely to be trusted. But even if Tügel had not changed his agreement with the Nazis’ goals, he clearly and honestly regretted their failure. Tügel had fought a lung disease for many years, and the war’s final phases so damaged his physical and mental health as to put him into permanent decline. He lingered another year, during which resigned his office and exchanged bitter letters with other pastors, before dying on December 15, 1946.

Conn, Tügel’s old theological enemy, passed the final years of the war in the Schleswig-Holstein countryside. He had taught school in Hamburg until Kaufmann forced his dismissal, after which he drifted to Cuxhaven and other small “East Frisian” towns. While there, he presided over solstice festivals, marriages, and funerals, and in 1935 he rose to lead the German Belief Movement – a position he held well into the

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113 Hering, 271.
114 Ibid, 271 and 272.
116 Hering, 292.
117 FZG 11C1 - Alfred Conn – Nachlasse, 148-149.
1960s.He thus observed what he called “the German Götterdämmerung” from a position of relative safety. But while his religious and spiritual activism continued almost unabated, he lamented that Germany’s political conditions would never again allow a movement based on nationalistic socialism to gain power. On the one hand, National Socialism had strengthened its enemies – not only the Communists, who now occupied half of Europe and continued to spread throughout the world, but also international actors like the EC, UN, and the forces of globalized democratic capitalism. Even worse, Conn lamented, the experience of National Socialism had sapped Germans’ will to struggle on their own behalf. “What Hitler and Bismarck failed to do,” he wrote, referring to the creation of a strong national state that would unite all German-speaking people and lands, “will be impossible in the future.”

The SA had been founded to protect the Party’s own. The stormtroopers had always positioned themselves to showcase the movement’s connection to its people. The SA signaled National Socialism’s concern for its fighting men and their families, and it sought to enshrine its warriors as national heroes whose names would go down in memory. But as Conn wrote near the close of his memoirs, “Men, because they are limited in time, cannot properly reckon the great and final consequences of an idea.” The stormtroopers’ grand idea, National Socialism, estranged them from their families, destroyed the city they claimed to protect, and led them largely to their own deaths and their erasure from history. It also harmed irrevocably the reputation of Germany and its people – rather than “poets and thinkers,” scientists, and technicians without peer, the

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119 FZG 11C1 - Alfred Conn - Nachlasse, 161.
120 Ibid, 188.
121 Ibid, 189.
world now sees Germans primarily sadists and mass murderers. SA men naively believed that constant and brutal violence could protect the things they loved most. The criminal tactics they had justified through reference to virtuous ends were, however, more destructive to the things they claimed to promote than anything their many opponents had done. From the SA’s beginnings in 1922 to its final fate in 1945, the stormtroopers’ worst enemies were themselves.
A lone stormtrooper looks back at the cameraman during a march of the SA on the eve of war. (Source: Rolf Lennar, Kamerad, auch Du! Ernstes und Heiteres um das SA-Sportabzeichen. Munich: Eher Verlag. 1939.)
CONCLUSION

THE STORMTROOPERS’ LEGACY

The SA experienced many changes throughout its short and restless life. It had been born as Hitler’s elite guard and had led his ill-fated attempt to take over Munich in 1923. It had survived the resulting ban on the Party by disguising itself as a sport and hiking club. Futility, frustration, and persecution were the burdens under which the early SA languished. Once returning to the open, the stormtroopers struggled to gain notice in a sea of competing paramilitaries, which they eventually rose above through a reliance on spectacular public demonstrations and attention-grabbing violence. These techniques combined with a discovery that a claim to victimhood brought great moral superiority, even if the persecution and violence stormtroopers suffered came about through their own belligerence. The argument resonated in the era’s difficult conditions, and the SA thus became a mass organization of millions, based in large part on its demonstrated commitment to providing for the young men in its ranks. Deepening roots in neighborhood taverns, associations with local businesses, networks of relatives, and alliances with pastors established a subculture that attracted more recruits and showcased the now-mighty organization’s power. Disaffected young men submerged themselves in this ersatz family, within which they surrendered both autonomy and individuality in exchange for the social comfort of camaraderie, the material relief of welfare and physical security, and the psychological succor of living within a closed ideological circle. These advantages of the SA – combined with the compromises, failures, and mistakes of its rivals – led the NSDAP to its first taste of power. Once in charge of the
state, the SA mutated again. It became the beast it had always longed to be: bloodthirsty, acquisitive, and reveling in an ability to command both personal and political obedience. But the stormtroopers overreached, and thus offended neighbors, pastors, business owners, and political allies – in other words, the local social networks out of which they had come. This allowed the movement’s enemies, both inside the Nazi Party and without, to move against them for their own reasons. By 1935, the SA was largely destroyed. Reduced in numbers, bereft of purpose, and devoid of political power, it drifted through the remainder of the Nazi era with few official functions.

After 1945, the brownshirt remained a potent symbol of National Socialism. As such, he was ripe for caricature and stigmatization by writers on both sides of the Atlantic. He had always been a sinister figure to those outside the Nazi community. Those not in the movement looked into the stormtroopers’ taverns, homes, and living spaces and saw only their worst traits. Their most scandalous sins, bloodlust and homosexuality, came to embody their entire world. As this dissertation has shown, both violence and same-sex attractions were indeed prevalent within the SA. A fixation on these traits alone, however, serves only to vilify. Such an approach fails to explain stormtrooper motivations as anything other than negative and destructive impulses, and it renders unintelligible the fact that the stormtroopers’ peers, families, and communities often considered them examples of heroic and honorable action for the common good. An interpretation that sees only homosexuals, brutes, or otherwise entirely negative figures encourages a modern audience to retain the SA men as distant figures of unapproachable evil. It keeps stormtroopers at arms’ length, and it therefore perpetuates flawed understandings of how radical right politics emerge from local contexts and from stories
of personal struggle that would be far more identifiable to modern audiences if we only learned to accept the criminal potential of our own families, neighborhoods, and political systems.

In order to correct such misreading, this dissertation has studied the SA and early National Socialist movement as a local phenomenon. The approach has two advantages. First, it properly considers the stormtroopers as members of an integrated community of family members, neighborhood ties, school networks, teammates, church congregations, and co-workers. Stormtroopers were not “isolated mass men,” but rather men threatened with the disintegration and breakdown of those social structures that had kept them tied to their communities, which they tried to defend by taking over or ideologically converting pre-existing social networks. ¹ This process did not, at least before the takeover of power, involve outright domination. Instead, small groups of stormtroopers and other party activists built bridges between the Nazi organizations and the local public sphere’s traditional bodies. The first generation of stormtroopers had come from local citizens’ defense militias and sport clubs, both of which were grass-roots organizations connected to their immediate surroundings and to local social networks. In venerable institutions such as the Lutheran Church, Franz Tügel and his pastoral allies subtly but consistently steered their parishioners into the Nazi movement, which they argued would save the Church from democratic politicization. When addressing professional organizations – especially the symbolically important professionals, merchants, sailors, and police officers – the SA again posed as a protector of Hamburg’s local traditions. In linking all

these networks, stormtroopers and Party activists claimed to again liberate local autonomy from outside political domination. “Nazi joiners,” as Koshar called them, claimed that they sought to preserve traditional forms of Hamburg’s associational and communal life that had been undermined by the division of a unitary local community along class, party-political, and racial lines. These appeals were not without an element of self-interest. Hamburg’s stormtroopers claimed to defend their communities and families, but they were just as concerned with keeping their own threatened places in the local hierarchy. SA men thus mobilized political, racial, and gendered arguments for their own authority, worked to align differing organizations behind a common Nazi banner, and built structures that sheltered them from the inherent clash between their ideas and reality. The stormtroopers’ political mobilization was thus a quest for local pride and place, carried out in the context of a national political struggle and with assumptions of constant international war.

The stormtroopers’ justifications for their own violence are therefore unintelligible outside a local context, which in Hamburg often featured appeals to Hanseatic independence, economic autonomy, and gendered authority for merchant men over their families and neighborhoods. The stormtroopers’ efforts to build themselves as hegemonic men deserving of political rule well illustrates Joan Scott’s observation that systems of gender, hierarchy, and power are enacted through individual minds, bodies, and biographies. The masculine, “hegemonic” traits that stormtroopers mobilized to political ends had longstanding heritage. They provided a pattern to which the SA men had been raised to follow, one that promised moral authority and financial reward. But

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2 Koshar, 23.
3 Scott, 41-45.
“hegemonic masculinity,” as one of its major theorist has noted, in fact restricts and
punishes far more men than it rewards.⁴ Men must enforce this system on themselves by
the violent exclusion of alternatives. Among stormtroopers who feared acknowledging
their own homosexuality, the desire to escape the restrictions of hegemonic masculinity
transformed into violent urges to enforce the code. Many stormtroopers therefore
attacked male homosexuals, Jews, and Communists as public scapegoats to distract from
their own sins. Another subset legitimately believed that these alternative models of
masculinity had to be defeated. These stormtroopers thought that it threatened the social
and political order for any man to publicly resist or contest the hegemonic standard. The
SA could not simply ignore homosexuality as an issue or homosexual men as
incompatible with the movement. But it could re-shape the discourse surrounding
homosexuality to make it a force of negative integration, which would unify otherwise
disparate elements of the conservative right in opposition to the homosexuals’ alleged
assault on traditional German masculinity.

However, as this dissertation has shown, the SA in fact attracted a large number
of adherents who either admitted their homosexuality or who, regardless of their sexual
drives, so highly valued male camaraderie as to find an attractive home in the SA
subculture. Same-sex affection or homoeroticism thus functioned as a force for positive
integration as well. In a time of degraded democratic and monarchical politics, the
stormtroopers reached back to ancient systems of authority based around male warrior
bands.⁵ Living in wartime conditions integrated otherwise competing men into a
collective capable of seizing political authority. The act of battle proved the leaders,

⁴ Connell, 76-83.
⁵ For a parallel case among the plains Indians of North America, see Bryan Turner, “Warrior Charisma and
strengthened emotional bonds, and secured resources that men could use to create families and businesses. A study of one city’s neighborhood best shows how brownshirt violence emerged from this local context of jealousy, competition, and personal ambition.

The local perspective on Nazism brings one other important advantage, one that ties into this dissertation’s larger argument concerning public misconceptions of early National Socialism. A study of the SA as subculture at first seems odd, especially compared to the classic subculture studies that emerged from Chicago and Birmingham, which tended to focus on such marginalized groups as gay men, gang members, prostitutes, and punk rockers.⁶ These are local studies of marginalized minorities. Yet when we think of the Nazis, we think of the public spectacle, the mass march, or the imposing uniform. Orwell spoke of the “intoxication of power, constantly increasing…the thrill of victory, the sensation of trampling on an enemy who is helpless…a boot stamping on a human face—forever.”⁷ From Orwell’s 1949 perspective, and in our present world, such oppressive images resonate as unquestionable portrayals of fascism’s brutish and violent heart. But they have less power to explain the early origins of the National Socialist movement, which lacked the money for boots, whose enemies were far from helpless, and whose triumph was anything but certain. The early stormtroopers gained their thrills not from victory, but from defeat. Their intoxication was not with the possession of power, but with the hope of its acquisition. Stormtroopers had joined the movement to escape from poverty, homelessness both literal and figurative, social

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⁶ For a useful overview of these works and an introduction to the sub-field, see Ken Gelder and Sarah Thornton, Eds. The Subcultures Reader (New York: Routledge, 1997).
isolation, and other personal situations they felt unable to control. The stormtroopers’ search for political power was thus a substitute for personal powerlessness.
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