



Stefan Noethen. *Alte Kameraden und neue Kollegen: Polizei in Nordrhein-Westfalen 1945–1953.* Essen: Klartext Verlag, 2003. 567 S. EUR 39.90 (broschiert), ISBN 978-3-89861-110-7.



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A Long-Neglected Topic Finally Finds Attention

Although police forces were involved in the National Socialist regime's policies of persecution both within Germany and in the occupied territories, the history of police forces has long been neglected by German historians. Within the past two decades, however, this topic has become a subject of German historiography. Following research on the development of police organizations in the nineteenth century and a more thorough look at police forces of the "Third Reich," historians now have "discovered" the police forces of the two post-war German states.[1] With this volume, Stefan Noethen contributes a voluminous work about the personnel policy of British occupation forces and German officials respectively between 1945 and 1953, asking whether policies within the British occupation zone succeeded in establishing a democratic police force. Central issues of analysis are the continuity or change within the police staff and the measures taken to establish and then maintain the loyalty of policemen to the new state.

As a necessary background the author first explains the police structure in National Socialist Germany; police forces became a major support for the regime. Here, the

author summarizes concisely a great deal of research on the German police between 1933 and 1945 (pp. 23-48), complemented with a number of regional case studies from the Rhineland and Westphalia (pp. 48-58). British military knew about the crimes committed by police forces in the occupied territories (p. 62). The Political Intelligence Department of the Foreign Office collected information about police activity during World War II and put its knowledge to use in the handbook of the Combined Chiefs of Staff. The handbook was the first basic instruction to British military on how to handle the occupation of Germany. Further details about the treatment of the police were put down in the *Instruction on the Re-Organisation of the German Police System in the British Zone from September 25, 1945*. Noethen gives details of all the considerations involved in British policy planning after 1939, additionally portraying all of the protagonists involved. In doing so the author reenacts the motives of British policy-making toward Germany. The decentralization measures mandated by the *Instruction*, although not at all contrary to traditional German principles, roused skepticism and sometimes outright rejection among German officials. As a result German politi-

cians rescinded most of these reform measures after responsibility for policing was returned to Germans. The *Polizeiorganisationsgesetz* of August 11, 1953 set an end to these reforms by reestablishing central police forces within the *Laender*. German politicians subsequently repealed other reform measures made in British occupation policies, most importantly those dealing with armaments and uniforms.

After describing British reform policies and their revision by German politicians, Noethen moves to treat questions of personnel, starting with the highest levels. At the end of the war all police directors and police officers of high ranks were arrested. Wherever possible, their posts were filled by experienced policemen who had been fired in 1933. However, in cases where the necessary individuals were not available, strict denazification quickly gave way to more pragmatic management. In July 1946, fourteen of the twenty-four police directors in office had never been members of the NSDAP. Five of them had been dismissed by the Nazis in 1933. Between six and eight men, however, had been members of the Nazi party. Whether any of the latter had committed war crimes is not known, but “cannot be ruled out” (p. 141). The author explains in detailed accounts how former members of the NSDAP found their way back into the police. Both the British military government and the minister of the Interior of North-Rhine Westphalia put more emphasis on the contemporary security situation than on a serious analysis of the past of police directors (p. 147).

A major part of the book deals with personnel policies as they concerned all ranks of policemen. Chapter IV contrasts cases of continuities against cases of change. Former policemen of the Weimar Republic and of the National Socialist period were reemployed; moreover, inexperienced men or enemies of the Nazi regime were sometimes newly engaged. Noethen shows that even policemen who had taken part in mass executions found their way back into the police force. Noethen criticizes the sometimes superficial investigations of British officials, who did not evaluate their knowledge about war crimes carefully (p. 198). While Noethen’s many case studies are stimulating to read, readers may expect to find more exact numbers of former war criminals within the postwar police force rather than vague statements such as, “the extent of personal continuity must have been quite high in departments of criminal investigation” (p. 191). However, as the author shows, denazification measures varied from town to town and often depended on local networks and actors, so that exact numbers are hard to obtain. Ex-

act graphic charts are integrated into the appendix of the book, unfortunately without any cross-reference in the text (pp. 529ff).

In December 1946, the *Land* of North-Rhine Westphalia and with it, German politicians, became responsible for police forces. Chapter 5 describes the personnel policies in the years 1947-1953, which led to an increase in employment of former NSDAP members. The numbers still depended on local circumstances. Noethen reckons the portion of police staff members who were former victims of political persecution at the end of the 1940s as only 2.7 percent, whereas a much larger number had been members of the NSDAP, many of them high-ranking ones. The number of former NSDAP members increased further in the 1950s, when the accelerated termination of the denazification process led to the judgment of increasing numbers as *Mitläufer*. At the same time, legislation (especially Article 161 of the German Basic Law) enabled former civil servants to reenter the police and other state services (pp. 365-375). Consequently, it became possible that even men involved in war crimes might find their way into the police force (pp. 397-408).

Chapter 6 turns from the political conditions of police work to a more thorough look at the actual work of the police and the measures taken to establish new, democratic methods of policing. The opportunity to re-educate the German police thoroughly was not taken: Instead of reforming police training, the British counted on controlling new police schools without interfering too much (although provincial police schools were equipped with bugging devices). When the German *Laender* became responsible for police schools in 1947, the possibility of a turning away from traditional education was finally eliminated. However, by establishing cooperation with social scientists outside the institution, the central school for police forces in Münster-Hiltrup laid the foundations for a more thorough education which in the long run contributed to a democratization of the German police (p. 428). Furthermore, Noethen underlines the importance of police unions in the democratization process. They enabled policemen to articulate their opinions and wishes (concerning payment and working conditions) and helped to establish democratic traditions. This last chapter of the book leads the way to further research, as its perspective shifts from the outer institutional and legal conditions of police work to the inner life and actual work of policemen and then to their confrontation with the people.

The conclusion of only two pages is much too short to

present concisely the main results of this thorough study and fails to explain the author's final claim: that the economic development of the Federal Republic of Germany helped to prevent the danger of the reemergence of an undemocratic police force (p. 498). All in all the book is a weighty contribution to the history of police forces after 1945. The many details can sometimes lead to confusion, and unfortunately there is no index, which would have been very helpful for local historians. The reader also would have profited from cross-references to the graphic charts and to the revealing biographical sketches of police directors in the appendix. However, these are only minor objections to an important study. The well-founded results (Noethen has examined 980 file units of several archives on the regional and local level, in addition to thirty-five witness interviews) for North-Rhine Westphalia constitute an important orientation for future

studies of German police.

Note

[1]. Significantly, one of the first books on the crimes committed by police forces during World War II has been written by a U.S.-based historian. See Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), published in German as *Ganz normale M  nner. Das Reserve Polizeibataillon 101 und die "Endl  sung"* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1993). For an overview of the police forces of the two post-war German states, see Gerhard F  rmetz, Herbert Reinke and Klaus Weinhauer, eds., *Nachkriegspolizei. Sicherheit und Ordnung in Ost- und Westdeutschland 1945-1969* (Hamburg: Ergebnisse, 2001).

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