

# HELMUTH VON MOLTKE AND THE ORIGINS OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

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## CHAPTER ONE

### *Military decision-making in Wilhelmine Germany*

The importance and extent of the role of the Chief of the General Staff can be understood only in the context of the complicated system of military decision-making that was characteristic of Imperial Germany. It was determined by two elements in particular: the Kaiser's extensive and almost unchecked power, and the polycratic structure of the army, in which rival centres of authority were often in direct competition with one another. This chapter will analyse the organization of the German army as essential background to an understanding of Helmuth von Moltke's role and the limitations of his position. Given his impressive title and the fact that historians have so often focused on the General Staff in their investigations of the German army, it is easy to form the impression that this post was the most important and most influential military position in the German Empire. Certainly, this is what contemporaries in the General Staff claimed.<sup>1</sup> However, the Great General Staff did not have sole control over the army. There were many competing bodies, each with their own wide-ranging authority, and ultimately any person's influence depended on his standing with the monarch. This important fact is vital in understanding the limitations and constraints of Moltke's position. The Great General Staff created Germany's strategy, it devised the annual mobilization plan and had to ensure that the army was ready for war at all times. However, military doctrine was created by the Ministry of War and the corps commanders, who had immediate access to the Kaiser. The structure of the armed forces was also ultimately decided by the Minister of War, who was responsible for presenting demands for army increases to the Reichstag. Important appointments were decided by the Kaiser's Military Cabinet, independently of both the General Staff and the Ministry of War. This chapter will examine the nature of the competition between these different

<sup>1</sup> Wilhelm Groener regarded the position of Chief of the General Staff as the most honourable in the world. *Der Feldherr wider Willen*, p. xii.

military bodies, before moving on to an analysis of the Great General Staff as a military institution.

Prussia and the military seem almost synonymous; it is difficult to think of one without the other. In Prussia, and from 1871 in the united Germany under Prussian suzerainty, the military played a prominent part in everyday life. For many Germans, it was thanks to the army and the victorious wars of unification that Germany had become a unified state and begun her ascent to the status of a major European power. During Wilhelm II's reign, this overemphasis on all things military became particularly pronounced, thanks not least to the Kaiser, whose upbringing had been steeped in military tradition, and who regarded himself as a second Frederick the Great, and as a result aspired to lead 'his' army personally.<sup>2</sup> Not surprisingly, Bismarck, the founding father of the new Reich, had considered it imperative to wear a uniform in public, as did many other high-ranking civilians at the time. The importance of the uniform in Wilhelmine Germany cannot be overstated, and the often-cited example of the 'Hauptmann von Köpenick' illustrates the extent of this.<sup>3</sup> While the military's role and fatal influence in the political system of Imperial Germany seem without parallel vis-à-vis her European neighbours (although, as Jacob Vogel emphasizes, comparative studies in this area are still lacking), the role of the military in public life, the importance of parades and military festivities, was as pronounced in parliamentary France as it was in monarchist Germany. The idea of a German *Sonderweg* seems problematic given such parallels. The overemphasis on the military was much less a 'specific phenomenon of German society' than the result of a process of nationalization and militarization which can be regarded as a general development of European society in the late nineteenth

<sup>2</sup> See e.g. Wiegand Schmidt-Richberg, 'Die Regierungszeit Wilhelms II', in Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt (ed.), *Handbuch zur deutschen Militärgeschichte 1648–1939*, vol. 5, *Von der Entlassung Bismarcks bis zum Ende des Ersten Weltkrieges (1890–1918)*, Frankfurt/M. 1968, p. 32, who argues, however, that this 'overestimation of the military' must not be confused with 'militant spirit'. 'The excesses of militarism, such as the exaggerated cult of uniforms, the overestimation and copying of military manners might have seemed bizarre and obtrusive to foreign onlookers', he maintains, 'but were really more trivialities (*Äußerlichkeiten*).' However, it could be argued that the effect and influence of such views on the public attitude as a whole was far more decisive than Schmidt-Richberg estimates, especially from 1911 onwards. Without such 'overestimation of the military', its decisive influence over political decision-making would not have been possible. On the Kaiser's childhood, see John Röhl, *Wilhelm II. Die Jugend des Kaisers, 1859–1888*, Munich 1993; English edition *Young Wilhelm*, Cambridge 1998.

<sup>3</sup> The story of the unemployed cobbler Voigt, who bought a second-hand uniform and managed to occupy the Köpenick town hall, based solely on the authority that the uniform lent him, captures perfectly the importance of military authority in Imperial Germany.



century.<sup>4</sup> Where Germany differed, and was perhaps even unique, was in the extent of the Kaiser's role: his exaggerated influence was seldom moderated by outside forces.

It was perhaps a bad omen that the second German Reich, the united Germany, had been founded on the basis of three wars. With hindsight it seems as if no peaceful existence could have resulted from such aggressive beginnings. The wars of unification allowed the military to assume an exaggerated role in the new Reich. They also paved the way for the General Staff's increase in power and importance, based on the successes achieved under the leadership of the elder Moltke.<sup>5</sup> The General Staff acquired an almost 'mythical status' and its officers were regarded as the 'crème de la crème' among the German military.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, officers who had taken an oath to their king conceived of themselves as a separate caste, above the ordinary civilian citizen. This position of perceived superiority in turn helped to ensure first that the military were largely regarded with great admiration, and secondly that they were able to fulfil the demands of their changing domestic role within Wilhelmine Germany. If need be, they would have to protect the monarch from external and internal threats.<sup>7</sup>

Article 63 of the new constitution of 1871 ruled that the previously separate German armies were to form one Imperial German army, the Reichsheer under the supreme command of the German Kaiser.<sup>8</sup> However, in peace-time some contingent armies retained their own military administration and jealously guarded this independence. Among them, the Bavarian army enjoyed the most wide-ranging special rights, such as organizational independence in peace-time and a separate General Staff, War Academy and Ministry of War. Regarding organizational matters, concessions had also been made to Württemberg,

<sup>4</sup> Jacob Vogel, *Nationen im Gleichschritt. Der Kult der 'Nationen in Waffen' in Deutschland und Frankreich, 1871–1914*, Göttingen 1997, pp. 11, 19, 280ff.

<sup>5</sup> Otto, *Schliefen und der Generalstab*, p. 18.

<sup>6</sup> Bucholz, *Moltke*, pp. 39, 13.

<sup>7</sup> Gotthard Breit, *Das Staats- und Gesellschaftsbild deutscher Generale beider Weltkriege im Spiegel ihrer Memoiren*, Boppard/Rhein 1973, p. 21. On the army's domestic role, see Wilhelm Deist, 'Die Armee in Staat und Gesellschaft 1890–1914', in Michael Stürmer (ed.), *Das kaiserliche Deutschland. Politik und Gesellschaft, 1870–1918*, Düsseldorf 1970, p. 318.

<sup>8</sup> For the following see Ernst Huber, *Deutsche Verfassungsgeschichte seit 1789*, vol. 3, *Bismarck und das Reich*, Stuttgart, 1963, p. 989, pp. 992–1002; Walther Hubatsch, 'Die Verwaltung des Militärwesens 1867–1918', in *Deutsche Verwaltungsgeschichte*, ed. Kurt G. A. Jeserich, Hans Pohl and Georg-Christoph von Unruh, vol. 3: *Das Deutsche Reich bis zum Ende der Monarchie*, Stuttgart 1984, pp. 316–317; Friedrich Hossbach, *Die Entwicklung des Oberbefehls über das Heer in Brandenburg, Preussen und im Deutschen Reich von 1655 bis 1945*, Würzburg 1957, pp. 36ff. The present book cannot address in more general terms the constitution of the Reich or its structures. A helpful summary can be found in Thomas Nipperdey, *Deutsche Geschichte 1866–1918*, 2 vols., Munich 1992, vol. 2, *Machtstaat vor der Demokratie*, pp. 85ff.

Saxony, Hessen and, to a lesser degree, other states.<sup>9</sup> Co-ordination among the contingent armies was achieved with the help of military plenipotentiaries, exchanged between the provincial capitals and Berlin. Between Prussia, Saxony and Württemberg this exchange of information was much more successful than between Prussia and Bavaria, again because the Bavarian army carefully guarded its independence. Actual unity of the German army was only finally achieved and consolidated on the battlefields of the First World War, although tensions remained throughout between Prussian and non-Prussian officers.<sup>10</sup> During the war, the Kaiser's right to supreme command over the Imperial army overruled any special peace-time rights that had existed for the contingents. As Prussia's army and military constitution provided the model for the Imperial army, and Prussian military law was introduced in non-Prussian contingents after 1871, the German army after 1871 was much more Prussian than German in character, and the Prussian army corps far outweighed the others.<sup>11</sup> In 1871, there were 14 army corps from Prussia, two from Bavaria and one each from Saxony and Württemberg. By 1914, these numbers had increased to 19 Prussian, three Bavarian, two Saxon and still only one from Württemberg – 25 in total. Prussia's share in the Reichsheer was over 75 per cent.<sup>12</sup> The predominantly Prussian character of the German army was further heightened by the fact that the Prussian King, in his role as German Kaiser, carried the title of 'Supreme War-Lord' (*Oberster Kriegsherr*) and possessed the right of supreme command over the army in times of war.

It was the Kaiser's role in military decision-making that determined how the different military institutions, the Great General Staff, the Prussian Ministry of War and the Military Cabinet, interacted with each other and conducted their business. The Kaiser's *Kommandogewalt* (power to command) was one way of reducing civilian interference in the army. Wilhelm II appointed key figures, such as the Imperial Chancellor, the Prussian Minister of War and the Chief of the Great General Staff, without having to consult anyone. He was in charge of all military appointments, usually acting upon the advice of his Military Cabinet.

<sup>9</sup> Friedrich-Christian Stahl, 'Preußische Armee und Reichsheer 1871–1914', in Oswald Hauser (ed.), *Zur Problematik 'Preußen und das Reich'*, Cologne 1984, p. 191. On the Bavarian Army, see Frederick Francis Campbell, 'The Bavarian Army, 1870–1918: The Constitutional and Structural Relations with the Prussian Military Establishment', Ph.D. Dissertation, Ohio State University 1972. See also BayHSTA-KA, MKr1, 'Deutsche Reichsverfassung mit den Sonderbestimmungen für Bayern'. <sup>10</sup> See also Stahl, 'Preußische Armee', pp. 191, 238.

<sup>11</sup> Huber, *Deutsche Verfassungsgeschichte*, vol. 3, p. 994.

<sup>12</sup> Stahl, 'Preußische Armee', pp. 195–196.

In addition, he was entitled to make decisions on organizational matters concerning the army, such as training, discipline, promotions or deciding to what uses to put the troops.<sup>13</sup> It was his right to declare war and conclude peace, although both required the Chancellor's countersignature. Similarly, decisions relating to military administration and the budget, such as the size of the army, equipment, supplies and so on, required the countersignature of either the Chancellor or the Prussian Minister of War.

While the Kaiser was keen to exercise his influence in civilian as well as military matters, it was in the realm of the army that he was most involved. He considered himself primarily a military man, and valued his military staff highly. In contrast with the civilian leaders, who were ultimately answerable to the Reichstag, his military entourage were relatively free from such constraints. Ultimately, Wilhelm II had nothing but contempt for civilians, an attitude which was largely shared within the military. In his post-war memoirs, Wilhelm Groener came to regret this military disregard for politicians and diplomats, although he assumed that the attitude of French, English or German officers towards civilians would have been similar. 'However', he concluded, 'to our own detriment we allowed this military animosity against diplomacy and politics to become too pronounced before and during the war.'<sup>14</sup> Moreover, in a country where the military were able to influence policy and decision-making to such a large degree, such pronounced dislike was to prove more dangerous than, for example, in Britain and France.

Because of the Kaiser's determination to lead 'his' army personally, although he lacked the necessary skills to do so, the German army was in most matters dependent on his often whimsical and usually ill-informed opinions, and as a result clearly suffered from a lack of coherent leadership. Wilhelm II did not have the patience or skill to attend to matters of real importance, and instead occupied himself with superficialities, such as uniform changes and parades. As Count Zedlitz-Trützschler complained in his diary of 1904: 'We are currently, for example, occupied with the 37th change of uniforms since the accession to the throne!'<sup>15</sup> The Kaiser enjoyed interfering in army manoeuvres and exercises despite his obvious lack of talent and knowledge, and was

<sup>13</sup> Schmidt-Richberg, *Handbuch*, p. 62.

<sup>14</sup> Groener, *Lebenserinnerungen*, p. 60.

<sup>15</sup> Robert Graf von Zedlitz-Trützschler, *Zwölf Jahre am deutschen Kaiserhof*, Stuttgart 1924, p. 61 (English translation *Twelve Years at the Imperial German Court*, London 1924). Zedlitz-Trützschler was the Kaiser's *Hofmarschall* until his resignation in May 1910 on the grounds of irreconcilable differences with the Kaiser. His memoirs provide a critical insight into his time at court.

usually unopposed in this by his subordinates. This situation only improved after 1906 with the appointment as Chief of the General Staff of the younger Moltke, who made it a condition of his appointment that the army manoeuvres be transformed into a more useful exercise by limiting the Kaiser's involvement.<sup>16</sup>

Perhaps worse still, in order to retain his influence over military matters, the Kaiser actively encouraged the already existing division between the command and administrative structures in the army and even introduced the same dual system into the navy in 1889.<sup>17</sup> In place of the Admiralty Staff, the body that had so far been solely responsible for naval matters of command and administration, he created a Supreme Command (*Oberkommando*) for command, the Reich Navy Office (*Reichs-Marineamt*) for naval administration, and the Imperial Navy Cabinet (*Kaiserliches Marinekabinett*), modelled on the already existing Military Cabinet. Jörg-Uwe Fischer sees the reason for this in the Kaiser's desire to rule over 'his' army and 'his' navy personally, arguing that the Kaiser could not consent to allowing an influential position like that of Chief of the Admiralty Staff to exist 'between himself' and his favourite creation'.<sup>18</sup> Because there already existed a similar division between the various military institutions, there was no danger of the Chief of the General Staff assuming such an important role, either. The Kaiser's desire to consolidate and extend his personal influence thus had a detrimental effect on both the army and the navy. Increasing fragmentation of the army's structure removed any unity from the military leadership.<sup>19</sup> As a result, co-ordination of strategy or policy between the

<sup>16</sup> The Kaiser's interferences in manoeuvres are detailed in Chapter 2.

<sup>17</sup> See Rudolf Schmidt-Bückeberg, *Das Militärkabinett der preussischen Könige und deutschen Kaiser, Seine geschichtliche Entwicklung und staatsrechtliche Stellung 1787–1918*, Berlin 1933, pp. 180–182. Caprivi resigned as leader of the navy when he failed to prevent the introduction of dualism into its leadership, for he recognized it 'immediately as a fateful mistake'. See also Jörg-Uwe Fischer, *Admiral des Kaisers. Georg Alexander von Müller als Chef des Marinekabinetts Wilhelms II.*, Frankfurt/M. 1992, p. 34; Walther Hubatsch, *Der Admiralstab und die obersten Marinebehörden in Deutschland 1848–1945*, Frankfurt/M. 1958, p. 49; idem, 'Verwaltung', p. 326. See Carl-Axel Gemzell, *Organization, Conflict, and Innovation. A Study of German Naval Strategic Planning, 1888–1948*, Lund, Sweden, 1973, p. 39 for a diagram of the naval hierarchy before and after Wilhelm II's changes.

<sup>18</sup> Fischer, *Admiral des Kaisers*, pp. 29–30. The Kaiser's Cabinet order of 14 March 1899 reveals how he conceived of his position: 'After having decided to exercise the supreme command over My navy, just as over My army, personally, I do not consider it practical that there should exist between Myself and the separate leaders a central institution of command, which would after all only have the purpose of delivering My orders.' Quoted in Ernst Huber, *Heer und Staat in der deutschen Geschichte*, Hamburg 1943, p. 358. See also Hubatsch, 'Verwaltung', pp. 310–332. Alfred von Tirpitz also describes the negative results of this 'Kabinettsregierung' and division of power in his *Erinnerungen*, Leipzig 1919, pp. 38–9.

<sup>19</sup> See also Schmidt-Bückeberg, *Militärkabinett*, p. 187.

army and the navy became impossible. Rivalries over the limited budget available to both institutions, and over the Kaiser's favour, impeded effective planning between the two. The Kaiser could have instigated co-operation, but, for reasons already described, he reinforced existing rivalries rather than trying to bridge the gaps.<sup>20</sup> Instead, owing to the Kaiser's influence, for many years Germany spent most of her defence budget on building a navy to challenge British supremacy, although she was a land power. Strategically, the naval expenditure made little sense, because a future war would be decided on land. However, as long as the Kaiser favoured the naval policy of Admiral von Tirpitz, no one was in a position to change his mind.

In an attempt to reduce the existing antagonism between the General Staff and the Admiralty Staff, the two institutions regularly exchanged officers. In practice, this did not always create the mutual understanding it was intended to achieve, nor did it reduce the rivalry between the two institutions. In 1906 *Korvettenkapitän* Freiherr von Keyserlingk was seconded to the deployment department of the General Staff, where he found himself facing criticism from members of the General Staff, who lacked any good will towards the navy. They reproached the navy for its apparent lack of 'offensive spirit', which, according to the General Staff, was in stark contrast to the large budget that the navy had been granted. Keyserlingk felt in turn that Schlieffen's influence, his insistence on the offensive even from a position of inferiority, and his repeated reassurances that all was well despite worsening military conditions, had impaired the General Staff's sense of judgement.<sup>21</sup>

Many of the leading officers were well aware of the Kaiser's shortcomings. Yet this never made them question their duties to the monarch or forget the oath 'With God for King and Fatherland' that every officer had taken, and that applied in peace-time as much as during the war. In particular the higher ranks of the army felt a strong sense of allegiance

<sup>20</sup> See also Wiegand Schmidt-Richberg, *Die Generalstäbe in Deutschland 1871–1945: Aufgaben in der Armee und Stellung im Staate*, Stuttgart 1962, p. 19. While Schmidt-Richberg asserts that only the Kaiser could have changed the situation, he stops short of saying that the Kaiser, by virtue of his personality, was entirely unable to do so.

<sup>21</sup> Keyserlingk's memorandum, 1 November 1906, quoted in Hubatsch, *Admiralstab*, p. 129. Ludendorff spent almost four months on the Admiralty Staff and in the navy in 1905. F. Uhle-Wettler, *Erich Ludendorff in seiner Zeit. Soldat, Strategie, Revolutionär. Eine Neubewertung*, Berg 1995, pp. 53–4. Groener also spent some time with the navy, having served on board S.M.S. *Pommern* for several weeks in the summer of 1908: *Lebenserinnerungen*, p. 123. Moltke's *Erinnerungen* offer no evidence that he might have spent time with the navy. Members of the Bavarian General Staff were also seconded to navy manoeuvres and journeys – although they had to meet their own expenses for these trips. See BayHSTA-KA, Generalstab, 324.

to their King (in Bavaria, Württemberg and Saxony it was to their own king that most allegiance was felt). In the more prestigious regiments (particularly the *Garderegimenter*), officers would have been in frequent touch with their monarch, thus re-emphasizing their special bond.<sup>22</sup> Generalfeldmarschall Erich von Manstein remembered the attitude in the Imperial Army in his memoirs, pointing out how inextricably linked the Prussian army and the monarch had been. The oath sworn by soldiers had created an ethical bond between them and their 'Supreme War-Lord'. Abstract concepts such as the state did not enter into the equation, and neither did the personality of the king. 'One did not serve Wilhelm II, one served the King.'<sup>23</sup> Thus, it was beside the point if the individual felt critical towards the monarch he was serving. Obedience was demanded vis-à-vis the institution of the monarchy, rather than to any individual king. Minister of War Karl von Einem's memoirs emphasize a similar view. While, for example, the military leaders regretted the dismissal of Bismarck and disagreed with the Kaiser's decision, they would never have voiced their criticism publicly:

We considered it a human and historic tragedy that the founder of the Reich, who had done so much for the army, was forced to leave his creation. But we were too firmly embedded in the monarchical conviction to have voiced our criticism publicly; after all, we were soldiers and furthermore we believed in our Kaiser.<sup>24</sup>

Even the highest-ranking military leaders were willing to accommodate the Kaiser, for reasons of loyalty that may be difficult to comprehend today. Interference from outside the military sphere was regarded as a threat to the military order, and from within the military criticism was unlikely, not only in the light of the feelings expressed in Manstein's illuminating memoirs, but also in view of the fact that one's army career would have been jeopardized by overt criticism of the system and its leader.

The Kaiser exercised his *Kommandogewalt* with the help of men, usually generals, in *Immediatstellen*, that is positions with direct access to the monarch. In the early days of the Reich, these had only been the Minister of War and the commanding generals of the army corps.<sup>25</sup> The

<sup>22</sup> See Breit, *Staats- und Gesellschaftsbild*, p. 21.

<sup>23</sup> Erich von Manstein, *Aus einem Soldatenleben 1887–1939*, Bonn 1959, pp. 51ff. Quoted in Breit, *Staats- und Gesellschaftsbild*, p. 21.

<sup>24</sup> Generaloberst von Einem, *Erinnerungen eines Soldaten 1853–1933*, 2nd edn Leipzig 1933, p. 40.

<sup>25</sup> Schmidt-Richberg, *Generalstäbe*, p. 16. The commanding generals occupied the highest peacetime command in the German army, and the importance of their position was both emphasized and heightened by their immediate access to the monarch. They were in charge of training and commanding the troops, and answered only to the King.

Chief of the General Staff was granted the right of direct access in 1883 – the year which marked the beginning of the rivalry between the Minister of War and the Chief of the General Staff. Until that date, the General Staff had been nominally subordinate to the Minister, being only a department within the Ministry of War.<sup>26</sup> However, Wilhelm von Hahnke complained after the war that Schlieffen, having been ‘merely’ Chief of the General Staff, had apparently never enjoyed sole access to the Kaiser, but that traditionally the Minister of War and the Chief of the Military Cabinet had always been present. In addition, Wilhelm II had often asked the commander of his Headquarters to attend.<sup>27</sup> *Immediatrecht* (the right of direct access) did not therefore necessarily equal private access to the Kaiser. Waldersee, Schlieffen’s predecessor, had enjoyed the privilege of being alone with the Kaiser. It is likely that the same right was not granted to Schlieffen because he was not the Kaiser’s friend. With Waldersee, on the other hand, the Kaiser had a close relationship that went back to the 1880s, when Waldersee had assumed a position of importance resembling that of a father figure.<sup>28</sup> The younger Moltke, too, was granted private and immediate access to the Kaiser on account of their close personal relationship. Personal patronage was thus in many ways as important as official authority.

The number of *Immediatstellen* had already been increased under Wilhelm I, but under his grandson it reached over 40 within the army alone (there was a similar number of *Immediatstellen* within the Navy).<sup>29</sup> In military matters, immediate right of access was granted to the Chancellor, the Minister of War, the Chief of the General Staff, the Chiefs of the Military and Naval Cabinets, the State Secretary of the Imperial Naval Office, the Commanding Admiral and the president of the Imperial Military Court, to name but the most important.<sup>30</sup> Further right to immediate access was enjoyed by the commanding generals of the army corps, who numbered 25 in 1912.<sup>31</sup> Not all the *Immediatstellen* conferred equal status, but where they did, rivalries often occurred.<sup>32</sup> Internal power struggles were frequent, as the various *Immediatstellen* vied for royal favours and regarded themselves as being in competition for

<sup>26</sup> See H. O. Meisner, *Militärattachés und Militärbevollmächtigte in Preußen und im Deutschen Reich*, Berlin 1957, p. 53.

<sup>27</sup> BA-MA, NL Hahnke, N36/12, pp. 3–4.

<sup>28</sup> On Waldersee’s role in Prince Wilhelm’s formative years, see Röhl, *Wilhelm II. Die Jugend des Kaisers*, pp. 495ff., 599ff.

<sup>29</sup> Schmidt-Richberg, *Handbuch*, p. 62; Hossbach, *Entwicklung*, p. 51.

<sup>30</sup> Schmidt-Bückeburg, *Militärkabinett*, p. 187.

<sup>31</sup> Huber, *Deutsche Verfassungsgeschichte*, vol. 4, *Struktur und Krisen des Kaiserreichs*, Stuttgart 1969, p. 524.

<sup>32</sup> Schmidt-Richberg, *Generalstäbe*, p. 17.

funds and prestige. They also 'competed' to determine what would be Germany's best military strategy for the future. Only the fact that certain holders of *Immediatstellen* had regular meetings with the Kaiser due to their special responsibilities (War Ministry, Military Cabinet, General Staff) prevented even more disjointed decision-making in this decentralized military structure.<sup>33</sup>

In addition to the *Immediatstellen*, the Kaiser's military entourage consisted of general adjutants, generals à la suite, aides-de-camp (*Flügeladjutanten*), the Chiefs of the Navy and Military Cabinet and the entire Military Cabinet,<sup>34</sup> that is, military men close to the Kaiser and with immediate access to him, often on a daily basis. The so-called military headquarters (*Königliches Hauptquartier*) was made up of those generals, adjutants and aides-de-camps who were in personal service to the Kaiser, plus the commanders of the *Schlossgardekompagnie*, the *Leibgardermerie*, and the headquarters.<sup>35</sup> All in all, total numbers varied between 20 men in the military entourage when Wilhelm II acceded to the throne, and 44 in 1914.

Wilhelm's military entourage consisted largely of men whom the Kaiser had known personally prior to their appointment, for, particularly in positions close to him, his 'desire for the familiar face'<sup>36</sup> determined his choice. Helmuth von Moltke became one of the Kaiser's personal adjutants in 1891, and was from then on in almost daily contact with the monarch.<sup>37</sup> As Isabel Hull shows, the *Flügeladjutanten* had to adhere to strict codes of conduct. Even criticism of one's immediate superior was ruled out, and it was of course impossible for anyone to criticize the Kaiser, especially given the fact that one's position ultimately depended on his favour. Many of these officers occupied either military or diplomatic offices (as ambassadors, military plenipotentiaries or attachés), and as such helped to extend the Kaiser's self-centred style of governing from military to political matters. In particular his much-favoured *Flügeladjutanten* – whom Wilhelm II regarded as the élite<sup>38</sup> – considered themselves to be able to run politics better than the despised diplomats of the *Auswärtiges Amt*, and intervened frequently. Their close relationship with the Kaiser allowed them to report directly to the monarch, especially in the early days of his reign, when many of them had been his acquaintances from his army regiment. In later years, the

<sup>33</sup> Schmidt-Richberg, *Handbuch*, p. 62.

<sup>34</sup> Stahl, 'Preußische Armee', p. 202.

<sup>35</sup> For this and the following information, see Hull, *Entourage*, pp. 175ff.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 189. <sup>37</sup> See also Chapter 2.

<sup>38</sup> Schmidt-Bückeburg, *Militärkabinett*, p. 195.



increasing age gap and decreasing familiarity led to less informality.<sup>39</sup> It was at the monarch's discretion whether or not to inform other authorities, such as the Minister of War or the Chancellor of their news. This *Adjutantenpolitik* significantly impeded the relationship of the Auswärtiges Amt with the Kaiser.<sup>40</sup>

By 1895, the aides-de-camp had become so involved in policy-making that they appeared, in Holstein's words, like 'an organized secondary government'. Count Münster at the German embassy in Paris asked sarcastically: 'Why is there still a Wilhelmstrasse if official business is to be divided up among the Aides-de-Camp?'<sup>41</sup> Wilhelm II's military entourage provided an important level of decision-making, both military and political, which was removed from the control of parliament or any civilian institution. For the Kaiser, this was one of the means by which he secured and extended his influence. At times, Wilhelm's *Flügeladjutanten* even helped determine his decisions against the advice of the Military Cabinet or the General Staff, as in the case of Moltke's appointment.<sup>42</sup>

Although the Kaiser was in theory the head of the army, there was no uniform army leadership. Instead, different military institutions and individuals vied with each other for influence and envied each other's positions. Apart from the three main military bodies, the Ministry of War, the Military Cabinet, and the General Staff, the commanding generals of the 25 army corps were an important, although often overlooked, part of military planning. They liaised directly with the Kaiser in questions of command, and they reigned supreme over the army corps that they commanded.<sup>43</sup> It was the corps commanders who commanded and trained the troops and who were at the forefront of developing new military doctrine. The commanding generals, rather than the General Staff, determined how the German army fought. Much of the debate about doctrine and tactics in German military circles was led by these generals, men such as Colmar von der Goltz, Friedrich von Bernhardi, Sigismund von Schlichting and others. Many of the tasks one would perhaps associate with General Staff work were actually part of

<sup>39</sup> Josef Stürgkh, *Im Deutschen Großen Hauptquartier*, Leipzig 1921, p. 25; Hull, *Entourage*, p. 205.

<sup>40</sup> Stahl, 'Preußische Armee', p. 202; Schmidt-Bückeberg, *Militärkabinett*, pp. 195–196.

<sup>41</sup> Both Münster and Holstein are quoted in John Röhl, *Germany without Bismarck. The Crisis of Government in the Second Reich, 1890–1900*, London 1967, p. 161.

<sup>42</sup> H. O. Meisner (ed.), *Denkwürdigkeiten des Generalfeldmarschalls A. Grafen von Waldersee*, 3 vols., Stuttgart 1923–1925 (cited as Waldersee, *Denkwürdigkeiten*), vol. 3, pp. 224–225. See Chapter 2 below.

<sup>43</sup> Ludwig Rüdiger von Collenberg, *Die Deutsche Armee von 1871 bis 1914. Forschungen und Darstellungen aus dem Reichsarchiv*, 4, Berlin, 1922, p. 9; Paul Schneider, *Die Organisation des Heeres*, Berlin 1931, p. 66.

the domain of the commanding generals. By virtue of their direct access to the Kaiser, they added another layer to the complicated and deliberately multi-faceted decision-making structure of Imperial Germany. Co-operation and co-ordination of policy were difficult, if not at times impossible, in this system which allowed for secrecy and circumvention of even the most important decision-makers. While such a system might have benefited the Kaiser in his ill-fated desire to direct 'his' army, the various competing elements, examined in more detail below, suffered under the lack of coherent leadership.<sup>44</sup>

#### THE PRUSSIAN GENERAL STAFF ESTABLISHES ITS INDEPENDENCE

As part of Scharnhorst's military reforms in the early part of the nineteenth century, the body of military advisers that had been known as the '*Generalquartiermeisterstab*' (later *Generalstab*) had been integrated within the Prussian Ministry of War. However, by 1821 a process of separation from that body had begun: General von Müffling was appointed 'Chief of the General Staff of the Army' outside the Ministry of War. By 1825, the Staff was formally a separate institution, but its chief had no right of immediate access to the King, and all orders and suggestions of the Staff had to travel via the Ministry of War. The Minister of War remained the Chief of Staff's superior, and the main military adviser to the King until as late as 1864.<sup>45</sup> A letter from the elder Moltke, dated April 1864, outlines the position of impotence of the Chief of Staff at that time:

It often happens that my expert opinion in the most important matters is demanded suddenly, while on another occasion it is not considered necessary to inform me of an intended decision, or even one that has already been made. Therefore I have to attempt at least to keep myself informed of things by way of private correspondence.<sup>46</sup>

In the early stages of the war of 1866, Moltke succeeded in gaining control over military operations, and was authorized for the duration of the war to give orders directly to the troops, while merely informing the Minister of War of his instructions. For the first time, an immediate link of command between the Chief of Staff and the commanding generals had been created. His victorious campaigns helped Moltke to establish

<sup>44</sup> See Deist, '*Die Armee in Staat und Gesellschaft*', p. 316.

<sup>45</sup> See Huber, *Heer und Staat*, pp. 338ff. for this and the following.

<sup>46</sup> Moltke to Oberst v. Blumenthal, 28 April 1864, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 340.

the authority that was needed for his 'usurpation' of military power and influence.

The wars of 1870–1871 finally consolidated the Chief of Staff's independence, not least because Moltke's victories thrust the General Staff into the limelight. He retained in peace-time the influential position he had gained during the war. He was solely responsible for the tactical and strategic preparations for war and for the training and education of the higher-ranking officers of the General Staff, and served as the Kaiser's immediate adviser in operational matters. However, in financial matters he was still required to co-operate with the Minister of War, for the latter remained responsible for negotiating the military budget in the Reichstag. In 1883, a permanent right of immediate access was granted to the Chief of Staff, extending his position of influence even further. The Great General Staff (*Großer Generalstab*) had emancipated itself from the Ministry of War.<sup>47</sup> This new position of importance also manifested itself in the increasing number of General Staff officers, and in the new General Staff building that was erected opposite the Reichstag behind the Brandenburg Gate.<sup>48</sup>

It was not Moltke, however, who increased the General Staff's powers even further, but his ambitious subordinate Count Alfred von Waldersee. Moltke made little use of his *Immediatrecht*. Waldersee, however, who came to undertake more and more of the day-to-day General Staff work as the ageing Moltke became less of a leader and more of a figurehead, arranged regular audiences with the Kaiser whenever Moltke was away from Berlin.<sup>49</sup> Because of his close friendship with Wilhelm II, first as Prince and then as Kaiser, Waldersee was able to win his support for his plans for the further development of the General Staff. After Wilhelm succeeded his father in 1888, Waldersee became the new Chief of Staff, and as such perhaps the most influential person around the Kaiser at that time, enjoying the confidence of both Wilhelm and his wife. Due to the Kaiser's dislike of attending to his 'duties', most ministers, with the exception of the Minister of War, found it difficult to get an opportunity to discuss their affairs with him. Waldersee, however, had no difficulty in arranging audiences.

<sup>47</sup> See e.g. Schmidt-Bückeberg, *Militärkabinett*, p. 150; Schmidt-Richberg, *Generalstäbe*, p. 16.

<sup>48</sup> Walter Görlitz, *Der Deutsche Generalstab. Geschichte und Gestalt*, Frankfurt/M. 1950, p. 123. When the elder Moltke became Chief of Staff in 1857, there were 64 General Staff officers. In 1877 that number had increased to 135 and by 1888 it had reached 239.

<sup>49</sup> Schmidt-Bückeberg, *Militärkabinett*, p. 152; Hossbach, *Entwicklung*, p. 48. On Waldersee, see also Görlitz, *Generalstab*, pp. 138ff.

As the Kaiser's special confidant, Waldersee's influence was not restricted to military matters. He was able to discuss and influence the Kaiser in political matters, and seems to have had some say in the developments leading to Bismarck's dismissal. During the 'Waldersee era' the General Staff was also able to consolidate its new position of influence.<sup>50</sup> Waldersee's scheming included first of all the appointment of a new Minister of War. A change of minister would increase Waldersee's own power as the new Chief of the General Staff, and he aimed to reduce the Ministry of War to an administrative body. Training and appointments to higher posts were to become the General Staff's domain.<sup>51</sup> Waldersee's short time in office provides a perfect example of the way power was exercised and important appointments were made in Wilhelmine Germany. Waldersee's preferred successor to Minister of War Paul Bronsart von Schellendorf was General Julius von Verdy du Vernois. Waldersee had ascertained during his negotiations with Verdy that he would not object to Waldersee's attempts to reduce the Minister's powers. After a few months in office, however, even the pliable Verdy began to object to further curbing of his responsibilities and to the Kaiser's independent decision-making.<sup>52</sup> In October 1890, the Kaiser replaced Verdy with Hans von Kaltenborn-Stachau. By this time the position of Minister of War had been thoroughly devalued, and even Waldersee became concerned that things might have gone too far, for the Kaiser increasingly seemed to want to become his own Chief of Staff.<sup>53</sup>

Waldersee's plotting to increase the General Staff's power ultimately back-fired. He had attempted to elevate the military above the political leadership, but his political aspirations eventually appeared threatening to the Kaiser. After Waldersee had criticized the Kaiser's performance during the 1891 manoeuvres, the monarch had him removed to a corps command in 1891.<sup>54</sup> The Kaiser did indeed desire to be his own Chief of Staff as well as his own Chancellor. He would not tolerate among his immediate subordinates a man who was trying to amass powers and establish the kind of position of authority to which Waldersee was aspiring. Rather than having one influential military figure beneath him, the

<sup>50</sup> Huber, *Heer und Staat*, p. 349; Schmidt-Bückeberg, *Militärkabinett*, p. 183.

<sup>51</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 165ff. for the following.

<sup>52</sup> One example of this was the Kaiser's decision to move an infantry brigade to Berlin to counter civil unrest, without consulting Verdy or the Chancellor. *Ibid.*, p. 189.

<sup>53</sup> See e.g. *ibid.*, pp. 191–192.

<sup>54</sup> Huber, *Heer und Staat*, p. 349. In 1900, Wilhelm had appointed him Commander-in-Chief for the China expedition following the Boxer Rebellion. Röhl, *Germany without Bismarck*, p. 268.

Kaiser preferred to divide powers among a number of generals. Of course, the Chancellor and Minister of War were also in favour of the dismissal of Waldersee, as they wanted to curb the development of any political ambitions within the General Staff, and to limit the powers that the Chief of the General Staff had acquired.<sup>55</sup> In 1891, Waldersee was replaced by Count Alfred von Schlieffen, who was a better candidate in the Kaiser's opinion, because he lacked all political ambition.<sup>56</sup> Before the work of the Great General Staff is investigated in more detail, its 'rival' institutions, the Prussian Ministry of War and the Military Cabinet, as well as the role of the commanding generals, must first be examined.

#### THE PRUSSIAN MINISTRY OF WAR

In this complicated system, dominated by the Kaiser's interference, the General Staff had to work alongside the Prussian Ministry of War, the longest established of Prussia's military institutions. Founded by Scharnhorst in 1809, it was originally the central body of the Prussian army. In 1809 it was responsible for the entire military administration, and was 'in all military matters the King's highest military institution'.<sup>57</sup> Decentralization of military power and pluralism of *Kommandostellen* (positions of command) had in part been blamed for Prussia's collapse in 1806, and Scharnhorst's reforms aimed to establish a more functional military set-up by providing a central military body which was equipped with all the necessary responsibilities. However, the system did not stay intact for long. In the first half of the nineteenth century the powers of the Ministry of War were already beginning to be eroded, shifting to both the developing Military Cabinet and the General Staff. While the Minister of War was still the King's key adviser in the war of 1864, when war broke out in 1866 the elder Moltke, as Chief of Staff, managed to gain independent power to command the army, establishing a position equal to that of the Minister of War.<sup>58</sup> After 1871, the responsibilities of the Ministry were further reduced, as the General Staff and Military Cabinet asserted themselves and claimed increasing shares in the Ministry's powers and responsibilities.

<sup>55</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 350.

<sup>56</sup> His role in the General Staff will be examined in more detail in Chapter 2.

<sup>57</sup> *Publicandum* of 18 February 1809, quoted by Minister of War Bronsart in his memorandum on the position of the Prussian Minister of War, composed on the eve of his resignation in 1888. Quoted in Schmidt-Bückeberg, *Militärkabinett*, pp. 167–168. On the Ministry of War see also H. O. Meisner, *Der Kriegsminister 1814–1914. Ein Beitrag zur militärischen Verfassungsgeschichte*, Berlin 1940.

<sup>58</sup> Huber, *Heer und Staat*, pp. 322–323.

In Wilhelmine Germany the Prussian Minister of War was responsible for the army's organisation, equipment, armament, funds and related matters.<sup>59</sup> In conjunction with the General Staff he decided on training standards for troops and non-commissioned officers. The Minister of War was further responsible for the strength and military preparations of the German army. The Minister's responsibilities had initially included matters of both command and administration, but as part of the attempt to prevent the Reichstag from gaining influence over matters pertaining to the army's command, his influence had gradually been reduced to administrative matters only.<sup>60</sup> By the late nineteenth century, the Ministry had lost its original purpose of uniting the various military institutions under one roof. Although the Minister of War no longer possessed the right to command troops by this period, he nonetheless occupied a strong position owing to his responsibility for presenting the military budget to the Reichstag and administering it. The General Staff informed him of its demands and requirements, but it was ultimately up to the Minister of War to decide which army or navy increases were needed. Because of his important position in connection with the budget, both the General Staff and the Military Cabinet attempted to curb the Minister's powers in the 1880s and 1890s. The debate over army increases between the General Staff and the Ministry of War is of crucial importance throughout the period under investigation in this book, and provides the background to much of Moltke's peace-time work.

In the Reichstag, the Minister's position equalled that of a *Reichskriegsminister* (i.e. not just a Prussian minister, but in effect an Imperial Minister of War), although for several reasons such an office was never formally created. On the one hand, the Kaiser, whose concern was always to consolidate or expand his power and influence, would not have had the same authority over a *Reichskriegsminister* as he did over a Prussian one, who was necessarily also a Prussian general, and as such obliged under oath to obey his monarch. Bismarck, too, had feared for his influential position and had therefore deliberately not created such an important post.<sup>61</sup> On the other hand, Bavaria, Saxony and Württemberg were keen to preserve their military independence as much as possible, and would not have accepted the superiority of a *Reichskriegsminister*.<sup>62</sup> This constitutional peculiarity put the Prussian Minister of War in a difficult position. Legally, he was not a minister for

<sup>59</sup> See Schmidt-Richberg, *Handbuch*, pp. 64ff. for the following information on the Ministry of War.

<sup>60</sup> Huber, *Deutsche Verfassungsgeschichte*, vol. 3, p. 1000.

<sup>61</sup> Nipperdey, *Deutsche Geschichte*, vol. 2, p. 202.

<sup>62</sup> Stahl, 'Preußische Armee', p. 198.

the whole nation; Bavaria, Saxony and Württemberg had their own Ministers of War, theoretically of equal rank. Fortunately, the ministers worked together well and were in direct correspondence with each other, so that this unresolved and potentially troublesome situation generally had no negative consequences for the army.<sup>63</sup>

Vis-à-vis the Kaiser, the Minister of War's position was even more precarious. The Kaiser, as King of Prussia and leader of the Prussian army, appointed the Prussian Minister of War. As a general, he would have sworn an oath of obedience to his 'Supreme War-Lord', the monarch, while as a Prussian minister, he was bound by the constitution and obliged to object to orders that were in opposition or in conflict with it. If the two were irreconcilable, his only option was to resign.<sup>64</sup> The Prussian Minister of War was the only Prussian soldier who owed a duty of obedience both to his monarch and the Prussian Constitution of 1850.<sup>65</sup> That this was no enviable position is exemplified by Franz von Wandel's diary entry at a time when he was head of the General War Department (*Allgemeines Kriegsdepartement*) within the Ministry of War. He was contemplating retirement, partly for fear of being appointed Minister of War, which he considered 'would be the death of me, physically, spiritually, morally':

I would wear myself out and yet would not contribute anything towards the good of army or country. No minister, other than the Reich-Chancellor, has as difficult a position as the Minister of War: on the one side the Kaiser, Military Cabinet, commanding generals, Chief of the General Staff, on the other [side] the Secretary of the Reich-Treasury and the Reichstag. The level of work, self-denial, trouble, fighting, that a Minister of War must suffer incessantly is only known to someone who has for years been working in the Ministry of War, and he would always say: under no condition do I want to become Minister of War.<sup>66</sup>

Seen in this light, it is not surprising that the position of Minister of War changed more frequently than any of the other influential military posts. Between 1871 and 1914, there were eight Prussian Ministers of War, compared to four Chiefs of the Military Cabinet, and four Chiefs of the General Staff.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>63</sup> Rüdts von Collenberg, *Die Deutsche Armee*, p. 9.

<sup>64</sup> Schmidt-Richberg, *Handbuch*, p. 66.

<sup>65</sup> Stahl, 'Preußische Armee', p. 199.

<sup>66</sup> BA-MA, NL Wandel,  $\pi 564/4$ , diary entry, 14 October 1912, pp. 38ff. Excerpts from Wandel's diary also in Gerhard Granier, 'Deutsche Rüstungspolitik vor dem Ersten Weltkrieg. General Franz Wandels Tagebuchaufzeichnungen aus dem preußischen Kriegsministerium', *MGM*, 2/1985, pp. 123–162.

<sup>67</sup> See also Stahl, 'Preußische Armee', p. 200, and appendix 3, p. 242. Stahl calls the position of Minister of War 'probably the thorniest [office] within the higher echelons of the Prussian army', p. 199.

# THE MILITARY CABINET

The Chief of the General Staff also had to negotiate his position vis-à-vis the Military Cabinet. As a 'department for personal matters' (*Abteilung für die persönlichen Angelegenheiten*), this institution had existed within the Prussian Ministry of War since 1824, and was responsible both for personnel questions and for matters directly related to the King. A relatively small institution, it had not gained independence from the Ministry of War until 1883, when it became answerable directly to the Kaiser.<sup>68</sup> The Military Cabinet prepared the Kaiser's orders and dealt with requests directed towards the monarch. All officer positions were filled according to its suggestions.

During Wilhelm II's reign, the importance of the Military Cabinet increased and it was criticized by many as unconstitutional and potentially dangerous. The Kaiser regarded the cabinet system as his 'personal' institution and a means by which he tried to escape the ties of constitutionalism.<sup>69</sup> Not surprisingly, there was a clear demand at the end of the war that the Military Cabinet be dissolved. The 'Workers' and Soldiers' Council' demanded its abolition, arguing that 'it is impossible for us to agree to the continuing existence of this notorious remnant of the old system'.<sup>70</sup> Even before this time, the Military Cabinet had many critics. It was feared that in this powerful military institution secret decisions were being made that no constitutional body could control or influence. No provisions for such a cabinet were made in the German constitution, so legally there was indeed reason for contemporaries to be concerned about the possibility of a shadow government (*Nebenregierung*) being exercised with the help of such extra-constitutional bodies.<sup>71</sup> The existence of the cabinet system was seen by critics as absolutism in its most pronounced form.<sup>72</sup> All military appointments, promotions and demotions of officers could be passed by the Military Cabinet without ministerial countersignature.<sup>73</sup> As Huber explains, the extent of the cabinet's influence resulted from the fact that its exact role was never

<sup>68</sup> In 1914, it consisted of its Chief and seven officers: Stahl, 'Preußische Armee', p. 205. The most important critical account of the role of the Military Cabinet is Schmidt-Bückeberg, *Militärkabinett*. See also Schmidt-Richberg, *Handbuch*, pp. 67ff.; Huber, *Heer und Staat*, pp. 69ff.; Hermann Granier, 'Eine Denkschrift des Generals Edwin von Manteuffel über das Militär-Kabinett', *Forschungen zur Brandenburg-Preußischen Geschichte*, vol. 47, Berlin 1935, pp. 172-181.

<sup>69</sup> Huber, *Heer und Staat*, p. 333.

<sup>70</sup> BA-Potsdam, files of the Reichskanzlei, R43, 12837, file 2019 (Militärkabinett), p. 42.

<sup>71</sup> 'Nebenregierung' in Schmidt-Bückeberg, *Militärkabinett*, p. 206; also Schmidt-Richberg, *Handbuch*, p. 68.

<sup>72</sup> Schmidt-Bückeberg, *Militärkabinett*, p. 224.

<sup>73</sup> Schmidt-Richberg, *Handbuch*, p. 68.



clearly defined, for 'an institution without a defined area of competence is potentially responsible for everything'.<sup>74</sup>

Not only the Military Cabinet, but the Naval and Civil Cabinets, too, were in positions of great influence, due to the trust that their chiefs enjoyed with the Kaiser. The chiefs of the cabinets could make themselves heard much more easily than any ministers, accompanying the Kaiser on his journeys and also having more regular access to him than those responsible to parliament.<sup>75</sup> It is very noticeable that all three cabinets gained increasing influence at the beginning of Wilhelm II's reign, when the young monarch was trying to establish his personal rule; and that during his struggle to gain more personal power, he came to rely more and more on his cabinets.<sup>76</sup>

Even apologists such as Huber and Schmidt-Richberg, who dismiss the notion of 'personal rule', do not dispute that the chief of the Military Cabinet was in a very influential position indeed. The Chief of the Military Cabinet was a '*vortragender Generaladjutant*', i.e. an adjutant with immediate access to the monarch, and he belonged to the Kaiser's closest military entourage. He travelled with him and was present at audiences with holders of other *Immediatstellen*. Schmidt-Richberg describes the position of Chief of the Military Cabinet as an 'exceedingly important and influential post',<sup>77</sup> although he modifies this by adding that the Chief of the General Staff was in a similarly powerful position. This is no doubt true, but only attests to the wide-ranging influence of the different military institutions under Wilhelm II. Their importance changed, depending on the individual who occupied a position at a particular time. Under Wilhelm II, the Chief of Military Cabinet was a less influential position when Dietrich von Hülsen-Haeseler occupied it than it had been under Wilhelm von Hahnke,<sup>78</sup> and the position of Chief of the General Staff was more important under Waldersee and the younger Moltke than it had been under Schlieffen. In Moltke's case, this was due in particular to his close friendship with the Kaiser. This is a clear indication that the personality occupying a position was more important than the position itself, and also illustrates

<sup>74</sup> Huber, *Heer und Staat*, pp. 333–334.

<sup>75</sup> This is very apparent in the time-table of *Immediatsvorträge* (personal audiences) that Schmidt-Bückeburg published in his study on the Military Cabinet: the majority of these audiences were with 'bodies not responsible to parliament', and within that there was a heavy slant towards the military. *Militärkabinett*, p. 178.

<sup>76</sup> See Röhl, *Germany without Bismarck*, p. 127.

<sup>77</sup> Schmidt-Richberg, *Handbuch*, p. 67; Huber, *Bismarck und das Reich*, p. 816.

<sup>78</sup> Wilhelm von Hahnke (1833–1912), Chief of the Military Cabinet from 1888–1912, father of Schlieffen's son-in-law Wilhelm von Hahnke (cf. Chapter 2).

the importance and influence an individual could gain if the Kaiser was favourably disposed towards him.

It is certainly undeniable that the Chief of the Military Cabinet had, through his close contact with the Kaiser, significant influence on the monarch and ultimately on military matters. However, the Kaiser did not always follow the Chief's advice, especially where appointments to leading positions within the army were concerned. The Kaiser felt more than able to make his own decisions, even against the advice of his closest and most trusted advisers. This is demonstrated most prominently in the appointment of Moltke as Chief of the General Staff in 1906, against the advice of the Chief of the Military Cabinet, Hülsen-Haeseler, who even threatened to resign over this issue.<sup>79</sup>

The Chief of the Military Cabinet's domain was primarily in the area of appointments. He did not have any influence on operational decisions, which were the Chief of Staff's domain. Where the two institutions might clash was over the appointment of army leaders and army chiefs of staff, as they did, for example, when it came to selecting the personalities to lead the German armies into war in 1914. From the General Staff's point of view, the Military Cabinet was an unwelcome rival. In a post-war, apologetic article on the work of the General Staff in the pre-war years, Georg Graf von Waldersee outlined how the younger Moltke's work had been much impeded because of the 'sad chapter' of appointing 'the personalities'. The Military Cabinet, Waldersee complained, had allowed Moltke 'only very modest influence' on appointments, and had frequently opposed General Staff suggestions. The result, Waldersee stated almost triumphantly, was that Moltke could not trust the cabinet, and that he had therefore been forced into secrecy vis-à-vis the Military Cabinet.<sup>80</sup>

Compared to 'constitutional' positions, the Chiefs of the Military Cabinet changed very infrequently. There were only four such chiefs in Wilhelm's reign; Wilhelm von Hahnke from 1888–1901, Dietrich Graf von Hülsen-Haeseler from 1901 until his tragic death whilst dancing for the Kaiser in 1908,<sup>81</sup> Moriz Freiherr von Lyncker until July 1918, and Ulrich Freiherr von Marschall until the end of the war. All (apart from

<sup>79</sup> Moltke's appointment will be examined in detail below.

<sup>80</sup> Georg Graf Waldersee, 'Von Kriegführung, Politik, Persönlichkeiten und ihrer Wechselwirkung aufeinander', *Deutscher Offizier Bund*, 11, April 1927, p. 444.

<sup>81</sup> Hülsen-Haeseler's bizarre death in November 1908 is described in Zedlitz-Trützschler's memoirs, *Zwölf Jahre am deutschen Kaiserhof*, pp. 216ff.