

H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Klaus-Juergen Mueller, ed. *The Military in Politics and Society in France and Germany in the Twentieth Century.* Oxford and Providence, R.I.: Berg Publishers, 1995. vii + 176 pp. \$36.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-85496-812-1.



Reviewed by Mark Gingerich (Ohio Wesleyan University)

Published on H-German (April, 1996)

The purpose of the German Historical Perspectives Series, according to its general editors Gerhard A. Ritter and Anthony Nicholls, is to present recent specialized research by German historians and social scientists to a broader English-reading audience. The particular work under review, edited by the distinguished German military historian Klaus-Juergen Mueller, consists of seven essays by six leading German historians (two by Mueller himself), each of which examines in a comparative format aspects of French and German civil-military relations in the era from roughly 1870 to the present.

Pride of place goes to Mueller, who introduces the volume with an essay entitled "The Military, Politics and Society in France and Germany." Here Mueller provides an overview of the historiographical trends and methodological problems related to scholarly studies of French and German military history. He states that historical research in these fields is now sufficiently advanced to allow comparative approaches to particular problems. Such an approach should enable us to discern which historical characteristics are "typically German," "typically French," or "common to all great armies in their relationship to politics and society in our century" (p. 1). Mueller compares and contrasts aspects of each nation's military experiences and establishes the broader themes explored in the subsequent essays, all of which provide

topical (rather than chronological) comparisons.

In the second essay, "The Military and Society in France and Germany between 1870 and 1914," Gerd Krumeich, a specialist in French military history, concentrates on the relationship between the French army and government, and the evolving conceptions of the social role and function of the army. In many ways, French military policies (such as recruitment practices and service terms) reflected larger political debates, and the French army tended to reflect prevailing attitudes in French society and government. Krumeich concludes his brief essay with a comparison of French and German socialists' attitudes regarding the proper role of the army in each state. According to Krumeich, the differences in outlook (French socialists largely accepted the notion of a "nation in arms" while many German socialists, including the military expert Friedrich Engels, did not) arose from the significant structural and cultural dissimilarities of the two nations.

Manfred Messerschmidt contributes the third essay, "The Military Elites in Germany since 1870: Comparisons and Contrasts with the French Officer Corps." This insightful comparative analysis is wide ranging, drawing upon examples and trends from 1830 through the Second World War. Messerschmidt investigates the different historical and political contexts of the French and Ger-

man military officer corps, their attempts to control admission to their ranks, attempts by their respective governments to exercise decisive political control over the armed forces, the post-World War I relative decline of each state's army officer corps, and the infusion of Nazi ideology into the entire German officer corps during the Second World War, which resulted in the officer corps' postwar loss of political and social standing.

In his brief essay "Navy and Politics in Germany and France in the Twentieth Century," Michael Salewski, a German historian and former naval officer, investigates Franco-German naval relations during the era prior to World War I, the period from 1918 to 1933, and from 1933 until recent times. As Salewski argues, Franco-German naval relations almost always entailed at least a three-way relationship, due to Britain's naval supremacy. Today, as before, according to Salewski, both the French and German navies view the British navy, rather than the American, as the ideal model.

The fifth essay, "The Military and the Military-Political Breakdown in Germany 1918 and France 1940," by Ernst Willi Hansen, compares how both the French and German officer corps reacted to, and were transformed by, the military defeats and concomitant political collapses of 1918 and 1940, respectively. In this especially well-written essay, Hansen identifies a number of similarities in reactions between the two nations' officer corps, and concludes that the close similarities resulted primarily from the common origins of modern European "military values and mentality" (p. 106) rather than from factors determined by the unique paths of national histories.

Mueller contributes the sixth essay, "Military and Diplomacy in France and Germany in the Inter-War Period." In this sophisticated piece, he traces the complex

and nuanced roles played by military elites in the formulation of foreign policy in France and Germany in the interwar years. In both cases, military and diplomatic figures proved unable to develop strategies guaranteeing success in war. Mueller notes that French officers and diplomats prepared for a total war of attrition based upon the experience of 1914-1918, but were defeated in 1940 by the Germans' Blitzkrieg campaign; the Germans, while preparing for a succession of brief and limited campaigns, ultimately were defeated in a multi-front total war of attrition.

In the final essay, "The Army as an Occupying Power: The German Army in 1940-1944, the French Army in 1945-1949," Rainer Hudemann attempts to compare events that he regards as "virtually incomparable" (p. 139). Despite this caveat, he impressively analyzes the responses of each occupying power to the difficulties they faced. Despite the profound differences in each state's political and military systems, the kinds of problems encountered were remarkably similar, although the responses were not.

All seven essays are well documented with endnotes. A twelve-page bibliography is included, listing the sources (mostly secondary) utilized in the essays. Several works which appeared originally in English are cited in German-language editions, which seems odd, considering that the intended market for this volume is English-reading. Overall, this volume consists of thoughtful, interesting, and well-developed essays, although they are of perhaps a somewhat limited appeal. The general editors of the series offer this work for the benefit of persons lacking German reading skills but, given the relatively esoteric scope of the essays, this volume may appeal more to specialists who possess German language skills than to a broader audience.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-german>

Citation: Mark Gingerich. Review of Mueller, Klaus-Juergen, ed., *The Military in Politics and Society in France and Germany in the Twentieth Century*. H-German, H-Net Reviews. April, 1996.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=389>

Copyright © 1996 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.org.