

**A Life for Germany:
Günther von Maltzahn, the German Air Force,
and the Reinvention of the German Military Ethos**

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Introduction

The NATO alliance created during the Cold War currently faces increasing disunity and uncertainty among its partners. It is worth looking back at the beginnings of the coalition, when a war-weary West Germany made common cause with its former occupiers and reconstituted the armed forces disbanded in the wake of defeat in World War II. German leaders hoped the move would accelerate their efforts to recover national sovereignty as well as help protect Europe from possible Soviet aggression. But Germans feared a return to the Nazi-era military adventurism that had plunged Europe into the firestorm of war; many had also become extremely suspicious of the old officer corps, which they viewed as one of Adolf Hitler's chief enablers. In response, those spearheading rearmament committed to a new philosophy designed to mirror as well as promote the democratic values of future recruits, to ensure civilian control of the armed forces and enforce respect for individual worth. Christened *Innere Führung*, a nearly untranslatable phrase roughly rendered as inner direction, this principle continues to govern relations between the German military, the state, and society.

While the expertise of surviving members of the officer corps was essential to the rearmament enterprise, those selected to participate necessarily had to demonstrate a private history compatible with the democratic imperatives of *Innere Führung*. Wartime Luftwaffe commander Günther Freiherr von Maltzahn was one whose upright character embodied the most positive aspects of the German military tradition and whose command style harmonized with the concept of *Innere Führung*. I explore Maltzahn's background, his wartime experience—typical of the dilemmas faced by an appreciable number of officers—as well as his postwar confrontation with the past and engagement with the future, which contributed not a little to the emergence of a new, freer, and eventually reunited Germany.

Note on Sources

Carl Alexander Krethlow lauds biography in general for its ability to illuminate a personality's "room for maneuver, [its] possibilities and limitations, [its] peculiarities and the framework of [its] era." Furthermore, says Krethlow, the historian can help satisfy the current academic concentration on the "ordinary man," also predominant in the new military history, by focusing on the lives of officers who were not important field commanders, yet these are the very

cases in which source material such as private papers may soon be exhausted.¹ Indeed, sources for Maltzahn's life are not plentiful. Unlike some of his comrades, he left no diaries or memoirs. The wartime efforts of his fighter wing and the results of its sorties have been reconstructed in at least two unit histories, yet one estimate puts the loss of Luftwaffe records at 97 percent.² Using archival records, academic and popular historical works, memoirs by those who served with him, and family reminiscences and histories, I attempt credible explanations for his actions rooted in a preponderance of the evidence and the probable influence of his upbringing and environment. As Kretzlow emphasizes, when sources are thin examining a person's historical milieu can throw light on his actions by allowing comparison with the lives of contemporaries who shared similar experiences.³

Klaus Schmider advocates using soldiers' memoirs to try to reach a dispassionate judgment of a military career and chides academic historians for their seeming reluctance to mine this material in support of fragmentary official documentation.⁴ Since much of what can be gleaned about Maltzahn derives from the memories of others, the trustworthiness of such reminiscences inevitably becomes an issue. Recollection is unavoidably subjective, a problem that scholars have long recognized as "the instability of memory: it could be false, recovered, or implanted."⁵ Patrick Krassnitzer uses the term "'imported memories'" to describe "an associative mélange of vestiges of genuine memories, reawakened emotions, imported 'scripts,' and affective congruencies."⁶ He dubs these negotiations of memory "'drafts of identity'" that are reworked into "'the most meaningful life construction and self-presentation possible.'"⁷ For soldiers who have experienced the horrors of combat it is even more important to find meaning in something that often appears to have none, and the reality of their wars sometimes recedes behind the stories they tell about them. Yet the new military historians find special value in the

¹ Carl Alexander KRETHLOW: "Militärbiographie: Entwicklung und Methodik" in Michael EPKENHANS, Stig FÖRSTER, and Karen HAGEMANN, eds., *Militärische Erinnerungskultur: Soldaten im Spiegel von Biographien, Memoiren und Selbstzeugnissen*, Krieg in der Geschichte v. 29, eds. Stig Förster, Bernhard R. Kroener, and Bernd Wegner, Paderborn, Schöningh, 2006, pp. 13, 1.

² Dirk RICHHARDT: *Auswahl und Ausbildung junger Offiziere 1930–1945: Zur sozialen Genese des deutschen Offizierkorps*, unpublished dissertation, Philipps-Universität, Marburg, 2002, p. 200.

³ KRETHLOW: pp. 1-27, p. 16.

⁴ Klaus SCHMIDER: "The Last of the First: Veterans of the Jagdwaffe Tell Their Story," *The Journal of Military History*, 73.1, January 2009, pp. 231-249: p. 236; SCHMIDER: response in Kenneth P. WERRELL, Klaus SCHMIDER, and Jeremy BLACK, "The Air War over Germany: Claims and Counterclaims," *The Journal of Military History*, 73.3, July 2009, pp. 925-932: p. 931.

⁵ Joanna BOURKE: "New Military History" in Matthew HUGHES and William J. PHILPOTT, eds., *Palgrave Advances in Modern Military History*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, pp. 258-280: p. 273.

⁶ Patrick KRASSNITZER: "Historische Forschung zwischen 'importierten Erinnerungen' und Quellenamnesie: Zur Aussagekraft autobiographischer Quellen am Beispiel der Weltkriegserinnerung im nationalsozialistischen Milieu" in EPKENHANS et al., *Militärische Erinnerungskultur*, pp. 212-222: p. 213.

⁷ Quoted in Oliver von WROCHEM: "Die Stunde der Memoiren: Militärische Eliten als Stichwortgeber" in Frank BÖSCH and Constantin GOSCHLER, eds., *Public History: Öffentliche Darstellungen des Nationalsozialismus jenseits der Geschichtswissenschaft*, Frankfurt, Campus Verlag, 2009, pp. 105-129: p. 107.

subjectivity of such sources, which can be illuminating if their agreement in details creates a unified picture of people or events.⁸ This they do in Maltzahn's case.

As Aleida Assmann notes, what we recount about ourselves and those close to us is subjected to an "inner censorship" that conforms to our preferred self-image, an image also conditioned by the sociopolitical necessities of the present.⁹ In a postwar Germany confronting the enormity of Nazi crimes and the overwhelming destruction wrought by total war, many of the memoirs by the military elite functioned in this way to downplay complicity and facilitate personal and professional rehabilitation. Researchers have referred to such works as "'strategic reminiscences'" intended "'to dissolve concrete, personal responsibility in the darkness of the past.'"¹⁰ Some current military historians appear to regard the productions of all Wehrmacht officers and many enlisted men as equally suspect, especially in light of recent scholarship on the participation of German army units in war crimes.

Such reservations are valid, but there are other factors to consider. By the end of the first decade of the 21st century research on German war crimes remained focused on the army, with little specific reference to either the air force or the navy, which together made up less than 30 percent of the German armed forces. Luftwaffe units were in any case less likely to commit atrocities on the ground, being able to assume "a far greater distance from the progress of the war than an infantryman who had to shoot a group of hostages."¹¹ Although transcripts of British and American recordings of conversations among German POWs have allowed Sönke Neitzel and Harald Welzer to uncover stories of crimes against civilians by individual members of the Luftwaffe, the total number of prisoners of all military branches who were recorded, some 15,000, is hardly representative of the 17 million German men under arms during the Second World War, especially since only those prisoners deemed "especially interesting" were meticulously winnowed out by Allied intelligence officers for closer observation. The accounts of those who confessed to their fellow captives may also be "drafts of identity" crafted to suit their tellers' psychological needs of the moment, as the authors acknowledge.¹² If Luftwaffe memoirs are exculpatory, it most likely relates not to personal responsibility for specific war crimes but to the collective guilt ascribed by postwar society to German soldiers in general as participants in Nazi oppression, fighting a war that produced unspeakable atrocities and caused

⁸ BOURKE: pp. 263 and 272; for details, Ernst STILLA: *Die Luftwaffe im Kampf um die Luftherrschaft: Entscheidende Einflussgrößen bei der Niederlage der Luftwaffe im Abwehrkampf im Westen und über Deutschland im Zweiten Weltkrieg unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Faktoren "Lufrüstung," "Forschung und Entwicklung" und "Human Ressourcen,"* unpublished dissertation, Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität, Bonn, 2005, p. 27.

⁹ Aleida ASSMANN: *Shadows of Trauma: Memory and the Politics of Postwar Identity*, New York, Fordham UP, 2016 (trans. Sarah Clift), pp. 98, 111, 125. Krassnitzer emphasizes the importance of autobiography for the history of mentality, "not for the period being remembered, but for the moment of the recollection," p. 214.

¹⁰ WROCHEM: quoting Friedrich Gerstenberger, p. 121 and Jörg Echternkamp, p. 117.

¹¹ RICHHARDT: pp. 8 and 170.

¹² Sönke NEITZEL and Harald WELZER: *Soldaten: Protokolle vom Kämpfen, Töten und Sterben*, Frankfurt am Main, Fischer, 2014, pp. 425, 427, 15.

the suffering of millions, a war that many believed besmirched the honor of every German combatant. The “drafts of identity” fashioned by Luftwaffe and other memoirists after the fact may construct a picture of their wartime reality different from what occurred, especially by downplaying unpleasantness or violence, and they may have been written for any number of reasons—in response to postwar judgmentalism or as a related examination of conscience, in a historical exercise of describing their war for posterity, in exorcism of personal demons, to memorialize their comrades—but there is no cause to assume that their authors were Nazis or are concealing their own or others’ war crimes. Neitzel and Welzer cite research estimating that only 30% of the POWs whose conversations were recorded could be called ideological warriors, and advise against assigning overwhelming importance to ideology, which may spark war but does not explain why soldiers kill or commit war crimes. War dissolves civilized limits and cruelty can become the norm; soldiers kill “because it’s their job,” one handed to them by their societies and governed by the new frame of reference in which they find themselves. Neitzel and Welzer recommend a non-moralistic view of armed conflict in general, one less influenced by the “illusionary” belief of modernity that it has effectively distanced itself from violence.¹³ The writing of history, like biography itself, demands neither glorification nor cynical condemnation of its subject, but rather a “critically distant yet empathetic analysis” along with “a discrimination capable of dealing with human ambivalences, flaws, and contradictions.”¹⁴

Maltzahn’s Family Background and Youth

The Maltzahn family boasted a long history of military and public service along with a strong commitment to the landowner’s feudal responsibilities.¹⁵ Maltzahn’s father is still remembered in the area as a fair and generous employer who provided free medical care for his workers, electrified their houses along with the estate buildings, and maintained the village school. His children, firmly rooted in their Pomeranian community, grew up speaking the local low German dialect, attending the village school, and learning the value of labor by helping to bring in the harvest and tending their own garden plots. While class distinctions were observed among the village children and those of the big house, the Maltzahn siblings were taught that

¹³ NEITZEL and WELZER: pp. 295, 394, 421-422, 18.

¹⁴ Michael EPKENHANS, Stig FÖRSTER, and Karen HAGEMANN: “Einführung: Biographien und Selbstzeugnisse in der Militärgeschichte—Möglichkeiten und Grenzen” in EPKENHANS et al., *Militärische Erinnerungskultur*, pp. i-xvi: p. xi.

¹⁵ The Maltzahn family first appears in history in 1194 and is thus counted among the Uradel, the oldest of feudal families. The following family chronicle is marginally more accessible than its 1970s counterpart: Berthold SCHMIDT: *Geschichte des Geschlechts von Maltzan und von Maltzahn*, Schleiz, F. Webers, 1900-1926. Günther von Maltzahn’s grandfather Helmuth von Maltzahn-Gültz was a leading conservative politician, a member of the first Reichstag in 1871, finance minister for five years under Emperor William II (1888-1893), and Oberpräsident or royal governor of Pomerania, the Prussian king’s highest representative in the province, for ten years (1899-1911), as revealed in Helmuth Freiherr von MALTZAHN: “Helmuth Freiherr von Maltzahn-Gültz (1840-1923),” *Pommersche Lebensbilder* 2, 1936, pp. 266-280.

their privileged position entailed responsibility for all village residents, whether employed on the estate or not. Maltzahn senior might not have been politically liberal, but he adopted such socially progressive attitudes as ensuring that all his children were able to support themselves; he sanctioned a daughter's interest in mathematics, regarded as unusual for women of the period, as well as a son's desire to be an engineer, a profession not considered class-appropriate by some family members.¹⁶

At about the age of 11 young Maltzahn entered *Gymnasium*, the equivalent of a college preparatory high school, in the neighboring city of Anklam. Far from being a bastion of aristocratic privilege, the student body consisted mainly of boys from the commercial and professional classes. Only five obviously aristocratic names appear on a list of 216 students in the 1935/1936 academic year, six years after Maltzahn's graduation. During his time at the school in 1927 it also welcomed girls to its halls, a progressive move rather early for Germany.¹⁷

As the third of six sons and twelve children in all, the younger Maltzahn enjoyed little prospect of landed inheritance. He may have chosen an army life in response to his family's background of military service and his father's regret at giving up his own army career.¹⁸ As landed gentry he had been brought up to assume a leadership role, and he possessed the horsemanship skills valuable to the Weimar-era Reichswehr, envisioned as a border patrol force and left predominantly dependent on cavalry by the strictures of the Versailles Treaty. Although a cavalry recruit at 19, Maltzahn was apparently inspired to fly not only by the general enthusiasm for flight that gripped the youth of the period but also by glider pioneer Otto Lilienthal, an earlier alumnus of the Anklam *Gymnasium* who in the 1850s had tested his theories on an estate owned by Maltzahn's mother's family. In contravention of Versailles Treaty edicts Maltzahn undertook army-sponsored flight training in 1930 at the German Commercial Pilots' School in Bavaria before reporting for duty with his regiment. Instructors

¹⁶ Helmut QUICKER: "Letzter Gutsbesitzer fand 1945 den Tod," *Nordkurier*, Sept. 6th, 2012; Agnes LÜCHTRATH: *Verlorene Heimat Wodarg: Die Geschichte der Gedenktafel an der Kirche von Wodarg*, [n.p., n.p., 2013], pp. 20, 22-23, 40; Alfred HEIDLER: letter to the author, March 11th, 2014; Falk Freiherr von MALTZAHN (hereafter FFvM), "Bockel Flucht I" [working paper, family history], n.d., pp. 8, 10-11; "Der letzte Herr auf Krönnevit" [working paper, family history], [2012], p. 2; Christa OPPENHEIMER: "Agnes Luchtrath, die Wissenschaftlerin" in OPPENHEIMER, *Weiber zwischen 70 und 100: Sechs Frauen-Portrait; Dialoge gegen den Fetisch Jugend*, Butzbach-Griedel, Afra-Verlag, 2002, pp.79-103: pp. 82-84; FFvM: e-mail message to the author, May 19th, 2011.

¹⁷ Paul JAGUSCH: *Gymnasium zu Anklam 1535-1935*, Anklam, Poettke, 1935, pp. 110-113; Jürgen SCHNELL: *Festschrift zum Jubiläum 150 Jahre Anklamer Gymnasium*, Anklam, [n.p.], 1997, p. 33.

¹⁸ LÜCHTRATH: p. 14. He could look back to an especially distinguished military tradition on his mother's side; her family, the Pomeranian noble line von Borcke, had produced no fewer than 24 generals and field marshals (Wulf-Dietrich von BORCKE: "Angehörige der Familie v. Borcke im Generalsrang," *Familienverband v. Borcke e. V.* [web page], Familienverband v. Borcke e. V., 2006.) His chosen Cavalry Regiment No. 6 was a successor to Cuirassier Regiment "Queen" (Pomeranian) No. 2, known as the Bayreuth Dragoons (Bayreuth-Dräger), in which family members on both sides had traditionally served.

thought him earnest and willing; classmates noted mischievousness paired with punctilious manners and concern for the underdog.¹⁹

The location of the pilots' school in Bavaria near Munich had afforded Maltzahn and another comrade the opportunity to hear rising politician Adolf Hitler speak in the Bavarian capital. The young men were intrigued, having had a favorable account of Hitler's views from another trainee, but left the rally dubious about the future chancellor's heatedly expressed ambiguities. Outwardly largely nonpolitical, Maltzahn was very close to his father, a sharp critic of Nazism who had always considered their leader Hitler "a thug and political gambler." His low opinion of Hitler's philosophy was reinforced by a close reading of *Mein Kampf*, his personal copy of which he filled with annotations. After Hitler gained power in 1933 Maltzahn senior was denounced for refusing to fly the new Nazi flag, and his general attitude was common knowledge in the area. The younger Maltzahn probably held at least an ambivalent view of the Nazi regime, as did millions, among them future resistance leaders, who were prepared to give Hitler a chance after a decade and more of political chaos, economic crisis, and peace treaty humiliations.²⁰ Even those already at odds with the Nazi program might comfort themselves by reflecting, as did Sebastian Haffner, that the election result represented just another Weimar government turnover with little chance of lasting in the long term. With material circumstances improving and incremental social change creating the illusion that little was different, at least for the majority unaffected by discriminatory regulations, many not ideologically committed to Nazism took refuge in the common psychological response of ignoring any unpleasantness that did not directly affect them.²¹

¹⁹ Gustav LILIENTHAL: "The Evolution" in Otto LILIENTHAL, *Birdflight as the Basis of Aviation: A Contribution towards a System of Aviation*, London, Longmans, 1911 (trans. A. W. Isenthal.); "Wer wohnt wo in Demnitz?" *Gemeinde Altwigshagen in Vorpommern* [web page], Gemeinde Altwigshagen, November 2011; personnel file, Günther von Maltzahn, PERS 6/154865, BA-MA, Freiburg; Friedrich-Karl von PLEHWE: *Blick durch viele Fenster: Erinnerungen 1919-1978*, Berlin, Frieling, 1992, p. 95. One book in the youthful Maltzahn's library covered Lilienthal's exploits, while another celebrated glider pilot and inventor Gottlob Espenlaub (FFvM: e-mail message to the author, May 19th, 2011). The *Gymnasium* Maltzahn attended in Lilienthal's hometown of Anklam is now named after Lilienthal, its most famous alumnus.

²⁰ For Hitler speech, PLEHWE: *Blick*, pp. 103-104; for Maltzahn's father, FFvM: "Bockel Flucht 1," pp. 8-9 and e-mail messages to the author, May 19th, 2011 and June 18th, 2011, also "14-Jährige fanden toten Gutsbesitzer in der Sandkuhle," *Nordkurier*, Sept. 29th, 2012; for resistance leaders, Ernst WOLF: "Political and Moral Motives behind the Resistance" in Hermann GRAML, Hans MOMMSEN, Hans-Joachim REICHHARDT, and Ernst WOLF, *The German Resistance to Hitler*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1970, pp. 195-234: p. 228 and many references in Gerhard RITTER: *The German Resistance: Carl Goerdeler's Struggle against Tyranny*, Freeport, Books for Libraries Press, 1970 (trans. R. T. Clark).

²¹ NEITZEL and WELZER: pp. 51, 26, 47-48, 266.

Luftwaffe Commander

With aviation “the most significant development of modern times”²² Maltzahn immediately volunteered in 1935 for transfer to the new air force, becoming a flight instructor and later fighter group leader. His modesty, cheerfulness, and calm were universally popular, and his men repaid his dedication to them with hard work and high spirits. By 1940 his unit was embroiled in the Battle of Britain, a German miscalculation plagued by logistical problems and poor top command decisions. A frustrated Maltzahn declared that Germany could never win the war and that the best outcome would be a favorable peace.²³ In October 1940 he was promoted to commodore of Fighter Wing 53 (JG 53), known as the Ace of Spades for its signature emblem, and two months later received the Knights’ Cross, Germany’s highest military decoration, for exceptional leadership. The Oak Leaves, an added distinction, followed in August 1941. He was now a celebrity, pictured on postcards and pestered for autographs in a culture that idolized its war heroes.

In June 1941 JG 53 moved to the Russian front, where its commodore gained an idea of the ferocity of Nazi racial policy, confiding to his father that Soviet civilians and Jews had been rounded up and shot. Indeed, a fellow commodore had refused to lend his men to an SS task force for such an operation. At the end of the year Maltzahn was doubtless relieved to lead JG 53 to Sicily in support of German efforts against Malta and North Africa. Bailing out over the Mediterranean in May 1942, he received a demonstration of his men’s regard: fully half of his flyers were soon in the air searching for their leader, completely ignoring two befuddled Spitfire pilots in their path. Maltzahn was rescued and returned to base, where he was showered with flowers and paraded on the shoulders of his jubilant men.²⁴

Gustave René Hocke, a humanist and writer serving as a civilian interpreter for JG 53, struck up a fast friendship with its commodore. “Seldom have I seen a person of such integrity, liberality and noble turn of mind, yet combined with model military behavior,” Hocke reports. Maltzahn’s thirst for knowledge led them on tours of Greek temple ruins during their scarce free time.²⁵ As their exchanges of opinion became more and more frank Hocke witnessed an example of Maltzahn’s growing disgust with the Nazi regime.

²² PLEHWE: *Blick*, p. 119.

²³ Personnel file, Günther von Maltzahn, PERS 6/154865, BA-MA; Richard COLLIER: *Eagle Day: The Battle of Britain, August 6-September 15, 1940* New York, Dutton, 1980, p. 216.

²⁴ For Russia, FFvM: e-mail message to the author, June 23rd, 2011; Kurt BRAATZ: *Gott oder ein Flugzeug: Leben und Sterben des Jagdfliegers Günther Lützow*, Moosburg, NeunundzwanzigSechs, 2005, pp. 265-267; for the Mediterranean, Mike SPICK: *Aces of the Reich: The Making of a Luftwaffe Fighter-Pilot*, London, Green, 2006, p. 204; Otto DOWNAR: *Kriegstagebuch 1939-1945: Pik As Geschwader JG 53 Stab- und Luftnachrichtenkompanie* [n.p., n.p., 1970], p. 28; Jochen PRIEN: *JG 53: A History of the “Pik As” Geschwader*, Altglen, Schiffer, 1997, 3 vols., 1:380.

²⁵ Gustav Rene HOCKE: *Im Schatten des Leviathan: Lebenserinnerungen 1908-1984*, Munich and Berlin, Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2004, p. 162.

During a party for local society the uncharacteristically agitated commodore summoned Hocke outside to the garden and explained that he had just been handed a “secret Führer order” commanding that captured Allied saboteurs, although regular soldiers, were not to be regarded as prisoners of war but executed on the spot. Taking a match to the paper, he declared, ““As far as I’m concerned, this despicable order was never issued.””²⁶ It could only have been the infamous “Commando Order” of October 18, 1942.

Later that year Maltzahn directed several far-flung units in Tunisia against overwhelming Allied superiority. After one disastrous mission he gathered his pilots together; as described reverently by a member of the staff and signals company years later: “The commodore stood among his flying comrades like a cliff in a foaming sea. Objectively, quietly, and with discipline” he dissected the mistakes of the day, eliciting from his men “the necessary strength and a blind faith in him.”²⁷ When another failure cost hard-pressed German troops the loss of desperately needed tanks and munitions, Maltzahn flew back to Sicily and interposed himself between the furious high command and his pilots, unhesitatingly assuming responsibility for the debacle.²⁸ As conditions further deteriorated in spring 1943 Hitler condemned much of JG 53’s ground crew to remain behind in North Africa as ersatz infantry, but the commodore refused to abandon them, ferrying them out as human baggage in the rear fuselage of overloaded fighters under constant air attack. He himself flew on these missions, personally keeping faith with his men.²⁹

Worse was to come in Sicily, slammed shortly thereafter by the Allied juggernaut. To force success, Luftwaffe chief Hermann Göring resorted to threats of court martial and transfer to the Eastern front. After reading out one such ukase Maltzahn remarked drily, ““Gentlemen, I believe no further comment is necessary. I am ashamed that I had to issue this order.””³⁰ He then clashed with General of Fighters Adolf Galland, the poster boy of the Luftwaffe charged by Göring with directing operations on the island. When Galland accused the commodore of losing control over his underperforming pilots, Maltzahn disdainfully returned to the skies with the rest of JG 53, leaving the general to handle things on his own.³¹

Interestingly, the British Political Warfare Executive (PWE) capitalized on these incidents to undermine German morale in the homeland. Maintaining that Galland had threatened the commodore with loss of his command and transfer with his men to a shock battalion on the Russian front, the PWE ridiculed the general as a Nazi sycophant who had dared

²⁶ HOCKE: p. 163.

²⁷ DOWNAR: pp. 63 and 67.

²⁸ Günther RÜBELL: *Kreuze im Himmel wie auf Erden: Fronterleben im Jagdgeschwader Mölders*, Heusenstamm, Orion Heimreiter, 1980, p. 245.

²⁹ PRIEN: pp. 2:579-581; author’s conversation with FFvM, October 9th, 2015.

³⁰ PRIEN: pp. 2:622-623 and p. 2:636.

³¹ For Galland’s image, see Dean ANDREW: “Strategic Culture in the *Luftwaffe*: Did It Exist in World War II and Did It Transition into the Air Force?” *Defence Studies*, 4:3, Autumn 2004, pp. 361-386: p. 378; PRIEN: p. 2:652.

insult the highly decorated Maltzahn. The British thus acknowledged the latter's fighting spirit and integrity while perhaps hinting at his disillusionment with the regime.³²

Despite his momentary lapse of equanimity before Galland, Maltzahn managed to maintain his famed *sangfroid* when it counted most. An exhausted young pilot later credited him with pulling his men out of deep depression through the sheer force of his personality: “[H]is boyish laugh . . . [h]is kindly, always friendly eyes, clear, open face, and entire nature radiated such warmth and deep understanding, friendship and fatherly approval that, inspired by it, I simply felt new strength, which we all needed so much.”³³ As they hunkered down in a flimsy shelter during one severe bombing raid on Comiso airfield Maltzahn kept up the spirits of assorted military personnel with his droll commentary on the action, and when German troops finally withdrew to the Italian mainland in August 1943 he first arranged to distribute to the people of Catania the cots, blankets, and rations ordered destroyed upon retreat. This gesture made a lasting impression on the population, as the mayor informed Maltzahn's son twenty years later when the latter was in the city.³⁴ The commodore was unusual in not sharing the ethnocentric contempt for their Italian allies so common among German military men.³⁵

But his own physical resistance was low after the Sicilian debacle, and he was hospitalized for a month with a serious bout of malaria. Just days after returning to command he was ordered to a staff position in the homeland, which ended his operational flying career. For a passionate pilot who hoped to remain with his comrades until the end, this was wrenching.³⁶ For JG 53, too, the “awful rumor . . . hit . . . like a thunderbolt.”³⁷ Supportive yet demanding, Maltzahn shared his men's efforts in equal measure and was always accessible even to the lowest ranks. Unlike some frontline officers later elevated to staff positions he never underestimated the brutal reality of daily combat flying, a reality that left him exhausted and literally stooping under the burden of his responsibilities by the time he departed for his new post. With three

³² The front-page piece from the fake PWE-produced *Frankfurter Zeitung* newspaper as well as an air-dropped leaflet are reproduced in Lee RICHARDS: *The Black Art: British Clandestine Psychological Warfare against the Third Reich*, Peacehaven, www.psywar.org, 2010, pp. 150-153. Also see Ellic HOWE: *The Black Game: British Subversive Operations against the Germans during the Second World War*, London, Joseph, 1982, p. 123. For their part, the Americans also kept tabs on prominent German officers and even their relatives, eliciting from one rescued German seaman the information that “Freiherr von Maltzahn,” “said to be the brother of a Major Freiherr von Maltzahn of the Luftwaffe who has the Knight's Cross,” “is now in submarines”; UNITED STATES OFFICE OF NAVAL INTELLIGENCE: *Final Report on the Interrogation of Survivors from U-94 Sunk on August 27, 1942*, Office of Naval Intelligence 250 Series Post Mortems on Enemy Submarines, Serial No. 5, Washington, D.C., United States Government Printing Office, [1942].

³³ RÜBELL: pp. 246 and 238.

³⁴ For raid, Theo OSTERKAMP: “Günther Freiherr von Maltzahn,” *Jägerblatt*, 2.9, 1953, p. 2; for supplies, Hartwig von MALTZAHN: to Sigrun von dem Hagen, March 17th, 2007, private collection and LÜCHTRATH: pp. 35-36.

³⁵ Friedrich-Karl von PLEHWE: *Reiter, Streiter und Rebell: Das ungewöhnliche Leben des General E.-G. Baade*, [n.p.], Schäuble, 1976, p. 183; NEITZEL and WELZER: pp. 333-334.

³⁶ HOCKE: p. 162; PRIEN: p. 2:696.

³⁷ DOWNAR: p. 173.

years in charge of JG 53 Maltzahn was to remain the longest serving wartime wing commander.³⁸

His weakened condition was the product of more than simple fatigue, however. In 1942 he had been diagnosed with lymphatic cancer, a virtual death sentence at that time. In a bizarre twist, his medical researcher sister in Germany read the file of a cancer patient whose initials, birthdate, and occupation—fighter pilot—matched her brother's, but the shocked young woman kept his secret. At the famed Charité Hospital in Berlin he underwent the most successful treatment then available, a massive dose of radiation likely to produce extensive internal damage. He remained free of symptoms for the rest of the war, but it was never made clear to him either then or later that he was suffering from cancer.³⁹

In 1943 he was also drawn into military circles contemplating resistance to Hitler. Disillusioned German officers and diplomats in Rome had gathered around military attaché General Enno von Rintelen. Rintelen's assistant was Friedrich-Karl von Plehwe, an old friend of Maltzahn's from their cavalry and flight training days (and at the end of his diplomatic career secretary-general of the Western European Union from 1974 to 1977). Plehwe describes how Rintelen's circle debated not only abstract questions such as the nature of war and militarism but also the need to mitigate the worsening German military situation. High-level military visitors to Rome in 1942 and 1943, several of them such as Claus von Stauffenberg and Erich Fellgiebel later instrumental in the July 20, 1944 plot to kill Hitler, shared their fears. Like others considered reliable, Maltzahn was almost certainly invited to join the discussions whenever he passed through Rome.⁴⁰ There he heard of a nascent plan to topple the dictator.

At the beginning of April 1943 Rintelen circle member Colonel (later General) Ernst-Günther Baade returned to Rome from home leave, reporting on a scheme that he felt might end the war. Luftwaffe anti-aircraft artillery (flak) forces were increasing steadily in German cities and industrial centers in response to mounting Allied bombing raids, while most regular troops were at the front. If, supported by fighter units engaged in homeland defense, these thousands of big guns could be turned against the regime, the government might be overthrown and peace negotiated. His comrades in Rome were intrigued, but too far from the scene to make any direct contribution. Baade, however, could not get the idea out of his mind.⁴¹ Remarks Maltzahn made to translator Hocke in late April 1943, less than a month after Baade's return from Germany with his news, indicate that he had become aware of the plot, was just as fascinated by the possibility, and even envisioned Hocke's helping in some way. Hocke had reestablished

³⁸ PRIEN: p. 2:696; RÜBELL: pp. 238-239; John WEAL: *Jagdgeschwader 53 "Pik-As,"* Botley, Osprey, 2007, p. 99.

³⁹ Charlotte DeCroes JACOBS: *Henry Kaplan and the Story of Hodgkin's Disease*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2010, pp. 47-48; LÜCHTRATH: p. 42; FFvM: e-mail messages to the author, June 5th, 2011 and June 18th, 2011; OPPENHEIMER: p. 99.

⁴⁰ PLEHWE: *Reiter*, pp. 185-187 and pp. 190-191; Friedrich-Karl von PLEHWE: *Schicksalsstunden in Rom: Ende eines Bündnisses*, Berlin, Propyläen, [1967], p. 145.

⁴¹ PLEHWE: *Reiter*, pp. 196-197.

himself as a journalist in Rome; Maltzahn was there for talks on the North African situation. Hocke relates of his friend:

His anger over the loss of pilots in the Mediterranean was so unfeigned that it now became quite clear to me: He was not one of the non-committal “grumblers.” He wanted to act! . . . [He] advised me: “Don’t leave here. You’ll hear from me. In every change of situation decide according to your convictions.”⁴²

By apparent coincidence Maltzahn himself got this chance.

His first posting in October 1943 after leaving JG 53 was to the staff of Colonel General Hubert Weise, commander of air defense for the homeland with headquarters in Berlin. If not himself the originator of the flak plot, Weise was one of its prime movers and ideally placed to direct it. On November 5th, 1943 Maltzahn summoned his old friend Plehwe, also currently stationed in Berlin, to a secret meeting at Weise’s headquarters. Weise asked Plehwe to recommend a Foreign Office contact for the conspirators based on the friendships he had established with like-minded diplomats in Rome. Plehwe did so, and Maltzahn later inquired about the possibility of winning popular hero Field Marshal Erwin Rommel to the cause. Plehwe, who had served on Rommel’s staff in Africa, warned his friend away from the field marshal, whom at this point he still believed a strong Hitler adherent.⁴³

The coup plan was suddenly derailed with Weise’s unexpected transfer in December 1943, perhaps indicating that hints of conspiracy had leaked out.⁴⁴ Weise himself regarded his new assignment, chief of the anti-aircraft technical office of the Air Ministry, as a demotion.⁴⁵ That same month Maltzahn was dispatched back south as Fighter Leader Northern Italy, the head of Axis fighter operations in that part of the country still under German control. This thankless task may have been handed to him at least partly in response to suspicions about his role in the flak intrigue. Faced with an insurmountable Allied superiority in aircraft of at least 10 to one, all

⁴² HOCKE: p. 176.

⁴³ PLEHWE: *Schicksalsstunden*, pp. 147-149.

⁴⁴ PLEHWE: *Schicksalsstunden*, p. 149. Apart from Hocke’s intriguing hint at such activity, Plehwe appears to be the only source for the story of the flak plot, but it is unlikely that he would have invented it. His inclusion of names of those who knew about it, people who might still be alive and able to dispute his account, as well as his supplying precise dates, obviously taken from his extensive diaries, mitigates against the possibility. Also, the main characters in Plehwe’s story, Weise, Maltzahn, and Baade, were all dead when he wrote and forgotten by the public, so that there was no need for him to rehabilitate their reputations. As for possible rehabilitation of his own, Plehwe himself played only a very peripheral part in the plot and was at the time he wrote a respected diplomat apparently under no pressure to exonerate himself of anything.

⁴⁵ Jeremy DIXON: *Luftwaffe Generals: The Knights’ Cross Holders, 1939-1945*, Altglen, Schiffer, 2009, p. 219. Dixon asserts that Weise (1884-1950) was an opponent of the Nazis and of the Luftwaffe leadership, and that he came under scrutiny after the 1944 assassination attempt on Hitler. When a postwar barracks was named for Weise one of the dedication speakers, a colleague during the war, noted that the general was dismissed at the end of 1943 “after increasing tension with Hitler”: see Peter KRONISCH: “Der Entstandort 1969” in KRONISCH, *Chronik Flugabwehrraketengruppe 34*, 2013, p. 34, <https://www.rottenburger34er.de/home/komplette-chronik-als-pdf/>.

he could do was build up a fighter control system as quickly as possible and shuttle small groups of planes from one hot spot to another.⁴⁶ Complaints by Luftwaffe commander in Italy Field Marshal Wolfram von Richthofen that Maltzahn failed to push his pilots enough, was too ready to excuse their failures, and displayed less than the desired aggression ““for fear of enemy attacks on his airfields””⁴⁷ may reflect the fighter leader’s reluctance to sacrifice any more of his pilots’ lives in a hopeless situation.

In August 1944 the Luftwaffe leadership floated a plan to shunt its Italian air force allies either into flak units or a flying Italian Legion under German command. Most of the Italians resisted surrendering their autonomy. Fighter Leader Maltzahn, who had high regard for the Italian pilots, many of whom he counted as friends, refused to support the scheme out of loyalty to them and respect for their dignity, which earned him an immediate transfer.⁴⁸ He was ordered back to Germany to the staff of his old critic General Galland.

Galland envisioned regaining control of the skies through a fighter force invigorated with quantities of the new Me 262 jet, but the high command was lending increasing attention and confidence to the bomber arm. While the general fought his corner Maltzahn made several flights in the plane in December 1944, acquainting himself with the capabilities of this revolutionary aircraft and perhaps hoping to return to operational flying. The fraught situation led to the so-called “revolt of the aces,” an attempt by senior fighter commanders to replace Göring as head of the service and return the fighter arm to predominance in defensive tactics.⁴⁹ By now Maltzahn had obviously lost faith in the possibility of a coup and saw the remaining task of the military as continuing to defend the population to the limits of its ability, in the process perhaps setting the stage for a negotiated peace.

The dissidents achieved nothing by confronting Göring at the Flyers’ Club in Berlin. Galland faced court martial and according to his own account contemplated suicide until Hitler intervened.⁵⁰ Most senior “plotters,” including Maltzahn, were initially slated to be mollified with appointments to the leadership of flying divisions,⁵¹ but he was ultimately denied this favor, relegated instead to the staff of the 9th Flying Division (J) to supervise the retraining of bomber pilots for fighter duty.⁵²

⁴⁶ Andrew J. BROOKES: *Air War over Italy, 1943-1945*, Shepperton, Allan, 2000, pp. 43, 62, and 86.

⁴⁷ PRIEN: p. 3:785.

⁴⁸ Nick BEALE, Ferdinando D’AMICO, and Gabriele VALENTINI: *Air War Italy, 1944-45: The Axis Air Forces from the Liberation of Rome to the Surrender*, Shrewsbury, Airlife, 1996, pp. 89-91; Nino ARENA: *L’Aeronautica Nazionale Repubblicana: La guerra aerea in Italia, 1943-1945*, [Parma], Albertelli, [1996], p. 203.

⁴⁹ Williamson MURRAY: *Strategy for Defeat: The Luftwaffe, 1933-1945*, Maxwell Air Force Base, Airpower Research Institute, Air University Press, 1983, pp. 252-253; flight log, Günther von Maltzahn, non-operational flights 3023-3026, December 14th, 1944, private collection; Johannes STEINHOFF: *In letzter Stunde: Verschwörung der Jagdflieger*, Munich, List, 1974, pp. 101-102.

⁵⁰ David BAKER: *Adolf Galland: The Authorised Biography*, London, Windrow and Greene, 1996, pp. 282-283.

⁵¹ Fellow “conspirator” Hannes Trautloft notes this in his wartime diary (BRAATZ: p. 357).

⁵² Hajo HERRMANN: *Bewegtes Leben: Kampf- und Jagdflieger 1935-1945*, Stuttgart, Motorbuch, 1984, p. 388. Maltzahn’s new superior (and fellow colonel) Herrmann, himself a bomber pilot, advocated a corps of inexperienced pilots to ram enemy bomber formations en masse, thus shocking the Allies into halting their bombing offensive and

On Germany's surrender in May 1945 he, his staff, and his long-time orderly, who refused to leave him, withdrew to a mountain cottage in the south of the country to await developments. After formally discharging the staff, Maltzahn set out by bicycle with his orderly en route to their families further north. Captured at an American roadblock, the officer found himself under investigation for Nazi party ties. Exonerated and released after a remarkably short period of detention for one of his rank, he was placed aboard an American army truck headed north and was reunited with his family at the end of June.⁵³

Now bereft of both his profession and his home in the Soviet-occupied east, he possessed little more than the clothes on his back and was assimilating the wartime loss of many members of his immediate family, including his father, executed by Soviet troops, and three brothers. After an arduous train journey across the country with his wife, four children, and some in-laws, he received a less than enthusiastic welcome from a wealthy father-in-law not eager to take in refugees. He finally began an agricultural apprenticeship and rented an overgrown truck farm dependent on a makeshift irrigation system of hoses. With his usual good humor and harking back to his classical education he christened his enterprise the "Günther von Maltzahn Pomological Garden," recalling Pomona, the Roman goddess of fruit orchards. Later he took over the winery of a brother-in-law missing in action and struggled to rescue it from the brink of ruin.⁵⁴ But his old profession soon beckoned once again.

Rearmament and *Innere Führung*

By late 1950, at the urging of the Western allies and with Chancellor Konrad Adenauer's strong support, Germany had pledged to help defend Europe against Soviet encroachment. Adenauer confidante Theodor Blank created a low-profile organization unofficially known as the *Amt Blank* (Blank Office) to plan the rebirth of the German military. Broad political support was necessary to achieve rearmament; opposition Social Democrat (SPD) leaders sympathetic to Adenauer's idea arranged meetings in early 1951 between party representatives and "reasonable," democratically inclined former officers who could be charged with the task.⁵⁵ Younger ex-military men active in the interparty youth movement used their remaining contacts

gaining time to bring the new jet fighters online. The pilots were to save themselves by parachute, and in the only attack they carried out almost 60 percent of them survived. After hesitant acceptance of the idea by Hitler, who insisted that the men be volunteers, Herrmann developed the initiative under his close personal control: see Arno ROSE: *Radikaler Luftkampf: Die Geschichte deutscher Rammjäger*, Stuttgart, Motorbuch, 1977, pp. 187-188 and 234; Adrian WEIR: *The Last Flight of the Luftwaffe: The Suicide Attack on the Eighth Air Force, 7 April, 1945*, London, Cassell, 1997 p. 64. In his memoirs HERRMANN writes that Maltzahn revealed the "harassment" his family had suffered at the hands of the regime, something this convinced National Socialist found inexplicable: "My family and my widest circle of acquaintances had never reported experiencing any such thing," p. 412.

⁵³ FFvM: e-mail messages to the author, April 20th, 2011 and Oct. 30th, 2012; "Bockel Flucht 1," p. 30.

⁵⁴ FFvM: "Bockel Flucht 1," pp. 29-32; e-mail message to the author, May 25th, 2011.

⁵⁵ Ulrich BUCZYLOWSKI: *Kurt Schumacher und die deutsche Frage: Sicherheitspolitik und strategische Offensivkonzeption vom August 1950 bis September 1951*, Stuttgart-Degerloch, Seewald, 1973, pp. 119-120.

to compile a list of 35 former soldiers with whom the SPD could talk.⁵⁶ Maltzahn was among them.⁵⁷ Perhaps somewhat to their surprise, both sides agreed on many points, including defense against communist totalitarianism, equal standing for German forces in any European defensive structure, and the need to balance defense and social welfare expenditures.⁵⁸

Heading the SPD delegations were well-known politicians Fritz Erler and Carlo Schmid. Aristocrat and professional soldier Maltzahn may have tended toward conservatism, but he found these men to be broadminded, open to cordial discussion and a frank exchange of ideas. He was particularly impressed with Erler, whose concentration camp experiences had neither embittered nor radicalized him.⁵⁹ Political leaders on both sides also approved of Maltzahn, for he received an invitation to join the staff of the Blank Office.

Former officers were chosen for their integrity, sympathy for democratic principles, and distance from the Nazi regime. Maltzahn's reputation largely spoke for him, but further clues were sought in an officer's view of the resistance movement in general and the July 20th plot against Hitler in particular. He did not have to agree with the action itself, only to understand the motivations of the conspirators. This "respect for the moral meaning" of July 20th was considered proof of his successful "'inner struggle'" to come to terms with what many considered competing ethical dictates of obedience.⁶⁰ After his death some friends speculated that in peacetime Maltzahn would have accepted high treason (*Hochverrat*—an attack on the constitutional order of the state such as a coup to free the country from a criminal regime), but that in wartime he would have rejected revolt as aiding and abetting the enemy (*Landesverrat*).⁶¹ Even without his actual involvement in a possible coup attempt, such feelings about July 20th would have been entirely compatible with the official position. But Maltzahn shared the moral compunction that had impelled the men of July 20 to rise against the state precisely because, not in spite of, a war that was slowly bleeding the nation dry. Historian Hans Mommsen identifies various catalysts that propelled individuals from mere criticism to resistance action; among these influences were a certain "social background and position" as well as "a deep-rooted national consciousness."⁶² Maltzahn's aristocratic grounding in community responsibility, leadership, and public service placed him firmly in both camps.

⁵⁶ Hartmut SOELL: *Fritz Erler: Eine politische Biographie*, Vol. 1, Berlin, Dietz, 1976, pp.106 and 143-145.

⁵⁷ Günther von MALTZAHN: to Heinz-Eugen Eberbach, Feb. 8th, 1951 and March 9th, 1951, MSg 2/13936 108, BA-MA, Freiburg.

⁵⁸ SOELL: p. 145.

⁵⁹ FFvM: e-mail message to the author, June 18th, 2011.

⁶⁰ Donald ABENHEIM: *Reforging the Iron Cross: The Search for Tradition in the West German Armed Forces*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1988, pp. 141-142.

⁶¹ FFvM: e-mail message to the author, June 18th, 2011.

⁶² Hans MOMMSEN: *Alternatives to Hitler: German Resistance under the Third Reich*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2003 (trans. Angus McGeoch): p. 28. Claudia KOONZ reaches a similar conclusion: "Choice and Courage" in David Clay LARGE, ed., *Contending with Hitler: Varieties of German Resistance in the Third Reich*, Washington, D.C. and Cambridge, German Historical Institute and Cambridge University Press, 1991, pp.49-63: p. 63.

Other indications of a former officer's re-employability were his successful adjustment to postwar society under difficult material circumstances and his open adoption of democratic principles; the "apolitical distance and isolation" expected of soldiers of the interwar years was now unacceptable.⁶³ Thanks to an iron will, great perseverance, and much hard work, Maltzahn had proven that he could rise above adversity and make a useful place for himself in civilian life. In his dealings with others, including the lowliest of his military subordinates and Italian civilians, he had demonstrated an unbiased openness and genuine concern for the individual.

His lifelong political reserve, while a personal characteristic, may have been reinforced by the official experience of the mass of military men in the Weimar Republic. The military law of 1921 prohibited public manifestations of partisan political sentiment such as membership in political organizations and attendance at political rallies, and the high command expected the officer corps to refrain from "meddling in the confounded politics." This stricture did not apply to that same high command, however, whose rule was that "politics must be conducted by a few only—tenaciously and silently" to maintain and extend conservative military influence while paying lip service to civilian control in a republican government foreign to the principles of most older officers. F.L. Carsten realizes that "this could only be achieved by the elimination of political discussion from the officer corps, by its strict subordination to the 'chief of the army command.'"⁶⁴ The chiefs strategically promoted "sincere carrying out of duty and self-sacrificing, quiet work in the service of the public and the Fatherland," thereby substituting a kind of old-fashioned "monarchical idea" for loyalty to the republic and its constitution. By refusing to ground its young officers in a true understanding of their political responsibility, the high command stunted the development of their political maturity and left them dependent on their superiors for guidance in this arena.⁶⁵ This picture mirrors that of the army in the Wilhelmine period, when the lack of parliamentary control over the military gave its high command great scope for exercising unofficial political influence and when an interest in politics was regarded by most of rest of the officer corps as unworthy of a gentleman. The Weimar prohibitions against soldiers' voting, joining political parties, or attending political meetings were holdovers from the Wilhelmine era.⁶⁶

⁶³ Georg MEYER: "Personalfragen beim Aufbau der Bundeswehr" in Wolfgang KRIEGER, ed., *Adenauer und die Wiederbewaffnung*, Rhöndorfer Gespräche Vol. 18, Bonn, Bouvier, 2000, pp. 99-120: pp. 100-101.

⁶⁴ F. L. CARSTEN: *The Reichswehr and Politics, 1918-1933*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1973, p. 110 for law, p. 47 for quotes by Wilhelm Groener, minister of defense during the late Weimar period, p. 66.

⁶⁵ Wolfgang SAUER: "Die Reichswehr" in Karl Dietrich BRACHER, ed., *Die Auflösung der Weimarer Republik: Eine Studie zum Problem des Machtverfalls in der Demokratie*, Schriften des Instituts für politische Wissenschaft Vol. 4, Villingen, Ring-Verlag, 1971, pp. 205-253: pp. 227 and 232; for "monarchical idea," CARSTEN, *Reichswehr*, p. 218.

⁶⁶ MESSERSCHMIDT: *Militär und Politik in der Bismarckzeit und im wilhelminischen Deutschland*, Erträge der Forschung Vol. 43, Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1975, pp. 39-40. Messerschmidt bases his argument on the seminal works of Gerhard Ritter, *Staatskunst und Kriegshandwerk: Das Problem des "Militarismus" in Deutschland*, Vol. 1, 1959, and Gordon Alexander Craig, *The Politics of the Prussian Army, 1640-1945*, 1955. For Weimar prohibitions see Ute FREVERT: *A Nation in Barracks: Modern Germany, Military Conscription and Civil Society*, Oxford, Berg (trans. Andrew Boreham with Daniel Brückenhäus), 2004, p. 241.

Scholars often adduce this lack of political orientation as proof that most interwar officers maintained merely a “distanced loyalty” to the Weimar regime⁶⁷ and were predisposed to cooperate with the militaristic, totalitarian Nazi government. A nonpolitical mindset may have militated against overt resistance to the Nazis, but perhaps at least as influential could have been the average conservative-minded officer’s conflation of the republic and the Social Democratic Party, which positioned itself “especially sharply” against the military.⁶⁸ The Nazi sympathies of young officers who entered the military during the later Weimar period cannot be fixed with any certainty. F. L. Carsten notes that while enthusiasm for Hitler among junior officers was “widespread” in the early 1930s, others not actually hostile to Hitler were merely extreme nationalists or even indifferent, which made them no different from the many, both German and foreign, who failed to grasp the reality of National Socialism. Dirk Richhardt claims that pre-war cadets were influenced more by traditional patriotism than by extreme right-wing nationalism such as that of the Nazis, basing this view on the stream of edicts issued by Minister of Defense Werner von Blomberg after Hitler came to power in 1933, in which the military was repeatedly exhorted to embrace Nazi ideology. Yet this could just as well reflect an attempt to bring older, more resistant officers on board, or to demonstrate to Hitler the support of the high command. In any case, says Georg Meyer, postwar searching of conscience among former officers about their role under the Nazis was more widespread than is generally believed, and quite a few admitted that their action or inaction during the war weighed heavily on their minds.⁶⁹

Maltzahn, too, was prey to self-doubt, as he confessed to a wartime comrade who later became a friend in civilian life. He himself realized that he was “good nature personified” and worried that this naiveté had blunted his perception of the unscrupulous use the regime had made of the military. His soul-searching had begun at least as early as his tenure as Fighter Leader Northern Italy and preoccupied him until his death. He and his friend often spent an evening over a bottle of wine dissecting the course of the war and discussing necessary changes for the future of the country: “The questions of ‘why’ and ‘how it should be in the future’ always stood troublingly front and center.”⁷⁰

In 1950 Maltzahn suffered a recurrence of cancer symptoms, including sharp pains in the neck and the loss of his voice, which left him able to communicate only in a whisper and complicated his new professional prospects. Almost simultaneously he was tendered both the position of director of personnel at German Petroleum (Deutsche Erdöl AG or DEA) as well as that of personnel expert for the future Luftwaffe in the underfunded Blank Office. The

⁶⁷ Detlef BALD: *Der deutsche Offizier: Sozial- und Bildungsgeschichte des deutschen Offizierkorps im 20. Jahrhundert*, Munich, Bernard und Graefe, 1982, p. 145.

⁶⁸ MESSERSCHMIDT: p. 3; RITTER: p. 65. SAUER points out that the Social Democrats were not in principle anti-military but would only support it in a state not ruled by class interests and in defense of the “international proletariat”: p. 216.

⁶⁹ CARSTEN: *Reichswehr*, pp. 396, 321, and 337; RICHHARDT: pp. 102-106; Georg MEYER: p. 102.

⁷⁰ RÜBELL: pp. 239-240.

government job was far from secure, apparently starting out on an on-call basis with payment by the day and ending as a series of short-term contracts, the compensation low compared to what he stood to earn in industry. But the desire to work for a postwar future markedly different from the failed past as well as his sense of duty to country and people outweighed economic expediency. After surgery restored his voice he became one of the earliest Luftwaffe appointees in the Blank Office in April 1951, living in Bonn apart from his family, who remained in the Mosel Valley winegrowing region.⁷¹

The Blank Office staff at the time numbered only in the low double digits. The enterprise occupied cramped space in a brick barracks complex dating from the days of the Wilhelmine Empire. Determined to emphasize civilian political control of the initiative, Blank forbade the use of military forms of address among his staff of former military men and civil servants,⁷² which fostered an atmosphere of informality and camaraderie. Almost everybody knew one another and the work at this early stage was so unstructured that personal contact with the higher echelons, including Blank himself, was common. Many colleagues had either been part of the July 20th conspiracy against Hitler or had had close ties to those involved, including Maltzahn, several of whose relatives had been implicated and one of whom had died under Gestapo arrest. All were dedicated to reform, convinced of the need for a force of citizen-soldiers with a spiritual outlook new to the German military.⁷³ The shortage of personnel and frequent changes of plan led to severe overwork. Resources were so strained that one man began his tenure armed only with a pencil and a piece of paper. The “raw material of the military bureaucracy” such as personnel files and manuals had either been destroyed during the war or were now in the hands of the Allies. But years later denizens of the early Blank Office looked back with nostalgia at this time of “ferment and innovation,” when they shared the feeling of being part of something important.⁷⁴

Theirs was not an easy task. Public opinion was outraged by the prospect of rearmament on the heels of a fearsome “total war” and shocked by revelations of military brutality. The bitter slogan “*Ohne mich!*” or “Count me out!” neatly summed up the prevailing mood. Many former professional soldiers were also aghast at being asked to serve again given what they viewed as their “defamation” by the Allies, who accused them of moral corruption, denied their pensions, blocked aid to war widows and orphans, and banned veterans’ organizations. Some

⁷¹ LÜCHTRATH: p. 42; FFvM: e-mail messages to the author, June 5th and May 19th, 2011 and March 6th, 2012. For work conditions, see “Planung für die Heranziehung von Gutachtern innerhalb der nächsten Wochen,” January 3rd, 1952, BW9/403b, Dienststellen zur Vorbereitung des westdeutschen Verteidigungsbeitrages 1950-1955, pp. 227 and 309, BA-MA, Freiburg.

⁷² David Clay LARGE: *Germans to the Front: West German Armament in the Adenauer Era*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1996, pp. 112-113.

⁷³ Konrad KRASKE: “Anfänge Öffentlichkeitsarbeit in der Dienststelle Blank” in Bruno THOSS and Wolfgang SCHMIDT, eds., *Vom Kalten Krieg zur deutschen Einheit: Analysen und Zeitzeugenberichte zur deutschen Militärgeschichte, 1945 bis 1995*, Munich, Oldenbourg, 1995, pp. 63-71: pp. 63-65; for Maltzahn relatives, Lars-Broder KEIL: “Er sprang aus dem Fenster, um der Folter zu entgehen,” *Die Welt*, July 19th, 2012.

⁷⁴ ABENHEIM: *Reforging*, pp. 76-78.

military men regarded wartime comrades working for Blank as crass opportunists, “little more than mercenaries in the pay of the occupiers, whose goal was the mobilization of German cannon fodder.”⁷⁵

Germany’s new allies also kept a watchful eye on the Blank Office, concerned that former Nazis and perhaps even war criminals might infiltrate it by taking advantage of the demand for their technical expertise. In 1953 United States High Commissioner for Germany James Bryant Conant reassured Washington that if the military men laboring under Blank displayed any vestige of “the old way of thinking” it was a conservative viewpoint and not a fascist one. The Americans also trolled through the millions of wartime German documents they had captured, checking the backgrounds of all 600 Blank Office employees and coming up with the same result.⁷⁶

The Soviets and their East German clients, however, used West German rearmament as a tool of Cold War rhetoric. Blasting supposedly renascent German militarism and imperialism, the newspaper *Neues Deutschland*, official organ of the East German government, announced that convicted war criminal Albert Kesselring, once Maltzahn’s superior in Italy and now languishing in prison, was influencing Blank Office policy with his theories on air warfare. Kesselring, the sheet trumpeted, might not be on staff—yet—but with his “confidant” Maltzahn so conveniently personnel chief of the new Luftwaffe, he might as well be. Kesselring’s views on air power, which the paper implies were dark secrets, had already been published in West Germany for anyone to read, and in January 1954 Maltzahn had been dead for seven months, an occurrence of which the author is seemingly oblivious.⁷⁷

Against this background the Blank Office concentrated on developing a new vision of the German soldier, one in tune with the values of modern democratic society. Two of the main contributors to this effort were the SPD politicians Erler and Schmid,⁷⁸ whom Maltzahn had met and greatly respected during their sounding meetings with former officers. The resulting philosophical approach to the relationship between military, state, and the individual soldier is termed *Innere Führung*, or inner direction. It still functions as the guiding principle of the German armed forces. In the institutional realm *Innere Führung* prescribes parliamentary control of the military and ensures civilian input in military affairs. On the individual level

⁷⁵ ABENHEIM: *Reforging*, pp. 43 and 66-68. See also the viewpoints on veterans’ issues expressed by Rolf EBLE and Wilhelm Ritter von SCHRAMM in Hans KÖRKER, ed., *Soldat im Volk: Eine Chronik des Verbandes Deutscher Soldaten (VdS)*, Wiesbaden, Wirtschaftsverlag, 1989.

⁷⁶ Ulrich BROCHHAGEN: *Nach Nürnberg: Vergangenheitsbewältigung und Westintegration in der Ära Adenauer*, Hamburg, Junius, 1994, pp. 203-204.

⁷⁷ “Kesselrings ‘verlängerte Arm der Politik,’” *Neues Deutschland*, January 30th, 1954, 5B; Albert KESSELRING: “Die deutsche Luftwaffe” in Kurt ASSMANN, Heinz GUDERIAN, [Friedrich August] von der HEYDTE, et al.: *Bilanz des zweiten Weltkrieges: Erkenntnisse und Verpflichtungen für die Zukunft*, Oldenburg, Stalling, 1953, pp. 145-158.

⁷⁸ Carl-Gero von ILSEMANN: “Streitkräfte in der Demokratie: Innere Führung gestern und heute” in MILITÄRGESCHICHTLICHES FORSCHUNGSAMT, *Dreissig Jahre Bundeswehr 1955-1985: Friedenssicherung im Bündnis*, Mainz, v. Hase und Koehler, 1985, pp. 313-342; p. 327.

Innere Führung seeks to guarantee that a soldier's personal freedom is as little restricted as is compatible with military effectiveness. Although "there [is] no place in the army for 'parliamentary processes,'" democratic society mandates "an approach as cooperative as possible, limited forms of co-responsibility in the troops, and the avoidance of harsh treatment."⁷⁹ *Innere Führung* upholds the dignity of the individual soldier and of all people, even to the extent that the soldier, as former Defense Minister Thomas de Maizière explains, "'is not only allowed, but obliged to disobey any order he or she feels might violate human dignity, which is probably unique in the world.'"⁸⁰ *Innere Führung* urges the citizen-soldier to regard the defense of democratic freedoms as worth the sacrifice of his autonomy and even of his life, promoting both self-reliance and teamwork among military men, fostering community and pan-European spirit, and encouraging political engagement.⁸¹ This last completely overturns the earlier tradition of the non-political soldier. Today the German soldier, like any other citizen, is entitled to the vote, free expression of political opinion, and freedom of association. The framers of *Innere Führung* recognized that "a citizen's political majority did not stop at the barrack gates," and that, reversing the old maxim, it was now the nation that was to school the army.⁸²

The components of *Innere Führung* and its ideal of the "citizen in uniform" found some echoes in the old Prussian army. In spite of negative public stereotypes of "blind obedience" and barracks brutality arising from later nineteenth century developments, Prussian military reformers earlier in the century had already spoken of "the enlightened citizen soldier" fully engaged with his society, of "citizens under arms" exercising initiative, taking responsibility at all levels, and demonstrating comradeship in their units. In their effort to create national unity in the face of the Napoleonic threat, the reformers had also hoped that military service would help reduce class and income barriers among the population.⁸³ Instruction in civics, however cursory and conservative, had been initiated before the First World War, and the position of unit spokesman dated to Reichswehr days, although its purview was limited to personal discontents.⁸⁴ The best German officers had also striven to cultivate a bond of trust between themselves and their men.⁸⁵ Maltzahn was heir to the many strands of the Prussian tradition and displayed the most liberal of them in his own leadership style. Newest to him was the truly revolutionary

⁷⁹ Ulrich de MAIZIÈRE: *In der Pflicht: Lebensbericht eines deutschen Soldaten im 20. Jahrhundert*, Herford, E. S. Mittler, 1989, p. 175.

⁸⁰ "No Shooting Please, We're German," *The Economist*, October 13th, 2012 (European ed.).

⁸¹ Johannes FISCHER, ed.: *Verteidigung im Bündnis: Planung, Aufbau, und Bewährung der Bundeswehr, 1950-1972*, Munich, Bernard und Graefe for the Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt of the Federal Republic of Germany, 1975, p. 55; for pan-Europeanism, Donald ABENHEIM: "The Citizen in Uniform: Reform and Its Critics in the Bundeswehr" in Stephen F. SZABO (ed.), *The Bundeswehr and Western Security*, New York, St. Martin's Press [1990], pp. 31-46; p. 35.

⁸² FREVERT: pp. 264-265.

⁸³ ABENHEIM: *Reforging*, pp. 13-18 and 98-99; for the enlightened soldier and reducing class conflict, Gordon Alexander CRAIG: *The Politics of the Prussian Army, 1640-1945*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1955, pp. 45 and 80.

⁸⁴ ILSEMANN: p. 320; CARSTEN: *Reichswehr*, p. 113.

⁸⁵ ABENHEIM: *Reforging*, pp. 17-18.

aspect of the Adenauer-era reforms, the fact that for the first time the primacy of parliamentary control and the civil rights of the German soldier were assured,⁸⁶ as well as the idea that the social pluralism characteristic of democracy must not only be respected but also reflected in the military sphere without, however, becoming divisive.⁸⁷ His training in service to those around him and his openness to others allowed him to fit into the new paradigm.

As a Luftwaffe officer Maltzahn was also in a better position than some to recognize the value of the new order. In his study of the wartime Luftwaffe, RAF Wing Commander Dean Andrew notes that its senior leaders, World War I holdovers with little understanding of modern aerial warfare, provided inadequate strategic and tactical direction. German commodores, “some of the finest leaders to command anywhere in the war,” needed to develop their own approaches, and Andrew credits them with a preponderant role in the creation of Luftwaffe institutional culture, which he recognizes in today’s German air force despite heavy postwar American influence.⁸⁸ They encouraged an initiative and independence in their pilots unique in the German military. Distinctions of rank counted for little; the best pilots led formations and planned attacks regardless of their position in the hierarchy. A nomadic life often lived under canvas fostered a family spirit that led to a further leveling of ranks as officers and men shared living quarters and meals, quite different from the usual scenario in the German army.⁸⁹ The new military historians stress that strong morale founded on “individual self-respect and small-unit cohesion,” rather than discipline or courage, makes the difference in battle, and that loyalty to comrades anchors the front-line soldier’s fortitude in the face of horror.⁹⁰ Maltzahn created an atmosphere in which every soldier was respected and could respect himself, thus promoting the group loyalty attested to by both his officers and men. The democratic and democratizing elements promoted by wartime wing commanders like Maltzahn correspond closely to the demands of today’s *Innere Führung*.

Innere Führung has been elaborated into a comprehensive theoretical construct that has been the focus of much commentary and some heated conflict in both military and society up to the present day, including disagreements about its actual implementation. While Maltzahn probably approached the concept as a commonsense one of caring leadership, comradeship, and upright action based on basic human empathy more than on strictly prescribed tenets, he participated in formulating regulations expressing the ideal during meetings of the Blank Office committee set up for that purpose.⁹¹

He may have considered *Innere Führung* to be a revitalization of the old vision of the military as the community-building “school of the nation.” The belief that the military can help

⁸⁶ ABENHEIM: “Citizen,” p. 44.

⁸⁷ BALD: p. 151; for avoiding political conflict, ILSEMANN: p. 331.

⁸⁸ ANDREW: pp. 362, 380 (quotation), and 384.

⁸⁹ ANDREW: pp. 365 and 370-371; DOWNAR: p. 138.

⁹⁰ BOURKE: pp. 266-267.

⁹¹ Minutes, Committee “*Innere Führung*,” Feb.-April 1953, BW 9/2227, Dienststellen zur Vorbereitung des westdeutschen Verteidigungsbeitrages 1950-1955, BA-MA, Freiburg.

inculcate social mores existed in ancient Greece, but the idea of the army as a “nation builder” first gained currency in Europe in the late nineteenth century, going on to be adopted by countries around the globe and of every political persuasion.⁹² In Germany the concept had emerged earlier in response to increasing liberal challenges to the conservative social order and was based on the Prussian military reformers’ conviction of the high moral virtue of the soldier’s calling, which, allied with the abolition of corporal punishment in the army, the promise of universal conscription, and the prospect of social and political freedoms for the populace, won the bourgeoisie over to the fight against foreign domination in the Wars of Liberation against Napoleonic France.⁹³ The ideal of military service as “a school of equality, awakening and nourishing a public spirit” later foundered on the renewed reality of harsh punishment and officer elitism as well as the army’s role in subduing dissent.⁹⁴ However, the successful conclusion of the Wars of Unification gave rise among the liberal-minded public to a new patriotism and admiration of the military that aided the state’s cooptation of the larger society to conservative values, achieved through nationalistic education imparted by teachers who had been army non-coms as well as opportunities for bourgeois men to reach officer status, which became the basis for almost all social advancement.⁹⁵ The “lively military discourse” on the mission of the army that flourished after unification among officers, soldiers, journalists, politicians, and people signified that the army was increasingly viewed as “an extremely influential and valuable institution of socialization,” although public and parliament recognized problems of harsh discipline, officer elitism, and the overweening attitude of some soldiers toward civilians. Neither was it lost on Social Democrats and other left-wing political groups that one of the army’s main purposes as the “school of the nation” was to combat revolutionary social ideology through its insistence on loyalty to the monarchy and love of the fatherland, the necessary characteristics of an obedient subject.⁹⁶ Nevertheless, the success of the program was such that during the empire, in the words of Jacob Burckhardt, “things military became the model for all things public.”⁹⁷ According to Neitzel and Welzer, by the end of the Weimar era this martial ideal had permeated all political strata, although the ultimate purpose behind their embrace of military virtues may have differed. The national trauma of the defeat of 1918, the humiliating strictures of the Versailles Treaty, and the weakness of the regime combined to produce “a radicalization of things military” that helped prepare the populace for later rearmament and

⁹² Ronald KREBS: “A School for the Nation? How Military Service Does Not Build Nations, and How It Might,” *International Security*, 28.4, Spring 2004, pp. 85-124: p. 85. Political scientist Krebs explores the reasons why he feels this conviction lacks basis and cites work positing that even West Germany’s carefully formulated philosophy of *Innere Führung* failed to create the desired result.

⁹³ SAUER: p. 213; FREVERT: pp. 19-21.

⁹⁴ FREVERT: pp. 80 and 121.

⁹⁵ Heinz STÜBIG: “The Prussian German Army: School of the Nation in the Nineteenth Century: Institutional Mechanisms and Its Consequences for Educational Policy,” *European Education*, 34.3, Fall 2002, pp. 5-19: pp. 9-13.

⁹⁶ FREVERT: pp. 149-150, 220-222, and 194.

⁹⁷ Qtd. in STÜBIG: p. 17.

conscription under the Nazi regime. The Reichswehr did not create this trend but certainly took advantage of it.⁹⁸

During cavalry training in their Reichswehr days Maltzahn and his friend Plehwe sought to discern the “pillars of [their] professional ethic,” specifically adopting as their mission the role of “teachers” in the “school of the nation,” rump though it might have become as a force of a mere 100,000 men and in an age when major conflict seemed unlikely after the lesson of the First World War. They were inspired by the vision of the officer as not only instructor but also example to his men, for whom he assumes responsibility and provides constant care.⁹⁹ They might have found this calling especially appealing during the late Weimar period when many young men felt helpless in the face of postwar socioeconomic and cultural change and sought ways to combat class differences by fostering a sense of national community. Ute Frevert locates the attraction of paramilitary organizations across the Weimar political spectrum in these very fears and desires, adding that even the proliferation of sports clubs addressed the perceived masculine need to acquire “decisiveness and resolution,” “discipline and self-determination,”¹⁰⁰ as well as the joys of comradeship. Maltzahn might have regarded the military as a socializing force less dangerous than partisan armies and more serious than sports leagues. Indeed, F. L. Carsten records that some young Reichswehr officers did hope to reduce class tensions by recruiting among workers and the political left but met with no sympathy from above.¹⁰¹ Given his approachability and openness to others, Maltzahn might have shared the views of these contemporaries.

Unfortunately, the “teaching” advocated by the Weimar as well as the earlier Wilhelmine high commands was limited to the inculcation of behavior meant to ensure a stable conservative social order. The values propagated by the Wilhelmine army were rooted in

the ideal world of the village, a transfigured vision of peasant life, intact bourgeois families, and the state’s secure order, where social conflicts such as those accompanying industrial development, the emergence of large cities, and mass society were either blocked out totally or effectively played down.¹⁰²

The 1931 guidelines for soldiers’ training issued by the Ministry of Defense could have been lifted directly from Wilhelmine practice, explicitly calling for replacing those ““concepts foreign to soldiers—constitution, democracy, and republic—with more familiar ideas like nation, people, fatherland and state [*Reich, Volk, Vaterland und Staat*].”” Even the two hours per week of civics

⁹⁸ NEITZEL and WELZER: pp. 69-71. Like Sauer, these authors also indicate that the Social Democrats and Communists were willing to support the military when national defense and/or their class interests were involved.

⁹⁹ PLEHWE: *Blick*, pp. 118-119. According to a report issued in 1935 by the Social Democratic Party in exile when conscription was reintroduced in Germany, few of the young men concerned believed even at this time that the step heralded another war but ““had no hesitation about thoroughly preparing for it”” (FREVERT: p. 250).

¹⁰⁰ FREVERT: pp. 243-244 and 247.

¹⁰¹ CARSTEN: *Reichswehr*, pp. 70 and 219.

¹⁰² STÜBIG: p. 15.

instruction given officer cadets themselves were later replaced by military history.¹⁰³ In both Weimar and Wilhelmine Germany, young lieutenants found themselves falling back on discipline, technical training, and the creation of good morale as the basis of their formal educational efforts.¹⁰⁴ At a time of growing political radicalism and economic distress, the army leadership provided its officer “teachers” neither practical training nor concrete guidelines on how to approach issues of social, economic, and cultural dislocation, much less the role of the army itself in state and society. This was merely the extension of the policy designed to keep the mass of the officer class itself politically unengaged and pliable in the hands of its high command. Willi Brandt, Social Democratic politician, German chancellor, and a dissident in 1930s Berlin, declares that the “true disaster” of Weimar Germany was that institutions “established as symbols of solidarity. . . had offered too little guidance on the individual’s personal responsibility in a critical situation, and even less on the individual’s duty to protect the constitution.”¹⁰⁵ Among these institutions must be numbered the German army. Under these circumstances young but earnest officers like Maltzahn, barely 21 when he took up his commission, could hardly be expected to craft a new model of military purpose.

In any case, it is certain that Maltzahn never envisioned the “school of the nation” as one dedicated either to the inculcation of iron discipline or to the exclusion of diverse points of view. As he proved in his own dealings with his men, for him it existed to promote and model the virtues of comradeship and community, self-sacrifice, respect for self and others, and service to country and people. When *Innere Führung* added explicitly pluralistic democratic ideals to the mix he had no difficulty assimilating them, especially after the cautionary example of the war years.

After Germany ratified the treaty establishing the European Defense Community in May 1953, Maltzahn’s quiet recruiting efforts bore tangible fruit. In the magazine of the Fighter Pilots’ Association he announced that the personnel department of the Blank Office was finally ready to receive official applications for all ranks. He cautioned against personal visits, which were “causing some headaches” for the understaffed office: “We would like to receive everyone so as not to disappoint them, but orderly work then becomes impossible—and there is really so much still to do before we can fly again.”¹⁰⁶

Death and Legacy

By now, however, he was critically ill. Laryngeal problems produced violent coughing fits upon eating or drinking; thin applesauce was practically his only sustenance. Swelling in his

¹⁰³ SAUER: p. 232, note 109; for civics, RICHARDT: p. 30.

¹⁰⁴ Reinhard HÖHN: *Die Armee als Erziehungsschule der Nation: Das Ende einer Idee*, Bad Harzburg, Verlag für Wissenschaft, Wirtschaft und Technik, 1963: pp. xlv-xlvi and 493-494; MESSERSCHMIDT: p. 68.

¹⁰⁵ Willy BRANDT: “The German Resistance Movement, 1933-1945” in LARGE, ed., *Contending with Hitler*, pp. 9-16: p. 12.

¹⁰⁶ “Wir hörten aus Bonn,” *Jägerblatt*, 2:6, 1953, p. 11.

neck and lungs made it difficult for him to breathe. It was only at this late date that his wife discovered how sick her husband was. He underwent more radiation, only to contract an infection in one severely compromised lung. Slated for surgery in June 1953 to remove the organ, he succumbed under anesthetic before the operation itself; one doctor believed that the proceedings had been botched.¹⁰⁷ He was 42 years old. His passing came as a shock to most of his wartime comrades, who apparently had been unaware of his condition.¹⁰⁸

Emotions ran high at his funeral. One mourner, tears in his eyes, suddenly embraced Maltzahn's eldest son, stammered that he owed his life to the boy's father, and then disappeared without revealing his identity. A longtime friend lauded Maltzahn's "upright, valiant, and chivalrous spirit," noting that his summons to the Blank Office reassured former soldiers: "We knew that [he] of all men, with [his] vast experience, would guarantee the selection of an irreproachable staff for the future flying corps." Decades after his death memories of him remained vivid, respect and affection for him, deep. One of his former officers recalled in a book published in 2002: "My first impression was that I stood in the presence of a gentleman of incomparable stature. He radiated energy and authority. . . . Maltzahn was the best commanding officer I ever knew."¹⁰⁹ As late as 2000, ageing former personnel of JG 53 met at his grave to commemorate what would have been his ninetieth birthday, thus literally bearing out a comrade's description of him after his death as "our unforgettable Maltzahn."¹¹⁰

Even making allowances for nostalgic hyperbole, it is evident that his personality and command qualities had a profound effect on those who knew him. Night fighter ace Wolfgang Falck lists the characteristics of a good fighter leader, one who can bend the roaring individuality displayed by most fighter pilots to the service of a unit without destroying the energy that makes them effective: "a high degree of insight into human nature, empathy, and modesty, but also a strong will, clarity in command, focused action, and that charisma that stems from the fact that a superior officer always sees himself as a role model."¹¹¹ Maltzahn added to these traits an almost unfailing calm and a wry sense of humor, respect for both allies and opponents, constant accessibility to all his men, from pilot officer to ground crewman, a real interest in their lives and needs, the willingness to share their hardships, and the determination to honor his obligation of care for them. Although the fighter wing had other commodores during the war years, postwar encounters between the Maltzahn family and former JG 53 members revealed the latter's special closeness to and affection for Maltzahn,¹¹² which the mere fact of his being its longest-serving head hardly seems enough to explain. No matter what one thinks of the Prussian military

¹⁰⁷ For health details, LÜCHTRATH: p. 42; FFvM: e-mail messages to the author, May 28th, 2011 and June 5th, 2011.

¹⁰⁸ *Jägerblatt* 2.7/8, 1953, p. 1 (cover); PRIEN: p. 2:697.

¹⁰⁹ Julius MEIMBERG: *Feindberührung: Erinnerungen 1939-1945*, Moosburg, NeunundzwanzigSechs, 2002, pp. 235 and 257.

¹¹⁰ FFvM: e-mail message to the author, June 5th, 2011; Werner ANDRES: "Mölders—Lützow—Maltzahn," *Jägerblatt*, 10.12, 1961, pp. 1-2.

¹¹¹ Wolfgang FALCK: foreword to BRAATZ, pp. 6-7: p. 6.

¹¹² FFvM: conversation with the author, October 9th, 2015.

vocabulary that cast officers as fathers and subordinates as children, Maltzahn earned the title beneath his photograph in the postwar history of JG 53's staff company: "Our father."

A final wartime incident encapsulates his personal style. A very young recruit to JG 53 in Italy never forgot his reception by his new commodore, who stood bare-chested refreshing himself over a basin of water. Maltzahn invited the boy to take a seat as he finished his ablutions. Then, after leisurely drying and dressing himself, he pulled up a stool and inquired about the youth's hometown, his parents, and how he had been drafted. The young man, surprised by his superior's unconventional behavior, attested years later that he left the commodore's presence feeling somehow safe and reassured, although he was under no illusion about the likely outcome of the war.¹¹³ Maltzahn's conduct here exemplifies today's *Innere Führung* in action.

Scholars such as Robert M. Citino, Geoffrey P. Megargee, and Wolfram Wette question the integrity of German officers like Maltzahn, contending that fighting a lost war was futile and irrational, and that even the hope that a stalemate might lead to a more favorable peace was a piece of "strategic myopia" "*given what we know*" now [emphasis supplied] about Allied intentions for unconditional surrender.¹¹⁴ Yet in the face of multiple failed attempts at rebellion, a draconian state security apparatus, and persistent public support for the regime, even dedicated resisters experienced "a feeling of isolation. . .helplessness and futility, almost of hopelessness" that by 1943 had turned them as well as many other Germans into fatalists, aware that the war was lost but resigned to slogging through to the inevitable end. Longtime Nazi opponent Konrad Adenauer "lapsed into a mood of resignation," believing that "there was no point of departure whatever for realistic action" against the regime.¹¹⁵ This reaction must have been just as prevalent among disaffected members of the officer corps, who could at least find purpose in the mission of homeland defense. A similar feeling animated most common soldiers, for whom loyalty to comrades was the overwhelming impetus for continuing to fight.¹¹⁶ Although both are often dismissed by historians, the desire to keep the eastern borders open to refugees and the misguided but rather widespread hope that the Western allies might demand German assistance against the Soviet Union as the price of a negotiated peace were also cited by German soldiers of all ranks as reasons to stay at their posts.¹¹⁷ And as historian Neitzel and social psychologist Welzer emphasize, not all human action is susceptible to explanation by reason alone.¹¹⁸

¹¹³ FFvM: e-mail message to the author, April 20th, 2011.

¹¹⁴ For hindsight, Robert M. CITINO: *The Wehrmacht Retreats: Fighting a Lost War, 1943*, Lawrence, University Press of Kansas, 2012, p. 237; for "myopia," Geoffrey P. MEGARGEE: *Inside Hitler's High Command*, Lawrence, University Press of Kansas, 2000, p. 213; Wolfram WETTE: *The Wehrmacht: History, Myth, Reality*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2006.

¹¹⁵ F. L. CARSTEN: introduction to GRAML et al., *German Resistance*, pp. vii-xiii: p. viii. For Adenauer, MOMMSEN: p. 36.

¹¹⁶ NEITZEL and WELZER: p. 40.

¹¹⁷ ROSE: pp. 137-138; Ulrich SAFT: *Das bittere Ende der Luftwaffe: "Wilde Sau," Sturmjäger, Rammjäger, Todesflieger, "Bienenstock,"* Walsrode, Militärbuchverlag Saft, 3rd ed., 1997, pp. 149-150, 153.

¹¹⁸ NEITZEL AND WELZER: pp.16-17.

Even the concept of fighting honorably under the Nazi regime is discredited by some writers. Citino offers the sweeping assurance that the German officer corps was largely with Hitler “every step of the way,” reducing any patriotic impulse to a mercenary defense of war spoils, stating that only Hitler’s military blunders turned his officers against him. Wette goes so far as to insist that the only German soldiers worthy of respect are those who deserted, regardless of whether the action was prompted by ideological conviction.¹¹⁹ Understanding for doing one’s duty, “pointless though it might be,” in a culture where the collective outweighed the individual is countered by the argument that disobedience as a virtue of necessity had long been celebrated by the German officer corps.¹²⁰

But Gerhard Ritter contends that defying misguided military orders did not presuppose disobedience in the political realm; the Prussian tradition of political mutiny was much less robust.¹²¹ Generations of aristocratic officers had been steeped in the conservative philosophy of life expressed in a verse inscribed on the gable of a house that Maltzahn’s father built: “Keep God firmly in your heart, *honor his king* [emphasis supplied], live for the fatherland. . . . Hold fast to this!”¹²² The personal relationship of the troops to the head of state, whether a monarch or a dictator like Hitler, was “before 1918 not just professional duty but a veritable affair of the heart.”¹²³ Indeed, the contemporary *Militärwochenblatt* confirms Ritter’s view that the oath to Hitler was a Nazi stab at resurrecting the old personal relationship between the army and the Kaiser: “‘It is the good old German tradition that [the oath] is taken to the prince, the Fuehrer, as a person.’”¹²⁴ Ute Frevert, writing in the early 2000s, also interprets the oath to Hitler as an appeal to the tradition of a personal bond between ruler and soldier. Ritter and Bernhard Schwertfeger both view the oath as a legitimate obstacle to a military coup.¹²⁵ Even the famous resistance figure Martin Niemöller, a U-boat commander in World War I, considered himself to be bound until the Kaiser’s death in 1941 by the oath he had taken to the monarch—and this in spite of the former ruler’s having released his officers from it. However, as Hans Rothfels indicates, this personal connection to the “prince” could conflict with “another highly honourable military and aristocratic tradition, that of noblesse oblige and of a duty to protect the weak,” thus setting up yet another potential crisis of conscience.¹²⁶

German nationalism and its early pillar, liberalism, reinforced the deep respect for and reliance on state authority.¹²⁷ Hans Mommsen speaks of “an idealized concept of the state which

¹¹⁹ CITINO: pp. 280-281; WETTE: pp. 166-168.

¹²⁰ For duty, MEGARGEE: pp. 230-231; for disobedience, CITINO: p. 225.

¹²¹ RITTER: p. 70; SAUER: p. 214.

¹²² FFvM: e-mail message to the author, April 28th, 2012.

¹²³ For “affair of the heart,” RITTER: p. 63; Bernhard SCHWERTFEGER: “Hindenburgs Tod und der Eid auf den ‘Führer,’” *Die Wandlung*, 3, 1948, pp. 563-577: p. 568.

¹²⁴ RITTER: p. 73; for the *Militärwochenblatt*, CRAIG: p. 480.

¹²⁵ FREVERT: p. 257; RITTER: p. 73; SCHWERTFEGER: p. 575.

¹²⁶ James BENTLEY: *Martin Niemöller*, New York, Free Press, 1984, pp. 23-24; Hans ROTHFELS: *The German Opposition to Hitler: An Appraisal*, Chicago, Regnery, 1962 (trans. Lawrence Wilson), p. 65.

¹²⁷ RITTER: p. 38.

lay at the heart of German governmental tradition,” placing it above faction and insisting on the common interests of state and society, which for a liberalism deeply influenced by Kant and Protestant belief were one and the same thing.¹²⁸ Church scholar Ernst Wolf explains that the neo-Lutheran doctrine of the two realms, in which the state functions as the “dominant partner” in “a divinely ordained union” with the church, proceeds from the traditional interpretation of Romans 13, which demanded obedience even to the most mercurial governing power as God’s proxy in human society, a view that in turn helped to legitimize nationalism and constituted one of the chief obstacles to the idea of the “lawfulness of resistance.”¹²⁹ The state as “a moral idea” in which individual rights were subordinate to collective needs was thus part of a German Protestant world view that prevailed from the early nineteenth-century Wars of Liberation against Napoleon until after World War II, when even august Social Democratic leader Carlo Schmid himself refused to support a constitutional clause guaranteeing the right to resist state authority.¹³⁰ Wartime generals like Heinz Guderian and Erich von Manstein claimed to fear that deposition of the head of state could lead to civil war at home, collapse at the front, and the destruction of the nation. But even in 1930, when the threat of violence was the homegrown one offered by paramilitary groups, Minister of War Wilhelm Groener had declared that “the sacred task” of the army was to prevent a “suicidal civil war.”¹³¹ Wartime military plotters realized that their success might precipitate internal anarchy and lead to foreign occupation of the country, and most front-line officers did indeed regard the conspiracy of July 20th, 1944 as inadmissible *Landesverrat*, according to Ulrich de Maizière.¹³² Given these entrenched cultural attitudes it would be surprising if Maltzahn’s eventual acceptance of a coup attempt had come easily to him.

No historian can overlook the destruction of European Jews by the German state during World War II; it dominates our approach to the war, say Neitzel and Welzer, because it represents the most extreme form of brutality,¹³³ but some scholars use it as a yardstick for assessing an officers’ integrity and the credibility of resistance efforts among the officer corps. In the latter context Mommsen explains that while the main motive of the July 20th conspiracy, and doubtless of the others as well, was to avert complete national ruin, the extermination of the Jews was viewed as symptomatic of the amorality of the regime to be destroyed. This realization was the result of a learning process over time as information on the annihilation efforts leaked out. Mommsen asserts that it was not until late 1942 that both civilian and military resisters

¹²⁸ MOMMSEN: pp. 12-13.

¹²⁹ WOLF: pp. 208-209, 202, 232.

¹³⁰ John A. MOSES: “Church and State in Post-Reformation Germany, 1530-1914” in John GASCOIGNE and Hilary M. CAREY, eds., *Church and State in Old and New Worlds*, Brill’s Series in Church History Vol. 51, Leiden, Brill, 2011, pp. 77-97: pp. 84-86. For Schmid, see MOMMSEN: p. 20.

¹³¹ CRAIG: p. 433.

¹³² David Clay LARGE: introduction to LARGE, ed., *Contending with Hitler*, pp.1-7: p. 6; Peter HOFFMANN: “The Second World War, German Society, and Internal Resistance to Hitler” in LARGE, ed., *Contending with Hitler*, pp. 119-128: pp.125-126 (Hoffmann mentions assassination plots in February, March, and December 1943 and in February and March 1944); Ulrich de MAIZIÈRE: p. 90.

¹³³ NEITZEL and WELZER: p. 421.

became aware of the systematic extermination of the Jews in death camps, although the army had witnessed and some units had also participated in massacres of Jews and other civilians in Russia since the invasion in the summer of 1941. Even Helmuth James von Moltke, leader of the Kreisau Circle of dissidents and working in the Abwehr, or military intelligence, struggled to form a clear picture of the enormity of the crime.¹³⁴ The date of late 1942 or early 1943 is mentioned in much of the literature as being the first time the true deadliness of the persecution was perceived by those officers with access to such information. As for an individual officer's attitude toward the Jews, degrees of anti-Semitism were common among all classes of Western society at the time, but nothing that has come down to us about Maltzahn suggests that he personally was prejudiced against Jews or any other group, as attested to by his record of friendly, equitable treatment of all ranks and his compassion for Italian civilians and pilots. His report to his father about the execution of Jews in Russia in 1941 indicates that he was disturbed by what he had discovered, especially since his father himself supported equality for Jews, maintained Jewish business contacts, and had helped a Jewish woman with food from the family estate as her official rations were increasingly curtailed.¹³⁵ Given this family example, it is unlikely that Maltzahn was antagonistic toward Jews or indifferent to their persecution, but he was not in a position to influence the outcome.

Discounting the strength of ingrained social norms, the depth of emotional conflict produced by contradictory traditions, and the constraints on resistance action in totalitarian Nazi Germany may more accurately reflect current taboos against contravening expected narratives than illuminate the experience of the German officer corps in World War II. Referring to the critical reception of an autobiographical novel by Martin Walser, Aleida Assmann notes, "the greater the discrepancy between the experiences of the past and the system of validation in the present, the stronger the pressure will be to make this past conform to the norms of the present." But by embracing heterogeneous shared histories and making them "socially acceptable. . . ., in a society in which presuppositions and attitudes have altogether changed," we "can help national memory to become more complex, subtle, and flexible"¹³⁶ and enable historians to better understand who we were. Also noting criticism leveled against Walser and Bernhard Schlink, the latter the author of the internationally acclaimed work *Der Vorleser* (*The Reader*), Erhard Schütz issues a similar challenge: "This phenomenon itself—namely, historical collective norms

¹³⁴ MOMMSEN: pp. 275, 250, 264.

¹³⁵ FFvM: messages to the author, 19 May 2011 and 23 June 2011, e-mail. There is no basis for the claim by Jean Nouzille, unsupported in his article by any source citation, that Maltzahn was himself one-quarter Jewish ("L'antisémitisme dans l'armée Austro-Hongroise," *Austriaca* 57, 2004, pp. 73-106: p. 100, footnote 81). Nouzille appears to have misread a passage on page 209 of Bryan Mark Rigg's *Hitler's Jewish Soldiers: The Untold Story of Nazi Racial Laws and Men of Jewish Descent in the German Military* (Lawrence, University Press of Kansas, 2002). In his footnote 80 Nouzille refers to a supposedly half-Jewish "General Baron Werner von Maltzahn," commander of the 56th Infantry Division, thus also confusing the real half-Jewish Major General Werner Maltzahn, head of the mortar rocket school in Celle, with the "General Freiherr von Maltzahn" on Rigg's page 209 who intervened on behalf of a part-Jewish subordinate.

¹³⁶ ASSMANN: pp. 133, 135 and 173.

of expectation regarding published opinion in general and cultural journalism in particular—demands historiographical reflection.”¹³⁷

Setting aside both hindsight and a presentist approach to the thinking of men from what is now in many respects a foreign culture, to better understand Günther von Maltzahn we might turn to the accounts of contemporaries like his youthful comrade Plehwe or Alexander Stahlberg, who lived through events that we can only imagine and “conditions which are almost impossible to describe to those who have never known a régime of naked terror upheld by mass enthusiasm,” a regime where every element of existence was determined by the Nazi state and its ideology, where “there was no longer any life other than that in uniform, and the question was merely which uniform one wanted or had to put on”¹³⁸—and how to maintain one’s own integrity while wearing it. Reared in a conservative aristocratic milieu like Maltzahn’s, like him an officer who served throughout the war (albeit as a mere lieutenant) while being no friend to the Nazis, Stahlberg regarded his military duty as a historic and patriotic obligation, even if it benefited the regime he despised; shirking would have been an unimaginable disgrace.¹³⁹ He rationalized his oath to Hitler by pronouncing the dictator’s name while substituting “Fatherland” in his heart, thus acquiescing as he saw it for the sake of his country. Later convinced that the war was a senseless and criminal one, he yet regarded his destiny to be continued service. An alumnus of Maltzahn’s own Cavalry Regiment No. 6, where issues like obedience to orders as well as the strictures of the Hague Convention were addressed “with great care” during officer training, Stahlberg also became aware early on of SS atrocities in Russia, yet says that he heard about Auschwitz only in late 1943. Caught up in early planning for the July 1944 attempt on Hitler’s life, he rejected doing the deed personally when he had the chance, concerned that any uncoordinated action would only bring to power a figure equally unscrupulous. Apparently unlike Maltzahn, Stahlberg was deeply interested in politics since his student days and later examined legal scholars’ opinions on wartime issues. While the scope of Stahlberg’s postwar examination of conscience may have surpassed Maltzahn’s, both men were clearly uneasy with some of their past choices and sought to come to terms with them.

Günther von Maltzahn successfully bridged two worlds in both his civilian and military lives. He displayed all the traditional noblesse oblige and loyalty to the state of the old aristocracy into which he had been born. But his experience of war and dictatorship tempered his conservatism and opened his eyes to the monstrous brutality of the Nazi regime, led him into a plot against the state, and convinced him of the advantages of a democratic society. As one of the architects of the postwar German armed forces he became an agent of democratic change,

¹³⁷ Erhard SCHÜTZ: “Zwischen Heimsuchung und Heimkehr: Gegenwartsromane und Zeitgeschichte des Nationalsozialismus” in Frank BÖSCH and Constantin GOSCHLER, eds., *Public History: Öffentliche Darstellungen des Nationalsozialismus jenseits der Geschichtswissenschaft*, Frankfurt, Campus Verlag, 2009, pp. 252-280: pp. 278-280.

¹³⁸ CARSTEN: in *German Resistance*, p. xiii. Carsten himself was a left-leaning Jewish émigré from Nazi Germany. For life in uniform, RICHARDT: p. 180.

¹³⁹ Alexander STAHLBERG: *Die verdammte Pflicht: Erinnerungen*, Berlin, Ullstein, 1998.

helping to pave the way for German reunification after the dissolution of the Eastern Bloc while at the same time continuing to serve as a model of duty and of using one's position for the greater good. He realized that mutually dependent officers and men formed a single effective combat force, and that a good commander was defined by the character and conduct of those he led. As personnel chief of the Luftwaffe he was fully aware of the importance of his task and determined to entrust the next generation of recruits to similarly-minded men.¹⁴⁰ These were officers whose characters and leadership skills he himself admired, those able to breathe military life into democratic ideals while successfully balancing the two. These were the men who would set the future course and tone of the new German military. An officer whose command style and wartime practices foreshadowed the forward-looking dynamic of *Innere Führung*, Maltzahn staffed the revived air arm with men who, like himself, could "apply constitutional principles to the internal order of the military" in a practical way.¹⁴¹ He was thus instrumental in making this new paradigm the public face of the postwar German armed forces. RAF Wing Commander Dean Andrew pays him tribute: Günther von Maltzahn is simply "among the Luftwaffe's all-time great leaders."¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ RÜBELL: pp. 137 and 240.

¹⁴¹ Petra MCGREGOR: "The Role of *Innere Führung* in German Civil-Military Relations," *Strategic Insights*, 5:4, 2006, <http://calhoun.nps.edu/handle/10945/11304>.

¹⁴² ANDREW: pp. 365-366.