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Nazi Indoctrination of the Kriegsmarine and its Relations with the NSDAP in the Years 1935–1945 – Outline of Subject Matter

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Introduction

Relations between the Kriegsmarine (War Navy) as one of the main three components of the Wehrmacht and the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP) after Adolf Hitler's rise to power in 1933 has been, until now, a relatively less-occupied topic in the historiography of the Third Reich. Scientific literature about Kriegsmarine in Nazi Germany tends towards omitting it from the general development of the regime as well handling the topic in the margin of the Wehrmacht as the main military organisation in the Nazi state. Rather the naval forces are in many cases reduced to the history of German rearmament since 1935¹ and sea campaigns (especially the Battle of the Atlantic²) during World War II. Furthermore, there is still a deficit of research concerning the impact of NSDAP and its indoctrination apparatus on

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- 1 Michael Salewski, *Die deutsche Seekriegsleitung 1935–1945*, vol. 1–3 (Frankfurt am Main/München: Bernard&Graefe, 1970–1975); Jost Dülffer, *Weimar, Hitler und die Marine. Reichspolitik und Flottenbau 1920–1930* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1973).
 - 2 Vide Dan van der Vat, *Schlachtfeld Atlantik* (München: Heyne, 1988); John Costello and Terry Hughes, *Atlantikschlacht. Der Krieg zur See 1939–1945* (Bergisch Gladbach: Bastei Lübbe, 1995); Jürgen Rohwer, *Der Krieg zur See* (Würzburg: Urbes, 2004); Lothar-Günther Buchheim, *U-Boot-Krieg* (München: Piper, 1997); Marc Milner, *Bitwa o Atlantyk*, trans. Grzegorz Siwek (Warszawa: Muza, 2012); Werner Rahn, "Der Seekrieg im Atlantik und Nordmeer," in: *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg*, vol. 6: *Der globale Krieg: Die Ausweitung zum Weltkrieg und der Wechsel der Initiative, 1941–1943*, ed. Horst Boog, Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1990), 273–425.

Kriegsmarine (and overall on the Wehrmacht).³ This is complemented by the neglected topic of mutual relations between the Party and Wehrmacht or visible dominance of explorations about ground forces (*Heer*), Waffen-SS and aerial warfare (*Luftwaffe*) over navy.⁴ For the last branch of the armed forces there is still particularly one question unanswered, namely to what extent officers, non-commissioned officers and crews internalised Nazi ideology, and what the seamen really thought of the regime or its specific political leaders. Apart from interesting single examples that as a rule regard predominantly biographical episodes,⁵ such empirical analysis still is not fully carried out in the subject literature.⁶

The aim of the article is an attempt at considering only a part of the above complex problem, namely institutional mechanics and willingness for acquisition of the Nazi worldview in Kriegsmarine. In the centre of the reflections remains a crucial question: how the indoctrination process in the navy took place during the time after 1935. Moreover, there are analysed the organisational interactions between the NSDAP and the Kriegsmarine, as well as motives and limits of the Party's endeavours to ideologically impact the attitudes of the sailors.⁷ How this development of indoctrination efforts was carried out and what results it brought is described on the basis of the pseudo-pedagogic concept of "military-spiritual leadership" (*wehrgeistige Führung*) in the Kriegsmarine. Two institutions are in this context of special importance: the High Command of the Navy or Upper Command of the Navy (*Oberkommando der Kriegsmarine*, OKM) under commander-in-chief of the German Navy (*Oberbefehlshaber der Marine*) Erich Raeder (subsequently *Großadmiral* Karl Dönitz), and the Office of Deputy Führer (*Dienststelle des Stellvertreters des Führers*, StdF) under Rudolf Heß

3 Vide Rolf Dieter Müller, Hans-Erich Volkmann, eds. *Die Wehrmacht. Mythos und Realität* (München: Oldenbourg, 1999); Andreas Kunz, *Wehrmacht und Niederlage. Die bewaffnete Macht in der Endphase der nationalsozialistischen Herrschaft 1944 bis 1945* (München: Oldenbourg, 2005).

4 Vide Christoph Rass, "Menschenmaterial." *Deutsche Soldaten an der Ostfront. Innenansichten einer Infanteriedivision, 1939–1945* (Paderborn/München/Wien: Schöningh, 2003); Bernd Lemke, *Luftschutz in Großbritannien und Deutschland 1923 bis 1939. Zivile Kriegsvorbereitungen als Ausdruck der staats- und gesellschaftspolitischen Grundlagen von Demokratie und Diktatur* (München: Oldenbourg, 2005); René Rohrkamp, "Weltanschaulich gefestigte Kämpfer." *Die Soldaten der Waffen-SS 1933–1945. Organisation–Personal–Sozialstruktur* (Paderborn/München/Wien: Schöningh, 2010).

5 Lothar Walmrath, "Iustitia et disciplina." *Strafgerichtsbarkeit in der deutschen Kriegsmarine 1939–1945* (Frankfurt am Main, et.al.: Lang, 1998); Timothy P. Mulligan, *Die Männer der deutschen U-Bootwaffe 1939–1945* (Stuttgart: Motorbuch, 2001); Dieter Hartwig, *Großadmiral Karl Dönitz. Legende und Wirklichkeit* (Paderborn/München/Wien: Schöningh, 2010).

6 Armin Nolzen, "Kriegsmarine, NSDAP und "wehrgeistige Führung" im Zweiten Weltkrieg," in: *Die Kriegsmarine. Eine Bestandsaufnahme*, ed. Stephan Huck (Bochum: Verlag Dr. Dieter Winkler, 2016), 173.

7 Vide Robert O'Neill, *The German Army and the Nazi Party* (London: Heineman, 1966); Manfred Messerschmidt, *Die Wehrmacht im NS-Staat. Zeit der Indoktrination* (Hamburg: R. v. Decker, 1969); Klaus-Jürgen Müller, *Das Heer und Hitler. Armee und nationalsozialistisches Regime 1933–1940* (Stuttgart: Dt. Verlag-Anst., 1988).

(after May 1941 he was succeeded by Martin Bormann as Chief of the Party Chancellery). Both authorities can be perceived as the representative instances for the Wehrmacht and the NSDAP.⁸ The text is based mainly on German and Anglo-Saxon scientific literature concerning the Kriegsmarine, the Wehrmacht and the Third Reich overall. It is only an outline of the matter, which is still absent in the historiography and requires further, deeper research, especially of the documental sources. Therefore, the article does not pretend to be a full presentation of the topic or its specific parts. Hopefully in the future its exhaustive analysis will be published.

Erich Raeder and Nazi indoctrination of the Kriegsmarine until 1939

After 30 January 1933, the German army (then the Reichswehr) started following a course of “intellectual assimilation” into National Socialism.⁹ The process included the whole “internal work” (*innerer Dienst*)¹⁰ in land, aerial forces and in the Reichs-/Kriegsmarine. Its aim was total absorption of the Nazi ideology by the officers and crews. So-called ideological education was here extremely vital, and especially cooperation in this field between the Wehrmacht and the NSDAP, during which more and more soldiers were attending special lectures and courses involving Nazi pseudo-doctrines, which turned out to be very fruitful.¹¹ Particularly after 1935 it became clear the old Christian values associated with seafaring could not prevent the violent intrusion of the National Socialist worldview into the navy. Even though the Kriegsmarine pursued its own course, as always, its commander in chief Erich Raeder left no doubt about his loyalty to Hitler (let alone his reservations about the Führer’s views on the

8 Armin Nolzen, “Von der geistigen Assimilation zur institutionellen Kooperation. Das Verhältnis zwischen NSDAP und Wehrmacht 1943–1945,” in: *Kriegsende 1945 in Deutschland*, ed. Jörg Hillmann and John Zimmermann (München: Oldenbourg, 2002), 71 ff.

9 Messerschmidt, *Die Wehrmacht*, 482.

10 Vide Heinfried Voss, “Das neue Haus der Reichswehr.” *Militärische Sozialisation im politischen und militärischen Übergang. Der Aufbau der vorläufigen Reichswehr 1919–1920 und ihre politische Funktion in der Republik, dargestellt an ihren badischen Truppenteilen* (St. Katharinen: Scripta Mercaturae, 1992), 73–118.

11 See Jürgen Förster, “Geistige Kriegführung in Deutschland 1919 bis 1945,” in: *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg. Die deutsche Kriegsgesellschaft 1939 bis 1945*. Section 1: *Politisierung, Vernichtung, Überleben*, ed. Jörg Echternkamp, vol. 9 (München: DVA, 2004), 484–505.

role of the navy¹²) and his commitment to the regime.¹³ Even before 1933 Raeder adopted a more pro-Nazi attitude as he recognised the potential the brown movement had for rearmament and rebuilding of the fleet. As a former Imperial Navy officer and Head of the Naval Command (from 1928) he supported a call for a “unified *Volk*” and a strong leader who would undertake the responsibility to “protect the interests of all classes and occupations” –important prerequisites for a strong navy and victory in war. Obviously, his strong anti-communist beliefs also influenced his support for Hitler as in the midst of the Great Depression and increasing support for the Communist Party of Germany (KPD). Like many others, he treated the Nazis as the final bulwark against Bolshevism.¹⁴ Raeder also personally supported a number of former naval officers who had become members of the NSDAP (like Wilhelm Busse¹⁵), which earned him “strong trust” within the Nazi movement. Nevertheless, he still feared that the extremists in the NSDAP under Gregor Strasser would push the leftist tendency agenda of the party at the expense of its nationalism and revisionist policies.¹⁶

The eagerness on the part of Raeder and his officers to integrate what they saw as the positive aspects of Hitler and his movement was genuine, reflecting the navy’s affinity

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- 12 Raeder remained wary of Hitler’s views about the navy. In “*Mein Kampf*” he criticised the German grand admiral Alfred von Tirpitz and the navy’s prewar policies. Hitler’s rejection of the idea of Germany as a world naval power (*Seemacht*) and colonial policies in favour of an alliance with Great Britain threatened Raeder’s goals. He wanted to secure the long range “world political role” of the navy and its battleship program. Furthermore, the NSDAP’s leader rejected “the perverse and calamitous statement” that “Our future lies on the water.” According to him, the country’s fate would always be determined on land, in Europe, because of its “disastrous” military–geographic position. In late October 1932, Hitler shocked Raeder with sharp criticism regarding the government’s support for his proposed naval program, especially the building of large battleships. Hitler argued it would harm Anglo–German relations, and the high cost of construction would take money away from the army. The navy’s focus should be in the Baltic, which didn’t require battleships. He also faulted the Kriegsmarine for not sufficiently taking into account new technology. See Keith W. Bird, *Kriegsmarine i Raeder*, trans. Aleksandra Górska (Warszawa: Bellona, 2012), 134–135; Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf. Zwei Bände in einem Band. Ungekürzte Ausgabe* (München: Franz Eher Verlag, 1943), 299–301; Gerhard L. Weinberg, ed. *Hitler’s Second Book. The Unpublished Sequel to Mein Kampf* (New York: Enigma Books, 2006), 167. Vide Jost Dülffer, “Wilhelm II. und Adolf Hitler. Ein Vergleich ihrer Marinekonzeptionen,” in: *Kiel, die Deutschen und die See*, ed. Jürgen Elvert (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1992), 49–69; Michael Epkenhans, “Tirpitz und das Scheitern der Kaiserlichen Marine im Ersten Weltkrieg,” in: *Personen – soziale Bewegungen – Parteien. Beiträge zur Neuesten Geschichte. Festschrift für Hartmut Soell*, ed. Oliver von Mengersen (Heidelberg: Manutius, 2004), 15–36; Rolf Hobson, *Maritimer Imperialismus. Seemachtideologie, seestrategisches Denken und der Tirpitzplan 1875 bis 1914* (München: Oldenbourg, 2004), 231 ff.
- 13 Rolf Dieter Müller, *Hitler’s Wehrmacht 1935–1945*, trans. Janice W. Ancker (Berlin/Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2016, Ebook), 53, 71.
- 14 Vide Michael Salewski, *Die Deutschen und die See. Studien zur deutschen Marinegeschichte des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Jürgen Elvert and Stefan Lippert, vol. 2 (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2002), 135.
- 15 See Dermot Bradley, Hans H. Hildebrand, Ernest Henriot, eds. *Deutschlands Admirale 1849–1945. Die militärischen Werdegänge der See-, Ingenieur-, Sanitäts-, Waffen- und Verwaltungsoffiziere im Admiralsrang*, vol. 1: A–G (*Ackermann bis Gygas*) (Osnabrück: Biblio Verlag, 1988), 194–196.
- 16 Bird, *Kriegsmarine*, 136.

to Fascism.¹⁷ With Hitler's appointment as chancellor, the officers celebrated the rekindled enthusiasm of the masses, which they had not witnessed since 1914 and regarded Hitler as the culmination of the work of Bismarck, Kaiser Wilhelm II, and even Tirpitz. The Nazis' national goals resonated with the Kriegsmarine's *Seemacht* ideology and its traditions as well as bitter experiences with the Weimar Republic and democracy. Moreover, it reflected their relationship with the "cultural Bolshevism" and moral decay that revolution had brought to Germany. The social goals of the movement, that is the promised creation of a true people's community (*Volksgemeinschaft*), were congruent with the navy's role in social integration or the "national feeling" required to support fleet building.¹⁸

Raeder's views can be portrayed as strictly conservative, authoritarian and nationalist. His concept of an "outward and inward navy style," with his emphasis on leadership, discipline and a strict moral code reflected a patriarchal tone that also conformed to the goals of the Nazi movement.¹⁹ As a paternalistic stern he expected from sailors unconditional loyalty, high Christian morals and total obedience.²⁰ The accent on patriotism and a belief in the national mission of the officer corps strengthened the compatibility with the "pseudo military" (*pseudosoldatisch*) aspects of National Socialism, as did the officers' concept of "internal leadership" (*innere Führung*), accentuating teamwork, *esprit de corps* and tolerance among officers and men.²¹

Within the Kriegsmarine, as well as to Hitler, Raeder's support for the Nazis was obvious. In the Third Reich, Raeder could therefore count on the dictator's respect for the professional competence of the naval leadership and his support of their proposals. The naval leadership needed direct access to the Führer (from 1938 the supreme commander of the army) to assert itself against the more dominating influence of the Wehrmacht. Even so, during the First World War, the naval leadership of Wilhelmine Germany had had the Kaiser's support and had been able to conduct a war that was independent to a large extent. But in view of its geographic defence situation, its share of armaments, and its personnel strength, the Kriegsmarine after 1935 had to be satisfied with the role of the smallest Wehrmacht branch.²² Moreover, the navy had to

17 Rolf Benschel, *Die Deutsche Flottenpolitik von 1933 bis 1939. Eine Studie über die Rolle des Flottenbaus in Hitlers Außenpolitik*. Beiheft 3 der "Marine-Rundschau" (Berlin: E. S. Mittler, 1958), 20.

18 Bird, *Kriegsmarine*, 137. Vide Adolf von Trotha, *Volkstum und Staatsführung. Briefe und Aufzeichnungen aus den Jahren 1915–1920* (Berlin: Grossdeutsche Verlagsanstalt, 1928), 184–186.

19 Charles S. Thomas, *The German Navy in the Nazi Era* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1990), 54–56.

20 In this context Raeder is also well known for dismissing Reinhard Heydrich from the Reichsmarine in April 1931 for "conduct unbecoming to an officer and a gentleman." Heydrich had a baby with his girlfriend and afterwards he fled to marry another woman. Soon he became chief of the Security Service (*Sicherheitsdienst*, SD) and in the next years he wanted to avenge his alleged dishonour by conducting often petty harrasing against Raeder. See Thomas, *The German Navy*, 55, 92–93.

21 Bird, *Kriegsmarine*, 137–138.

22 Müller, *Hitler's*, 53.

make do with compromises regarding the displacement and armament of its future capital ships. However, in view of the anticipated long-term build-up of the fleet, those compromises seemed acceptable for Raeder.²³ Nevertheless, until the outbreak of war, Raeder continued to believe that he was leading the navy in a “frictionless” coordination into the Führer state without identifying himself with the criminal ideological implications of National Socialism like virulent antisemitic policy measures. He believed in Hitler’s backing to rebuild fleet in the tradition of Tirpitz and the goals of Nazi foreign policy (he even accepted a possibility of war with Great Britain). Raeder’s myth that the Kriegsmarine had been allowed to develop independently in the Third Reich was a pure illusion, as well as his claims of keeping navy apolitical. The reality, however, is that the navy’s sea power ideology had allowed it to be seduced by the appeal of the National Socialist worldview and goals, both consciously and unconsciously.²⁴

The “national-political education” embraced by the Kriegsmarine after 1933, notwithstanding Raeder’s preoccupation with discipline, loyalty and paternalistic tradition, had, in his eyes, isolated his service morally and intellectually from the world around it, even as the navy moved to accommodate itself to National Socialism.²⁵ Raeder mostly opposed attempts by the Party to gain any influence in Kriegsmarine. He preferred mutual understanding and compromise, however, rather than open conflict in that field. On 28 August 1933, Raeder instructed Kriegsmarine to answer the greeting *Heil Hitler* in a similar manner, and on 6 September 1933 he gave the order that the “German greeting” would be performed by the navy only in certain formal situations. Moreover, he firmly resisted absorbing any rituals of Nazi neo-paganism into Kriegsmarine by making chaplains members of the German Faith Movement (*Deutsche Glaubensbewegung*).²⁶

On the other hand, within preparations for the future mobilisation, which began in the Party in 1937, the Office of Deputy Führer and the Reich Ministry of War (*Reichskriegsministerium*) ensured that regional and local leaders of the NSDAP take on “spiritual care” (*seelische Betreuung/Truppenbetreuung*) of the soldiers in the case of

23 Werner Rahn, “German Navies from 1848 to 2016. Their Development and Courses from Confrontation to Cooperation,” *Naval War College Review* 3 (2017): 34.

24 Bird, *Kriegsmarine*, 152.

25 See Thomas, *The German Navy*, 154; Keith W. Bird, *Weimar, the German Naval Officer Corps and the Rise of National Socialism* (New York: Grüner, 1977), 294–297.

26 Thomas, *The German Navy*, 83, 155–157. On German Faith Movement see more Kurt Hutten, “Die Deutsche Glaubensbewegung,” in: *Die Nation vor Gott. Zur Botschaft der Kirche im Dritten Reich* (1933), ed. Walter Künneht and Helmuth Schreiner (Berlin: Wichern Verlag, 1934), 506–533; Hans Buchheim, *Glaubenskrise im Dritten Reich. Drei Kapitel nationalsozialistischer Religionspolitik* (Stuttgart: DVA, 1953), 157–202; Karla Poewe and Irving Hexham, “Jakob Wilhelm Hauer’s New Religion and National Socialism,” *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 20 (2005): 195–215; Horst Junginger, “Die Deutsche Glaubensbewegung als ideologisches Zentrum der völkisch-religiösen Bewegung,” in: *Die völkisch-religiöse Bewegung im Nationalsozialismus. Eine Beziehungs- und Konfliktgeschichte*, ed. Uwe Puschner and Clemens Vollhals (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck&Ruprecht, 2012), 65–102.

a military situation.²⁷ The main executors of those measures were the inland department in the High Command of the Armed Forces (*Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*, OKW²⁸), the Reich Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda (*Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda*) or the German Labour Front (*Deutsche Arbeitsfront*, DAF) and its free time organisation Strength through Joy (Kraft durch Freude, KdF). OKW demanded efficiency of the NSDAP's and the state's civil offices in *Truppenbetreuung*, also in the navy. The High Command of the Armed forces, however, did not have further rights to issue instructions concerning specific Wehrmacht's branches. Furthermore, possibility of interference by the Party had also no effect whatsoever due to the fact that in those branches the respective commander was responsible for the indoctrination process.²⁹

In Kriegsmarine there was a complete autonomy concerning "inner service" (*innerer Dienst*) as Raeder worked to promote Nazi ideology in opposition to NSDAP.³⁰ He ordered that all his officers read a book by Kriegsmarine Commander Siegfried Sorge³¹ called "The Naval Officer as a Guide and Educator" ("Der Marineoffizier als Führer und Erzieher"³²) about what it took to be a good officer.³³ The tract includes ideological contents mainly in chapter: "Officer Lesson" (*Offizierunterricht*).³⁴ According to Sorge, a good and reliable naval officer must obediently believe in National Socialist values. He complimented Hitler for the Night of the Long Knives – a bloody purge of his own political party from June 30 to July 2, 1934, for assassinating hundreds of Nazis

27 See Frank Vossler, *Propaganda in die eigene Truppe. Die Truppenbetreuung in der Wehrmacht 1939–1945* (Paderborn/München/Wien, Schöningh, 2005), 55 ff.; Alexander Hirt, "Die deutsche Truppenbetreuung im Zweiten Weltkrieg. Konzeption, Organisation und Wirkung," *Militärgeschichtliche Zeitschrift* 2 (2000): 407–434.

28 Created in February 1938, it replaced the Reich War Ministry in the field of formal oversight over the army (*Heer*), navy (*Kriegsmarine*) and air force (*Luftwaffe*). See Geoffrey Megargee, *Hitler und die Generäle. Das Ringen um die Führung der Wehrmacht 1933–1945*, trans. Karl Nicolai (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2006), 47–79.

29 Nolzen, "Kriegsmarine," 174; Stephan Lehnstaedt and Kurt Lehnstaedt, "Der Angriff der "Schleswig-Holstein" auf die Westerplatte. Aus dem Logbuch des Seekadetten Hans Buch," in: *80 Jahre danach. Bilder und Tagebücher deutscher Soldaten vom Überfall auf Polen 1939*, ed. Svea Hammerle, Hans-Christian Jasch and Stephan Lehnstaedt (Berlin: Metropol, 2019), 135–172.

30 Even though Raeder never joined the NSDAP, claiming always that his service was "above politics" and he worked "disinterested (...) to the State," on 30 January 1937, Hitler awarded him the Golden Party Badge to credit him for his effective activities in promoting Nazi ideology in the German navy. See Bird, *Kriegsmarine*, 144–154; Charles E. Pfannes and Victor A. Salamone, *The Great Admirals of World War II. The Germans*, vol. 2 (New York: Zebra Books, 1984), 22–23; Erich M. Raeder, *My Life*, trans. Henry W. Drexel (Annapolis: United States Naval Institute, 1960), *passim*; Kurt Fischer, "Großadmiral Dr. phil. h. c. Erich Raeder," in: *Hitlers militärische Elite. Von den Anfängen des Regimes bis Kriegsbeginn*, ed. Gerd R. Ueberschär, vol. 1 (Darmstadt: Primus-Verl., 1998), 185–194.

31 See Bradley, Hildebrand, Henriot, eds. *Deutschlands Admirale*, vol. 3: P–Z, 345–346.

32 Siegfried Sorge, *Der Marineoffizier als Führer und Erzieher* (Berlin: E. S. Mittler&Sohn, 1937).

33 See Salewski, *Die Deutschen*, 115–116; T. Mulligan, *Die Männer*, 234.

34 Lehnstaedt, "Der Angriff," 138.

(especially from the leadership of the Nazi Storm Troopers, SA), whom he believed had the potential to become political enemies in the future.³⁵ Sorge insisted that if Hitler had been state leader in 1918, then the mutiny of the High Seas Fleet would have been swiftly destroyed just like the Führer's determination had crushed the alleged SA rebellion. For Sorge, the humble veteran of the trenches, Adolf Hitler, became the link between the soldierly virtues of the past and National Socialist ones for the present. Admittedly, Sorge went on to say not every officer could be Ferdinand Magellan, Julius Caesar, Alfred von Tirpitz, Frederick the Great or Adolf Hitler, but one could still learn an important lesson from these masters: only fearless determination and clear dedication transformed men into leaders who, when necessary, can use extreme violence to maintain discipline.³⁶

Sorge emphasised in his writing that combating "Jewish materialism" and "Marxist agitation" was the then generation's real mission and therefore one of a good officer's main obligations. As Sorge expressed it: "There is no better means [than this recognition] of making the Germans energetic and thankful followers of the Führer and of helping them understand that the Führer also had to use a heavy hand and sometimes must continue to do so in order to accomplish his fantastic aim." According to him, the officer must be conscious of the benefits that resulted from the unity with his nation (*Volk*), perceived by him as a "blood-and-fate community" (*Blut- und Schicksalgemeinschaft*). To do so he must accept the new political order without any question and "immerse himself in the depths of National Socialist ideology."³⁷ Sorge argued that a navy officer should be taught not only about the soldierly duties but also about German history to fully comprehend the elements of the Nazi worldview. Moreover, as important teaching material he recommended that the officers read Hitler's "Mein Kampf" and his speeches published by Franz Eher Verlag. It is evident that Sorge planted the Kriegsmarine in the National Socialist camp as a totally obedient instrument of the brown regime. It is, of course, impossible to determine precisely how much influence Sorge's work exerted upon the Kriegsmarine officers. Nevertheless, the book was a crucial counsellor for young officers of the navy for leadership that became very popular not only among them (in 1943 the fifth edition was published). Interesting, however, is the fact that the tract was banned in 1944. Raeder mentioned that its undertone was too "humanistic." He left unsaid the book's decidedly pro-Nazi content and rhetoric.³⁸

35 History.com Editors, *Hitler purges members of his own Nazi party in Night of the Long Knives*, accessed 19 November 2021, <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/night-of-the-long-knives>.

36 Sorge, *Der Marineoffizier*, 60–67, 138–141; Thomas, *The German Navy*, 150–152.

37 Sorge, *Der Marineoffizier*, 144–148.

38 See Thomas, *The German Navy*, 152–153; Bird, *Kriegsmarine*, 156; Nolzen, "Kriegsmarine," 156.

In the second half of the 1930's Kriegsmarine, wanting to maintain its traditional "state within the state" status and in order to prevent the "coordination" (*Gleichschaltung*) from above, the navy more and more engaged itself in a process of so-called self-*Gleichschaltung*.³⁹ Nevertheless, not until 1939 and during the war the concept of "military intellectual leadership" (*wehrgeistige Führung*) in the Kriegsmarine was formally institutionalised. There were of course some personal contacts between the NSDAP and the Kriegsmarine before, as well as some elements of Nazi indoctrination in the professional education of naval officers.⁴⁰ At the top stand the section of "military

39 Thus, it might seem odd that Martin Niemöller, a leading representative of the Confessional Church (*Bekennende Kirche*), an amalgamation of dissenting pastors, reported voluntarily for duty in the navy in 1939, after imprisonment in a concentration camp. Niemöller had been a daring U-boat officer during the First World War. In 1934 his memoirs appeared under the title: "Vom U-Boat zur Kanzel" ("From the U-Boat to the Pulpit"). As a theologian, he took a firm stand against Reich minister for church affairs Hanns Kerrl and the assemblage of German Christians (*Deutsche Christen*) he supported. Hitler looked upon the Confessional Church and its interchurch struggle. Niemöller, although a National Conservative, now belonged to the NSDAP. Even as a member, he attacked the party's chief ideologue, Alfred Rosenberg, which quickly led his arrest in 1935. As of 1938, Niemöller was considered a "personal prisoner" of Hitler, who intended to have him hanged and declined his request to serve the Fatherland again as a U-boat commander. After 1945 and his experiences as an outcast in the Dachau concentration camp, Niemöller adopted radical pacifistic views, holding that participation in military service was irreconcilable with Christian belief. But his surprising request to the dictator at the start of the war in 1939 epitomised his dominant theological stance, which was "service to the nation" and therefore supported a legitimate national order and national defence to an unlimited degree. This was particularly so for chaplains in the Kriegsmarine, and overall in the Wehrmacht, who saw themselves mostly as a symbiosis of officers of the traditional mould, this did not preclude their critical distance from the conduct of the army and its leadership. Their renouncing of open criticism was intended to keep institutional opportunities for pastoring open. Their service provided encouragement in the face of the hardships of battle, and it limited itself to offering comfort in medical stations, in prisons, and at mass graves. See Müller, *Hitler's*, 76–77; Harald Bendert, *Die UC-Boote der Kaiserlichen Marine 1914–1918. Minenkrieg mit U-Booten* (Hamburg/Berlin/Bonn, Mittler Verlag, 2001), 171; Helga Grebing, *Der Nationalsozialismus. Ursprung und Wesen* (München: Isar-Verl., 1964), 133; Clemens Vollnhals, "Die Evangelische Kirche zwischen Traditionswahrung und Neuorientierung," in: *Von Stalingrad zur Währungsreform. Zur Sozialgeschichte des Umbruchs in Deutschland*, ed. Martin Broszat, Klaus-Dietmar Henke and Hans Woller (München: Oldenbourg, 1990), 118 ff.; Dagmar Pöpping, *Kriegspfarrer an der Ostfront Evangelische und katholische Wehrmachtseelsorge im Vernichtungskrieg 1941–1945* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck&Ruprecht, 2017), 18 ff.; Omer Bartov, "Soldiers, Nazis and War in the Third Reich," in: *The Third Reich. The Essential Readings*, ed. Christian Leitz (London: Blackwell, 1999), 129–150.

40 During the war there were educated about 12,700 candidates for navy officers. Four months of infantry basic training with aims like self-discipline, hardship and subordination, were followed by six months of fleet practice, then six months theoretical education in navy officers' school in Mürwik, which ended with the naval officer main exam. After that began firearm training that lasted from six to eight months, for instance ship's artillery, torpedoes, mines, intelligence service as well as another six months of fleet practice as petty officer, where cadets already exercised officer's functions. Altogether the education lasted a maximum of 30 months (in 1944 it was shortened to 23 months). The prospective officers needed to have Abitur (school-leaving examination) and the right fitness for military service with a minimum height of 1.65 metres and 6/8 eyesight. Maximum age for service was 24 years. Until the start of the war there were training sailing boats ("Gorch Fock", "Horst Wessel" and "Albert Leo Schalgeter") and boats for the education system's inspection ("Emden", "Schlesien", "Schleswig-Holstein"). After September 1939 practice took place only on ships of the fleet, whereas

care” (*Referat Wehrbetreuung*) in the department “principles and organisation of military education” (*Grundsätze und Organisation der militärischen Ausbildung*) of the navy military office in the OKM. In June 1940 so-called military care officers were appointed to the staff. They were accountable to commanding officers and commanders “for the military spiritual state of the squad.”⁴¹ To the term *Wehrbetreuung*, which was also used in the *Luftwaffe*,⁴² belonged *geistige Führung* und free time organisation for sailors.⁴³

Wartime “national–political education”

Semantic affinity to the NSDAP that was hiding in the term *Wehrbetreuung* was fully explained at a conference of navy officers, which took place in Berlin in December 1940. It was closely connected to practical aspects of the service in the *Kriegsmarine*. Erich Frühling, a corvette captain and employee of the Navy Main Office (*Allgemeines Marinehauptamt*), saw the aim of “military care”⁴⁴ in “finding a new style of life, even

training for engineers was different from that for sea officers. They were all, however, integrated during day-to-day duties, for instance at preparing meals and operating guns, like on “Schleswig-Holstein.” The battleship opened fire with its main battery at the Polish positions on the Westerplatte on 1 September 1939; those were the first shots of World War II. Firing at Westerplatte was afterwards evaluated by the cadets with an artillery officer. Introduction of Nazi ideology to discuss the meaning of such military actions with the crew was sometimes present, but it depended on the decision of the current commander. Explicit trainings were carried out, especially ashore, in Mürwik, where history and political education (*Staatskunde*) were taught on the syllabus. At the marine school cadets attended five hours of classes in the morning and four hours in the afternoon. Moreover, they had two days of working hours till 21.30. The exam results, also in propaganda-like subjects, were the basis for the later order of promotion as precise reception of contents was of considerable relevance. At the end of the marine education the selection of officers was carried out. In order to become sub-lieutenant there had to be a positive vote of all the ship’s officers. See Lehnstaedt, “Der Angriff,” 138–139; Christian Jentsch, “Die Ausbildung zum Marineoffizier während der Kriegsjahre 1939–1945,” in: *Die Kriegsmarine*, 161–172.

41 Förster, “Geistige,” 548–549.

42 Vide Horst Boog, *Die deutsche Luftwaffenführung 1935–1945. Führungsprobleme, Spitzengliederung, Generalstabsausbildung* (Stuttgart: DVA, 1982), 596 ff.

43 Nolzen, *Kriegsmarine*, 175.

44 After all, *betreuen* (to look after) is an expression which has always been in common usage in the language in the Third Reich, and the Civil Code recognised the trustee (*Treuhänder*). The word was used inordinately and excessively back then. According to Victor Klemperer, a German scholar and author of the classic book: “LTI – Lingua Tertii Imperii”, in Nazi Germany the term *Betreuung* replaced in some way the word *Bedienung* (service). When someone looks after a person, he/she should be grateful for it, and aren’t allowed to put high demands on or distrust towards the helper. In the First World War, German students in the army were equipped with teaching materials and their education was continued on a course-by-course basis. During the next war they were “remotely looked after” (*fern-betreut*) and incorporated into a certain indoctrination system. Zob. Victor Klemperer, *Language of the Third Reich. LTI: Lingua Tertii Imperii. A Philologist’s Notebook*, trans. Martin Brady (New York: A&C Black, 2000), 222.

to a certain degree a new content of life for the soldiers” and in creating “a new social gathering” in the navy.⁴⁵ His remarks represented a clear connection to the activities of DAF, which for him were exemplary, because their ambition was to take care of the “racial comrade” (*Volksgenosse*) from the cradle to the grave. In the following years the *Referat Wehrbetreuung* in the OKM also tended towards this direction. At its disposal were more than 70 qualified employees, including 20 officers, 15 naval warrant officers and non-commissioned officers each and members of other crew ranks, 20 musicians and the same number of the Hitler Youth (*Hitlerjugend*, HJ) or the Reich Labour Service’s (*Reichsarbeitsdienst*, RAD) play groups, 4 theatre groups, 6 glove puppet stages, 8 student groups and 10 single artists were in Kriegsmarine on active service to entertain the seamen. Beside the “cultural care” (*kulturelle Betreuung*) the navy also took over the antisemitic indoctrination that was practiced in the NSDAP within the framework of the so-called training (*Schulung*).⁴⁶ An explanatory leaflet (*Wehrbetreuungsmerkblatt*) from 1 April 1941 obliged the unit commanders and their propaganda officers (*Wehrbetreuungsoffiziere*) to teach the sailors about the “Jewish question.”⁴⁷ Soldiers were to be informed that for a thousand years Jews had succeeded in penetrating “the healthy host nations” (*gesunde Wirtsvölker*) and harming them. As essential reading were such books as Alfred Rosenberg’s “Die Spur des Juden im Wandel der Zeiten”, Walther Brewitz’s “Von Abraham bis Rathenau Viertausend Jahre jüdischer Geschichte” and Hans F.K. Günther’s “Rassenkunde des deutschen Volkes.” The racial and antisemitic literature of the Nazi party was included, henceforth, also in the reading canon in the navy.⁴⁸

At the semantic level OKM always differentiated between *geistige Führung und Wehrbetreuung*. At a meeting for the navy commanders in Berlin in November 1941, for instance, vice admiral Walter Warzecha,⁴⁹ chief of the Navy Main Office, stressed that propaganda officers should only support Kriegsmarine’s commanders in the *geistiger Führung* process.⁵⁰ Apparently, in that matter, traditional leadership understanding crossed over for a long time, which still originated from the imperial navy, and a rather Nazi concept concerning indoctrination basics. “Military spiritual leadership” (*wehrgeistige Führung*) and total Nazification was in full implementation in

45 Förster, “Geistige,” 549–550.

46 Carl-Wilhelm Reibel, *Das Fundament der Diktatur. Die NSDAP-Ortsgruppen 1932–1945*. (Paderborn/München/Wien: Schöningh, 2002), 177–228; Phillip Wegehaupt, “Wir grüßen den Hass!": *Die ideologische Schulung und Ausrichtung der NSDAP-Funktionäre im Dritten Reich* (Berlin: Metropol, 2012), 15 ff.

47 Vossler, *Propaganda*, 128–129.

48 Mulligan, *Die Männer*, 237 ff.; Nolzen, “Kriegsmarine,” 175–176.

49 Klaus D. Patzwall and Veit Scherzer, *Das Deutsche Kreuz 1941–1945. Geschichte und Inhaber*, vol. 2 (Norderstedt: Patzwall, 2001), 559.

50 Förster, “Geistige,” 551–552.

the army, especially in the ground forces and aerial warfare from the beginning of 1942, namely after the crisis on the Eastern Front.⁵¹ In the navy, however, the terms *geistiger Führung und Wehrbetreuung* were in use for a longer time. They were even institutionalised as specific marine tasks, which were not the responsibility of officers of certain services, for example from Ic-department (observation of the enemy, espionage, sabotage defence and spiritual care),⁵² but a holistic leadership concept. Meanwhile, on 30 January 1943, following Hitler's outrage over the Battle of the Barents Sea (31 December 1942) with the British forces, Karl Dönitz, up to then Commander of the U-boats (*Befehlshaber der Unterseeboote*, BdU), was promoted to Grand Admiral, and replaced Raeder as Supreme Commander of the Navy.⁵³ Nevertheless, the appointment of Dönitz as the highest figure in the OKM changed a little in the institutional structure of the Kriegsmarine. Undoubtedly, he was unconditionally devoted to National Socialism and Hitler.⁵⁴ Although Dönitz only joined the NSDAP in 1944, Hitler fully appreciated how he developed the Nazi indoctrination program for German seamen and his confidence that U-boats could still defeat Great Britain.⁵⁵ Dönitz's loyalty, patriotism and ability soon won him the confidence of the Führer.⁵⁶

In the next weeks and months after the Stalingrad and Tunis defeats, Nazification of the navy and other Wehrmacht branches became more acute than ever. Employees of the section of *Referat Wehrbetreuung* in the OKM were urged to become more self-critical, obviously under the effect of some encouraging appeals from the new Supreme Commander of the Navy. Erich Frühling, at a speech during a course in the officers' school in Mürwik at the beginning of 1943 asked them to keep in mind that the Soviet marine fleet consisted of more or less a quarter of political commissioners. In his view, it meant that they were "therefore educated in the greatest extent as political and leaders of men."⁵⁷ Consequently, the main task of *geistige Führung* had to be strengthened as it was crucial for the war. The High Command of the Armed Forces and the Party

51 Vide M. Messerschmidt, *Die Wehrmacht*, 264–276, 443–446; Volker R. Berghahn, "NSDAP und "geistige Führung" der Wehrmacht 1939–1943," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 1 (1969): 33–36; Waldemar Besson, "Zur Geschichte des Nationalsozialistischen Führungsoffiziers," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 1 (1961): 84–85; Arne W.G. Zoepf, *Wehrmacht zwischen Tradition und Ideologie. Der NS-Führungsoffizier im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Frankfurt am Main/Bern/New York: Lang, 1988), 47–67, 125–128.

52 Felix Römer, *Der Kommissarbefehl. Wehrmacht und NS-Verbrechen an der Ostfront 1941/42* (Paderborn/München/Wien: Schöningh, 2008), 318 ff.

53 See Pfannes, Salamone, *The Great*, 64–66, 225–252.

54 See Nolzen, *Kriegsmarine*, 176–177; Salewski, *Die Deutschen*, vol. 1 (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1998), 326–327; Hartwig, *Großadmiral*, 158–199.

55 Tyler Bamford, *Nazi Germany's Last Leader: Admiral Karl Dönitz*, accessed 22 November 2021, <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/nazi-germanys-leader-admiral-karl-donitz>.

56 John Terraine, *Business in Great Waters. The U-Boat Wars, 1916–1945* (London: Pen&Sword, 1989), 520–522.

57 J. Förster, "Geistige," 583–585.

Chancellery (*Partei-Kanzlei*) in the spring of 1943 were also very concerned about the lacking ideological firmness of German soldiers. Hermann Reinecke, the head of the Main Army Office (*Allgemeines Wehrmachtamt*, AWA) in the OKW, and Martin Bormann from *Partei-Kanzlei*, were in permanent contact with each other.⁵⁸ On their initiative in the Party's fortress of the order (*Ordensburg*) Sonthofen in Allgäu⁵⁹ an orientation and indoctrination course for the representatives of Wehrmacht took place between 31 May and 5 June 1943. At the training conference there were 300 party speakers present, who were each assigned to one of the army branches. The aim of the meeting was, in Reinecke's words, to "to also make the last man in the German army trusting."⁶⁰ Three hundred selected soldiers, all of them so-called political leaders (*Politische Leiter*⁶¹) of the NSDAP, were supposed to carry "faith" in the "end victory" (*Endsieg*) into the respective units. The members of the High Command of the Navy who took part in the course later ordered Nazi propaganda periodical magazines from the SS Main Office (*SS-Hauptamt*, SS-HA), i.e. "SS-Leithefte"⁶² and "Germanische Leithefte" as exemplary teaching materials for their commanders.⁶³ The SS as a role model of discipline and indoctrination for the Kriegsmarine was all in all a bit peculiar as both formations of the officer corps were different in regard to origin, social profile and self-image. The topic regarding mutual ideological interactions between the SS and the navy still needs to be profoundly researched.⁶⁴

The assumption of practice and contents of the NSDAP's *Schulung* in the navy was continued after the second indoctrination course for military personnel organised by the OKW and Party Chancellery in Bad Schachen on 11–14 October 1943. The meeting was attended by 60 generals and admirals who were to be "stimulated" by the speeches of Nazi leaders, including Joseph Goebbels, Heinrich Himmler, Alfred Rosenberg and also by a few Gauleiters. The soldiers were to be "educated with regard to military spirituality just the same as Party members."⁶⁵ Every army officer had to know Hitler's "Mein Kampf" very well and become "political commissioner." On 16 October Hitler's speech ended the course. Inspired by its results Dönitz, who was also present

58 See Christian Streit, "General der Infanterie Hermann Reinecke," in: *Hitlers militrische Elite*, 203–209; Peter Longerich, *Hitlers Stellvertreter. Fhrung der Partei und Kontrolle des Staatsapparates durch den Stab Heß und die Partei-Kanzlei Bormann* (Mnchen/London/New York: Saur, 1992), 125.

59 See more Franz A. Heinen, *NS-Ordensburgen. Vogelsang, Sonthofen, Krsinsee* (Berlin: Links, 2011).

60 Frster, "Geistige," 57–571.

61 Willi Dreßfen, "Politische Leiter," in: *Enzyklopdie des Nationalsozialismus*, ed. Wolfgang Benz (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2007), 708.

62 Hans-Christian Harten, *Himmlers Lehrer. Die Weltanschauliche Schulung in der SS 1933–1945* (Paderborn: Schnningh, 2014), 421 ff.

63 Berghahn, "NSDAP," 56–57; Vossler, *Propaganda*, 129; Frster, "Geistige," 586.

64 Mulligan, *Die Mnner*, 225–228; Nolzen, "Kriegsmarine," 177.

65 Frster, "Geistige," 576–577; Zoepf, *Wehrmacht*, 69–70.

in Bad Schachen, decided to fundamentally reorganise *Wehrbetreuung* in the Kriegsmarine. On 18 October 1939 he launched the Military Spiritual Staff (*Wehrgeistiger Führungsstab*, WF) located in the Navy Main Office, headed by rear-admiral Friedrich Hüffmeier, a fanatical National Socialist.⁶⁶ This post, which could be compared to that of political commissar in the Red Army, was responsible for maintaining fighting morale and Nazi spirit among sailors. The staff comprised three command departments (*Führungabteilungen I, II, III*) under corvette captain Hans Drenckhan, marine captain Alfred Hans Symons and captain second lieutenant Herbert Just. The average age of the heads of departments and sections in the WF was just 46 years old. The most important part of that institutional process in the navy, however, was the visible change from the concept of *Wehrbetreuung* to a “total war” (*totaler Krieg*) attitude. Within the bounds of *wehrgeistige Führung* members of the Kriegsmarine from that time on were to be systematically penetrated by Nazi ideology and not only be “looked after” (*betreut*).⁶⁷

National Socialist Leadership Officers

Meanwhile, in autumn and winter 1943, the way was paved for a fundamental reorganisation of *wehrgeistige Führung* in the whole Wehrmacht. Driving forces behind the process were the Main Army Office, which wanted to systematise the “military spiritual leadership” in all army branches, and *Partei-Kanzlei*, insisting on stronger participation of the NSDAP in those matters. Regardless of the fact, Reinecke, Bormann and their employees aimed simultaneously at centralising *wehrgeistige Führung* in the offices of army and Party. Thanks to their initiative, on 22 December 1943 Hitler signed a decree, prepared by the AWA, that took the “military spiritual leadership” to another level.⁶⁸ The Führer ordered to establish the Nazi Leadership Staff in the OKW (*NS-Führungsstab*, NSF-OKW) and assigned it a task to secure “formation of political objectives [*Willensbildung*] and activation necessary for the units.”⁶⁹ Reinecke was appointed the overall head of NSF-OKW and was obliged to engage the NSDAP as a “bearer of political will” more in the process of military indoctrination. Moreover,

66 Förster, “Geistige,” 586–589; Rudolf Absolon, *Die Wehrmacht im Dritten Reich. 19. Dezember 1941 bis 9. Mai 1945*, vol. 6 (Boppard am Rhein: Boldt, 1995), 212 ff.

67 Nolzen, “Kriegsmarine,” 177–178.

68 Dokument 289, in: “Führer-Erlasse” 1939–1945. *Edition sämtlicher überlieferter, nicht im Reichsgesetzblatt abgedruckter, von Hitler während des Zweiten Weltkrieges schriftlich erteilter Direktiven aus den Bereichen Staat, Partei, Wirtschaft, Besatzungspolitik und Militärverwaltung*, ed. Martin Moll (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1997), 381–382.

69 Vide Peter Joachim Lapp, *Hitlers NS-Führungsoffiziere 1944/45. Die letzten Propagandisten des Endsieges* (Aachen: Helios, 2019), 11 ff.

he was supposed to propose suitable officers who had to take over the further Nazification of each army's branch. Those officers were named National Socialist Leadership Officers (*Nationalsozialistische Führungsoffiziere*, NSFO) and they were subordinate to respective unit commanders. They were responsible for both military command and political education/instruction. Therefore, the NSFO were not like the political commissars of the Soviet Army, who were deprived of any military command. The NSFO were installed in land, aerial forces and in the navy up to division level on a full-time basis, as well as in regiments, battalions and companies as voluntary workers.⁷⁰ When necessary they replaced previous indoctrination officers in military units who proved themselves to be unsuitable or not ardent enough for the task of *Schulung*. Reinecke's officers above all had to bring soldiers much closer to Nazi ideology through lectures, courses and discussions; the main task was to induce strong conviction so as to reinforce fanatic fighting spirit and morale, and therefore change Germany's critical military situation.⁷¹

Initially in the army besides the *NS-Führungsstab* there were also new leadership staff established, mostly on the basis of the previous personnel of *Wehrgeistige Führungsstäbe*.⁷² Dönitz established *NS-Führungsstab* in the OKM on 10 January 1944.⁷³ On the same day the first workshop for commanders and leaders of units of indoctrination courses in the Weimar began, the two next seminars for U-boat commanding officers and flotilla medics took place in Danzig and in Angers in western France. The events were still planned within the bounds of *wehrgeistige Führung* in the Kriegsmarine. In three Wehrmacht branches the activity of *NS-Führungsstäbe* began very slowly and soon proved itself to be time-consuming. At first a working team in the Party Chancellery (*Arbeitsstab für NS-Führungsfragen der Parteikanzlei/Gruppe II F der Parteikanzlei*) was launched, whose task was to coordinate the *Truppenbetreuung* of other party offices and to adapt to the new requirements.⁷⁴ Wilhelm "Willi" Ruder was appointed as head of the working team as he was for a long time active in the ideological training apparatus in the NSDAP.⁷⁵ *Partei-Kanzlei* had the right of nomination of the NSFO. The officers were regular Wehrmacht officers, but they had to be approved by Ruder's commission. Its members had to be checked in terms of political "flawlessness" and application to Nazi criteria. In order to tackle selection and training Ruder turned to the Party's district personnel offices (*Gaupersonnlämter*), which as a rule nominated for the NSFO only those candidates who had been members of the

70 Messerschmidt, *Die Wehrmacht*, 452

71 Nolzen, *Kriegsmarine*, 178.

72 Förster, "Geistige," 590–601.

73 Zoepf, *Wehrmacht*, 130–131.

74 Ibidem, 137–138.

75 Longerich, *Hitlers*, 181.

NSDAP or its organisational associations.⁷⁶ The most vital criterion was the necessity to be “militarily and politically tried and tested.”⁷⁷

The proposals of *Gaupersonlämter* were transferred then by *Partei-Kanzlei* to the NSF-OKW and from there to *NS-Führungsstäbe* in land, air forces and the navy. In general the proposed NSFO could take up his duties only after consent given by the respective commander’s unit. *Partei-Kanzlei* had to wait for the crucial decision to be made by the military authority.⁷⁸ Nevertheless, that was mutual because implementing regulations for Hitler’s decree from 22 December 1943 enabled the commanders to let certain officers of *wehrgeistige Führung* continue their work as NSFOs. The appointment was possible after the positive evaluation of the candidate by the Party’s district personnel offices. All in all, the selection process could be seen as a mutual suggestion and assessment exchange of rights between the Wehrmacht and the NSDAP.⁷⁹ In the Kriegsmarine it lasted until 13 March 1944 when Dönitz finally announced binding criteria for selection of the future Nazi Leadership officers. Those had to fulfil such conditions as: “1) being an unconditional National Socialist, 2) special personal skills, 3) outstanding probation at the front, 4) experience and practical competences in the political and ideological leadership and education: membership in the Party and active political activity as political leader are desired (...).”⁸⁰ The NSF officers in the OKM, under the overall leadership of Friedrich Hüffmeier, seemed to fulfil all those requirements. According to the OKW in autumn 1944 the personnel of the NSFO consisted of 32 officers and teachers.⁸¹ Among them there were 6 active and 26 officers in the reserve status. Nineteen out of 32 employees (59%) were members of the NSDAP, and likewise 19% of them were “believing in God” (*gottgläubig*). The percentage share of *Parteigenossen* lay exactly between the figures of the NSF-OKW (77%) and NSF-OKH (45%). By the end of 1944, approximately 47,000 secondary NSFO and 1,100 primary NSFOs took part in political courses.⁸²

In the navy as far as the appointment of the NSFO is concerned, Hüffmeier and his employees required from lower marine authorities staff proposals. After evaluating them they handed the candidatures further to the NSF-OKW, which consulted the Party Chancellery. Only after the candidature was agreed by both sides, such a person could finally be appointed as an NSFO (initially on a temporary basis). The time-consuming procedure meant that before 1 April 1944 there was not a single NSFO active

76 See Besson, “Zur Geschichte,” 104–112.

77 Nolzen, “Kriegsmarine,” 179.

78 See Messerschmidt, *Die Wehrmacht*, 449.

79 Zoepf, *Wehrmacht*, 151–168.

80 Hartwig, *Großadmiral*, 181, 365.

81 Zoepf, *Wehrmacht*, 129.

82 Nolzen, *Kriegsmarine*, 179.

in the Kriegsmarine.⁸³ What is interesting, frequently the *Gaupersonlämter* rejected the candidates from land, aerial forces and from the navy because of their alleged “reactionary attitude.” Three branches of the Wehrmacht, however, often disagreed with the proposals coming from the NSDAP.⁸⁴ In addition, there was even an example of a marine officer who, with reference to his critical attitude towards National Socialism, refused to accept the post.⁸⁵

The regular activity of the NSFO in the Wehrmacht war further delayed them, by necessity of the candidates, to take part beforehand in an educational course (*Schulungslehrgang*) organised in Ordensburg Krössinsee in Pomerania (today Złocieniec in Poland), the first of three Nazi educational centres constructed in Germany for cadres of the NSDAP.⁸⁶ The initial indoctrination seminar started on 8 March 1944. It lasted 10 days and was followed by the same standard scheme. At first Reinecke or one of his employees had an introductory lecture about the aims of the NSFO’s apparatus.⁸⁷ In the next days all those present had to endure 30 lectures, whose topics were agreed between *Partei-Kanzlei* and the NSF-OKW. The NSDAP’s representatives like Ruder gave, for example, lengthy talks about “the historical position of the NSDAP” or “the relation between the NSDAP and the Wehrmacht.” The courses re-educated hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of German soldiers with virulent antisemitic propaganda, like the notion of Jewish people as parasites or rats to be exterminated.⁸⁸ The lectures, with which the officers should be instructed and fanaticised, were accompanied also by a rich supporting programme. It included morning appeal, hoisting the swastika flag, performances of opera plays, puppeteering, comedies or watching films and participation in “evenings of comradeship” (*Kameradschaftsabende*). The leisure activities were to be organised in an unsuspecting and “unpolitical” manner of “cultural work” (*Kulturarbeit*), which was already present in the army in the form of *Truppenbetreuung* from September 1939. The supporting programme of *Schulung* in Ordensburg Krössinsee had two main tasks. On the one hand it should give the prospective NSFO practical instructions how to effectively indoctrinate soldiers in the Nazi spirit. On the other hand, the NSDAP and the NSF-OKW had the opportunity to check in detail the individual stance and character of the participants. In order to do so they were

83 Walmrath, “*Iustitia*,” 336–337.

84 J. Förster, “Geistige,” 610–613.

85 Zoepf, *Wehrmacht*, 167.

86 See more Rolf Sawinski, *Die Ordensburg Krössinsee in Pommern. Von der NS-Ordensburg zur polnischen Kaserne* (Aachen: Helios, 2008).

87 Zoepf, *Wehrmacht*, 169–202.

88 Saul Friedländer, *Die Jahre der Vernichtung. Das Dritte Reich und die Juden, 1933–1939*, vol. 1 (München: C.H. Beck, 1998), 799; Werner Rahn, “Dönitz, die Marineführung und die Verteidigung der ‘Festung Europa,’” in: *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg*, vol. 10/1: *Die militärische Niederwerfung der Wehrmacht*, eds. Horst Boog and Rolf Dieter Müller (München: DVA, 2008), 42.

assigned to work communities (*Arbeitsgemeinschaften*) that had to fill the supporting programme with content. Every community was headed by a Party functionary and an officer from the NSF–OKW. They assessed the candidates in writing. Together with positions of *Gaupersonlämter* the assessments were the basis for the final selection decision.⁸⁹

After the unsuccessful assassination attempt on Hitler on 20 July 1944 the regime intensified its efforts to thoroughly penetrate soldiers with Nazi ideology and to strengthen the ties between the army and the NSDAP. Such demands were also present in Reinecke's appeal concerning "the rescue of the Führer" on 21 July 1944. Dönitz made that suggestion his own and during the conference of the Kriegsmarine's commanders on 24–25 July 1944 he explained long-windedly the alleged contexts of the assassination attempt. He said that the "fanatical fight" was "our vocation and our fate" and therefore every navy commander had to "fanatically stand behind the Nazi state and unconditionally educate and set the units appropriately."⁹⁰ Militant fanaticism in the Kriegsmarine, however, was far below the expectations of the NSDAP, which was evident for instance at a meeting between Ruder and Dönitz on 17 October 1944.⁹¹ Ruder stressed that the indoctrination work of the NSFO needed a "clear, ideological declaration of belief" and henceforth it was contested by the "denominationally bound" (*konfessionell Gebundene*) Christian officers in the navy, especially by the younger ones. He gave an example of a lay priest who was sent by a captain of a certain ship to one of the NSFO's courses. While having a lecture the priest was repeatedly interrupted by Party hecklers and eventually had to leave the seminar. In response, Dönitz promised in future not to propose as NSFO officers anyone who was "denominationally controlled" and to prepare the relevant decree. Otherwise he was content with *wehrgeistige Führung* in his sphere of command. In his opinion, Hitler's decree of 22 December 1943 was not necessary for the navy because its "fighting spirit" could not be more outbid.⁹²

The Party Chancellery, however, viewed work of the NSFO in the Kriegsmarine clearly in a more negative light, which showed an internal document of the NSDAP from the end of the year 1944. At that point in time there were 1074 full-time (*hauptamtlich*) and 47,332 secondary/additional (*nebenamtlich*) NSFOs active in the three branches of the Wehrmacht.⁹³ In the navy there were only 37 full-time and 900 additional NSFOs. In the first category there were 11 active officers (29.7%) and 26 suspended officers (70.3%). Twenty-seven of the full-time NSFOs were members

89 Nolzen, "Kriegsmarine," 180.

90 Salewski, *Die deutsche Seekriegsleitung*, 645; Hartwig, *Großadmiral*, 170–178.

91 Zoepf, *Wehrmacht*, 307–310.

92 Nolzen, "Kriegsmarine," 181.

93 Vide Zoepf, *Wehrmacht*, 207–208.

of the NSDAP (73%), whereas 18 of them described themselves as “believing in God” (48.6%); so in Ruder’s terms they got rid of a burden of the “denominational bond.” The numbers were far under average in the land forces, where out of 624 full-time NSFOs 556 were *Parteigenossen* (89.2%) and 389 were *gottgläubig* (62.4%). In 13 indoctrination courses held in Ordensburg Krössinsee 2435 candidates participated for NSFOs from the three Wehrmacht branches. Among them were 462 persons from the navy, so overall only 5 percent. They were assessed on four levels: “exceptionally suitable”, “full-time suitable”, “additionally suitable” and “unsuitable.” In the Kriegsmarine conspicuous was the average low number of full-time NSFOs (4%). It was under the analogical number in *Heer* and therefore the NSDAP saw it as unsatisfactory. The result could be explained on the one hand by further existence of Christian traditions and, in terms of the NSDAP, “reactionary forces” in the navy, which were “unsuitable” for the future cooperation with the Party.⁹⁴ In that context Ruder explained in February 1945 in a lecture that, in the view of the Party, the directive of “political soldiers” had been widely disregarded and correcting it would secure the inner force of the army: “To the revolutionary will of the enemy (...), we must as of now oppose the full revolutionary power of National Socialism. (...) Wehrmacht, Party, Volkssturm: all of them are the National Socialist revolution. The German soldier thus fights as an armed National-Socialist. Waging war in a purely military fashion is not enough.”⁹⁵ In the last days of the “Thousand Year Reich” such appeals only fell on deaf ears and even Dönitz was no longer very interested in the continuation of the NSFO’s work.

After 20 April 1945, facing the destruction of the Third Reich, Hitler appointed Dönitz as his successor as president of the country, minister of war and supreme commander of the Wehrmacht.⁹⁶ After Hitler’s suicide on 30 April, Dönitz opened negotiations for surrender. After the capitulation of Germany in Reims on 7 May 1945 (to the Soviets two days later) he remained as head of the Flensburg Government, as it became known.⁹⁷ Dönitz and his administration were permitted to stay in Flensburg for another two weeks, until their arrest on May 23.⁹⁸ During cabinet meetings they debated meaningless issues, for example whether portraits of Hitler should be removed. That fact can be seen as a total retreat from Nazi propaganda, not only in the army. After

94 Nolzen, “Kriegsmarine,” 181–182.

95 Kunz, *Wehrmacht*, 240–241.

96 Walter Baum, “Marine, Nationalsozialismus und Widerstand,” *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 1 (1963): 17–18, 39.

97 Vide Michael Jones, *After Hitler. The Last Days of the Second World War in Europe* (London: Hachette UK, 2015), 88 ff.; Ian Kershaw, *The End. Hitler’s Germany 1944–45* (London: Allen Lane, 2011), 360 ff.; Herbert Kraus, “Karl Dönitz und das Ende des ‘Dritten Reiches’ in Flensburg 1945,” in: *Lange Schatten. Ende der NS-Diktatur und frühe Nachkriegsjahre in Flensburg*, eds. Broder Schwensen, et al. (Flensburg: Stadtarchiv Flensburg, 2000), 14 ff.

98 Peter Padfield, *Dönitz – des Teufels Admiral* (Berlin, et.al.: Ullstein, 1984), 503 ff.

that period Dönitz was sentenced to ten years' imprisonment by the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg in 1946.⁹⁹ He was released from prison ten years later. In the next years, Dönitz portrayed himself as a professional soldier who allegedly knew nothing of Hitler's expansionist plans and crimes. In reality, he was totally devoted to Hitler.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, Dönitz wilfully ignored the genocidal nature of the Nazi regime and later claimed ignorance of the Holocaust.¹⁰¹

Conclusions

In summary, it must be stressed that between the navy under Erich Raeder and the NSDAP there was no institutionalised communication, which could be gathered from the relations between the OKM and *Partei-Kanzlei* in the years 1935–1943. In a way it was not necessary because, as part of the Wehrmacht in the Nazi state, the navy acted within the bounds of political guidelines. There were, though, some personal connections between the Kriegsmarine and the Party as many of its members belonged to the NSDAP.¹⁰² Bormann developed regular contacts, however, with the OKM since 1941/1942. When Dönitz took up the post of the commander-in-chief of the German navy that formal structure was loosened a bit. Nonetheless, what showed the example of the “military spiritual leadership,” there was the development of an extensive adaptation of institutional practice in the Kriegsmarine and the NSDAP. That process could not only be put down to a causal model of cause and effect, but it could be described rather as “institutional isomorphism.”¹⁰³ Institutional isomorphism is a concept of institutional theory “to explain the homogeneity of organisations in a field.” In another words it is “a similarity of the processes or structure of one organisation to those of another, be it the result of imitation or independent development under similar constraints.” American sociologists Paul J. DiMaggio and Walter W. Powell developed in 1983 a pioneering framework that analysed the “different mechanisms, including

99 Hartwig, *Großadmiral*, 42 ff. Erich Raeder was also taken to Nuremberg to stand trial on the counts of conspiracy to commit crimes against peace, war crimes, and crimes against humanity; planning, initiating, and waging wars of aggression; and crimes against the laws of war. He was sentenced to life imprisonment. Due to his ill health Raeder was released in September 1955. See Bird, *Kriegsmarine*, 283 et. seqq.

100 Hartwig, *Großadmiral*, 192.

101 Terraine, *Business*, 520–522.

102 Lehnstaedt, “Der Angriff,” 138.

103 The term comes from a book by an American sociologist Amos H. Hawley, *Human Ecology. A Theoretical Essay* (Chicago: Chicago Press, 1968). See also Richard W. Scott, *Institutions and Organizations. Ideas and Interests* (Los Angeles, et.al.: Sage, 2008), 151–158.

coercive, mimetic and normative, through which isomorphism occurs.”¹⁰⁴ The institutional adaptation of the navy and the NSDAP began with *wehrgeistige Führung*, then with imitation. In that context the High Command of the Kriegsmarine imitated at first the activities of DAF and KdF so as to “look after” (*betreuen*) its members, and also by incorporating semantics used in the NSDAP. In the second step the normative pressure played an important role, which resulted from “general compulsory military service” (*Allgemeine Wehrpflicht*). It manifested itself primarily in the growing number of *Parteigenossen* and *Politische Leiter*, who were also active in the navy. Their specific competences included, from spring 1943, the “internal leadership” indoctrination component. Finally institutional isomorphism between the Kriegsmarine and the Party was accelerated by the *Führererlass* from 22 December 1943 and after 20 July 1944. Then came a stronger dependence of the Wehrmacht on the other Nazi organisations. The autonomy of the army in the Third Reich began at that time to systematically erode.¹⁰⁵

Previous research concerning *wehrgeistige Führung* in the war years has been implicitly interested in its short- and medium-term implications. On the one hand it tries to explain the relatively long resistance of German soldiers to excessive ideological fanaticism; on the other some explorations indicate the military points of view, especially an oath of loyalty to Hitler, sometimes referred in as the Soldier’s Oath, taken by soldiers and officers in the Third Reich after 1934, so a vital psychological element to follow orders (as well as for justifying war atrocities).¹⁰⁶ Another factor in this case could be primary group bonds among soldiers.¹⁰⁷ The mentioned interpretations, which are present also in the research regarding the Kriegsmarine, are obviously logical, but they contain a major methodical problem. They are lacking an analytical framework necessary to assess the impact of mental dispositions on individual behaviour. In many studies there is an insufficient distinction between education and socialisation. *Wehrgeistige Führung* is the question of education, namely an intentional change of persons

104 Vide Paul J. DiMaggio, Walter W. Powell, “The Iron Cage Revisited. Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields.” *American Sociological Review* 48 (1983): 147–160; Ana Krajnović, “Institutional theory and isomorphism: limitations in multinational companies,” *Journal of Corporate Governance, Insurance, and Risk Management* 5 (2018): 1–7; Konstanze Senge, *Das Neue am Neo-Institutionalismus. Der Neo-Institutionalismus im Kontext der Organisationswissenschaft* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften in GWV Fachverlage, 2011), 99–135.

105 Nolzen, “Kriegsmarine,” 182–183.

106 See more Peter Calvocoressi, Guy Wint, Robert J. Pritchard, *Total War. The Causes and Courses of the Second World War* (Harmondsworth: Viking, 1989), 57; Marc Cogen, *Democracies and the Shock of War. The Law as a Battlefield* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2016), 187; Müller, *Das Heer*, 135–136.

107 Vide Thomas Kühne, *Kameradschaft. Die Soldaten des nationalsozialistischen Krieges und das 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck&Ruprecht, 2006).

by other persons.¹⁰⁸ The same concerns military education in the Wehrmacht, which was of course an intentional process within the organisation. Factors like bonds of camaraderie, pressure of a group, expectations, nationalism or internalisation of military values and norms, however, are undoubtedly phenomena of socialisation, which takes place in all social processes and cannot be controlled because it is unintentional by nature.¹⁰⁹ Therefore, in order to fully explain the situational behaviour of German soldiers, not only during the war, education and socialisation had to always be taken into consideration, as well as the internal organisational perspective of the certain Wehrmacht's branch. The most vital part for military scholars is the analysis of connection or interdependence between education and socialisation of soldiers, preferably in the form of the social history of the army. The Wehrmacht as a specific type of organisation needs to be examined also on the basis of organisation–sociological methods.¹¹⁰

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108 Vide Niklas Luhmann, *Das Erziehungssystem der Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2002), 48–81.

109 In the Kriegsmarine the expressions of education and socialisation, mental perceptions and interpretation patterns of behaviour could be found in the notes of cadets. They all had to keep a logbook (*Logbuch*) of important events, operations and navigation of a ship, which was controlled by a superior. Such logbooks during the war were often heavily impacted by Nazi propaganda and ideology as the cadets were mainly the generation of twenty-year-old men; their socialisation as adolescents had already taken place under Hitler's rule. They were saturated with racial stereotypes or taught that violence and force were normal political means. Zob. S. Lehnstaedt, K. Lehnstaedt, "Der Angriff," pp. 139–170; Jentzsch, "Die Ausbildung," 163; Michael Buddrus, *Totale Erziehung für den totalen Krieg. Hitlerjugend und nationalsozialistische Jugendpolitik*, vol. 1–2 (München: Saur, 2003).

110 Nolzen, "Kriegsmarine," 183; Lehnstaedt, "Der Angriff," 139.

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SUMMARY

The article deals with the problem of institutional mechanics and willingness for acquisition of the Nazi worldview in the Kriegsmarine. In the centre of the reflections remains a crucial question: how the indoctrination process in the German navy took place during the time after 1935. Furthermore, the organisational interactions between the NSDAP and the Kriegsmarine are analysed, as well as motives and limits of the Party's endeavours to ideologically impact the attitudes and views of the sailors. How this development of indoctrination efforts was carried out and what results it brought is described on the basis of the Nazi pseudo-pedagogic concept of "military spiritual leadership" (*wehrgeistige Führung*). As part of the measures to preserve its "state within the state" status, the navy, especially during World War II, began to systematically Nazify itself in a paradoxical aim to show Adolf Hitler that it was not necessary to put an end to its traditional independence. In order to prevent the "coordination" (*Gleichschaltung*) from above, the Kriegsmarine engaged itself more and more in a process of self-indoctrination. The text is an outline of the subject matter.

Indoktrynacja nazistowska w Kriegsmarine i jej relacje z NSDAP w latach 1935–1945 – zarys problematyki

Słowa kluczowe: Kriegsmarine, NSDAP, indoktrynacja

STRESZCZENIE

Artykuł traktuje o problemie mechanizmów instytucjonalnych i gotowości przyswojenia ideologii nazistowskiej w Kriegsmarine. W centrum refleksji pozostaje kluczowe pytanie, w jaki sposób przebiegał proces indoktrynacji w niemieckiej marynarce wojennej po 1935 r. Ponadto, analizowane są organizacyjne interakcje między NSDAP i Kriegsmarine, jak również motywy i ograniczenia zabiegów partii nazistowskiej, by wpłynąć w sposób ideologiczny na postawy i poglądy marynarzy. Na jakiej zasadzie przebiegały te starania oraz jakie przyniosły rezultaty ukazano na podstawie nazistowskiego pseudopedagogicznego konceptu “duchowego przywództwa bojowego” (*wehrgeistige Führung*). Elementem zabiegów korpusu oficerskiego Kriegsmarine, by zachować tradycyjny status “państwa w państwie” paradoksalnie była postępująca nazyfikacja marynarki wojennej, szczególnie w okresie II wojny światowej, której celem miało być udowodnienie Adolfowi Hitlerowi, że nie było konieczne ograniczanie jej tradycyjnej autonomii w ramach sił zbrojnych. W celu uniknięcia odgórnego gwałtownego podważenia autonomii Kriegsmarine ulegała jednak sama coraz bardziej procesowi narodowosocialistycznej indoktrynacji. Niniejszy tekst stanowi zarys omawianej problematyki.

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