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0521019567 - Helmuth von Moltke and the Origins of the First World War

Annika Mombauer

Excerpt

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Introduction

The origins of the First World War have been debated continually since its outbreak in August 1914. Every possible point of view has been advanced in trying to explain why war broke out, and the heated debates that surround the topic continue to fascinate historians and students alike. Since the Fischer controversy of the 1960s, some consensus has been reached and no one today would seriously support Lloyd George's famous dictum that the European nations had 'slithered into war', almost as an act of fate, an inevitable result of alliance policy for which no single government could be held responsible. Rather, many would argue that the fact that war proved unavoidable in 1914 was due to earlier developments and crises, some of which had been instigated or provoked by Germany, whose military and political decision-makers had embarked on *Weltmachtspolitik*. This intention of securing for Germany a position of dominance both within Europe and ultimately world-wide was at the heart of the origins of the First World War.

The culpability of Germany's political and military leaders can hardly be disputed, and yet the extent of their responsibility for creating a situation that would lead to war is still subject to debate. The importance and dominance of the military in Imperial Germany is almost proverbial, and their responsibility for bringing about war in 1914 can be clearly demonstrated with the help of archival sources that have only recently come to light.¹ These new documents support the thesis that German decision-makers consciously risked war in 1914, in order to improve the country's deteriorating position vis-à-vis her European neighbours. Some of the military went even further in their bellicose designs, and wanted 'war for war's sake'. In the not-too-distant future, Germany would no longer be able to wage a war against her neighbours with any real chance of success, their argument ran. As a result of this

¹ For more details, see the 'Note on Sources', pp. 6–13 below.

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perceived urgency, their actions and demands were motivated by a desire to fight a war before it ceased to be a viable option.

In January 1906, Helmuth von Moltke became Chief of the Great General Staff. He was to occupy this important position for the next eight years – a crucial time, as we know with hindsight, during which he was responsible for developing Germany's war plans, and ultimately for leading her army into war. This book examines the role and importance of Imperial Germany's last peacetime Chief of the General Staff, and is based largely on primary evidence which has recently become available following the collapse of the Soviet Union. In offering a re-evaluation of that most highly rated of Prussian institutions, the Great General Staff, and its most poorly rated chief, the younger Moltke, several common myths and preconceptions can be dispelled.

Moltke's reputation as Chief of the General Staff was largely shaped by the fact that during the war the German army under his leadership fared less well than expected, culminating in the disastrous defeat on the Marne and his subsequent dismissal. His ultimate failure as a military leader has led to the view that Moltke's entire time in office was unsuccessful, especially compared to that of his predecessor, who would allegedly have been able to achieve victory where Moltke failed. He was unfortunate in succeeding Count Alfred von Schlieffen, a Chief of the General Staff who left behind a devoted 'school' of followers, and Moltke's achievements and failings have invariably been compared to those of his famous predecessor. Moltke's many contemporary and subsequent critics have pointed to the fact that he had not been an ambitious or well-qualified Chief of the General Staff, nor an obvious candidate to replace Schlieffen, and that his pessimism and lack of self-confidence impeded his decision-making.²

The deliberate attempt after the war to establish a favourable view of Schlieffen has clouded our vision of the pre-war years. We see Schlieffen and his famous deployment plan, as well as Moltke's subsequent strategic planning, through the eyes of a 'Schlieffen school' of German military commentators. Much of Moltke's role has been distorted by this biased perspective. The most outspoken critic of Moltke, and a dedicated believer in Schlieffen's abilities, was Wilhelm Groener, who had served on the General Staff under both Schlieffen and Moltke. Groener, more than anyone else, has to be regarded as the creator of the

² For a recent negative evaluation of Moltke, based on the views of the 'Schlieffen school', see Arden Bucholz, *Moltke, Schlieffen and Prussian War Planning*, Providence and Oxford 1991, p. 223.

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'Schlieffen myth'. His papers in the military archive in Freiburg and his numerous publications created an idealized image of Schlieffen and bemoaned any changes made to Schlieffen's plan.³ Another dedicated and outspoken supporter of Schlieffen and a strong believer in the Schlieffen Plan was Wilhelm von Hahnke, who was doubtless motivated by the fact that he was Schlieffen's son-in-law, as well as his adjutant and secretary. Indeed, it was to Hahnke that Schlieffen had dictated his famous memoranda of 1905 and 1912. After the war he became an ardent defender of the 'Schlieffen myth', whose post-war reminiscences testify to his devotion to Schlieffen: 'I trusted Schlieffen blindly and during my decade-long work with him as his first adjutant and secretary I was absolutely convinced of the truth and validity of his thoughts. [Schlieffen] accepted me as his son into his heart and his trust, and confided to me the labour of his whole life.'⁴

The following account is both a study of Moltke's role and an attempt to show that the picture painted in the immediate post-war years was tendentious and sometimes deliberately clouded the issues. A departure from the usual Schlieffen-centred perspective helps to shed new light on Moltke and German strategic planning in the pre-war years. Foremost among the myths, and most damaging to Moltke's reputation, has been the Schlieffen Plan and Moltke's alleged adulteration of it. Because Moltke has so often been accused of ruining the famous deployment plan, and of being an unworthy successor to Schlieffen, it is necessary not only to examine Moltke's appointment, but to go further back in time to investigate Schlieffen's time in office and the genesis of the Schlieffen Plan. Only then can the period of transition, from the alleged genius Schlieffen to the apparent epigone, the reputed 'reluctant military leader', be properly understood.

Because of the strong post-war 'school' of Schlieffen followers, it became almost impossible to criticize Schlieffen publicly in the inter-war years. This was particularly true once the Nazis controlled publishing, as Moltke's former adjutant Friedrich von Mantey found when he attempted to publish a manuscript on Moltke and the Schlieffen Plan. He

³ See e.g. *Das Testament des Grafen Schlieffen. Operative Studien über den Weltkrieg*, Berlin 1927; *Der Feldherr wider Willen. Operative Studien über den Weltkrieg*, Berlin 1930; *Lebenserinnerungen. Jugend, Generalstab, Weltkrieg*, Göttingen 1957.

⁴ Hahnke's letter to the Prussian Crown Prince, 2 April 1922, Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv (BA-MA), NL Hahnke, 836/10. After Schlieffen's death, it was Hahnke who passed the 1912 memorandum to Moltke. See Wolfgang Förster, 'Einige Bemerkungen zu Gerhard Ritters Buch "Der Schlieffenplan"', *Wehrwissenschaftliche Rundschau*, 1, 1957, p. 44. Other prominent Schlieffen defenders include Hermann von Kuhl, Erich Ludendorff and Wolfgang Förster.

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complained that ‘because one is not allowed to say anything against Schlieffen’s plan, it has been impossible to find a publisher so far’.⁵ Even today, voices hailing Schlieffen as a genius, and his plan as a potential miracle, have not fully subsided. Despite substantial critiques, especially by Gerhard Ritter,⁶ many of the Schlieffen school’s views are reiterated to this day.⁷ According to Gotthard Jäschke, Ritter was a mere layman who should show more respect towards a man ‘whom a whole generation of General Staff officers had considered a genius and whom many still honour as such today’. In other words, Ritter the civilian should not interfere in military affairs, a view that echoes the prejudiced military attitude towards civilians that was already prevalent during Schlieffen’s time. Jäschke, unconvinced by Ritter’s criticisms, values the plan highly. ‘The memorandum is neither a recipe for victory nor a recipe at all, but a – perhaps desperate, but certainly ingenious – attempt to point the way for the uncertain Moltke.’⁸ Rolf-Joseph Eibicht’s monograph on Schlieffen is a more recent example of writings in the tradition of the ‘Schlieffen school’: there is no doubt in the author’s mind that Schlieffen would have succeeded in 1914 where his hapless successor failed. Eibicht asserts that ‘Schlieffen would, without a doubt and in an ice-cold manner, have attained the goal of a total and absolute defeat of the enemy, if he had had the opportunity to lead personally in 1914’, adding confidently that ‘Schlieffen would have achieved one of the biggest military victories for the German Reich in the First World War.’⁹ This school of thought attributes the defeat of Germany in the First World War to Moltke’s shortcomings. Against this background, Moltke’s role as Chief of the General Staff in the first months of the war deserves particular attention. In what way were Germany’s demise and Moltke’s own fall from grace connected? The following account takes issue with the view that Germany would have fought successfully under Schlieffen in 1914: a view that stems from writers like Groener, who maintained that Schlieffen had possessed the secret of

⁵ Mantey to Tappen, 9 March 1933. Mantey’s manuscript on ‘Moltke, Schlieffenplan und Eisenbahnfrage’ was rejected despite positive feedback from ‘several high-ranking officers’: BA-MA, NL Tappen, N56/5, p. 221.

⁶ Gerhard Ritter, *The Schlieffen Plan. Critique of a Myth*, London 1958.

⁷ A recent example is the readers’ debate in the *Spectator*, March–October 1997, where an amateur historian, who claimed to be Schlieffen’s granddaughter ‘Alice von Schlieffen’, staunchly defended the general’s plan and reiterated the usual accusations against the epigone Moltke.

⁸ Gotthard Jäschke, “‘Schlieffenplan’ und ‘Marneschlacht’” in Dermont Bradley and Ulrich Marwedel (eds.), *Militärgeschichte, Militärwissenschaft und Konfliktforschung*, Osnabrück 1977, pp. 187, 195.

⁹ Rolf-Joseph Eibicht, *Schlieffen. Strategie und Politik. Aus der Unterlegenheit zum Sieg*, Lünen 1991, pp. 17, 34, 40.

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victory, and that he would have achieved a ‘massive strategic Cannae!’ if he had been in charge of the army in 1914.¹⁰

In an in-depth analysis of the July Crisis of 1914, this study also investigates the degree of influence of military decision-makers in the management of the events that directly led to war. Focusing on the military during the July Crisis highlights the extent to which military concerns and thinking had become common currency. They were often accepted uncritically by civilians and increasingly determined their decisions. The short-sighted and narrow military planning of the pre-war years had tragic effects when war broke out, and the lack of alternative deployment plans to the Schlieffen/Moltke Plan significantly reduced political and military options at the end of July.

In re-evaluating Moltke’s role and importance, the following account does not aim to rehabilitate Germany’s last Chief of the General Staff – if anything, the conclusion drawn from this investigation must be that Moltke’s influence was more decisive in pushing Germany into war than has previously been assumed. After all, the portrayal of Moltke as a weak and insignificant figure did more than emphasize Schlieffen’s mythical genius. It also tended to minimize Moltke’s responsibility, and thus, by implication, that of Germany, for the outbreak of war. Accounts that stress Moltke’s reluctance to order mobilization during the July Crisis, for example, have argued that his hesitancy was proof that he did not want war.¹¹ The evidence available today makes such allegations untenable.

Because of his alleged weakness, Moltke’s bellicose pre-war statements have sometimes been dismissed as the ranting of a weak man trying to give the impression of decisiveness. However, this study shows that his aggressive outbursts should actually be taken seriously. They occurred too frequently to be disregarded, and they were voiced with increasing conviction during his time in office. Moltke’s importance lies in his consistent and desperate pressurizing for war before – as he saw it – time ran out for Germany and her only strategic plan.¹² It also lies in the substantial

¹⁰ Quoted in Jehuda Wallach, *Das Dogma der Vernichtungsschlacht. Die Lehren von Clausewitz und Schlieffen und ihre Wirkungen in zwei Weltkriegen*, Frankfurt/M. 1967, pp. 97–98. Just like Schlieffen, Groener seemed unaware that the battle of Cannae did not lead to ultimate victory for Hannibal. Rather, it led to the ultimate destruction of Carthage when it was burnt to the ground by the Romans. Cf. Wallach, *Kriegstheorien. Ihre Entwicklung im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, Frankfurt/M. 1972, p. 106.

¹¹ Theobald von Schäfer, ‘Wollte Generaloberst von Moltke den Präventivkrieg?’, *Berliner Monatshefte*, 5/1, 1927, p. 552.

¹² Arden Bucholz, *Moltke*, p. 223, argues that Moltke is negligible in terms of his military skills, his input and influence on military planning. For a different interpretation, see Isabel Hull, ‘Kaiser Wilhelm II and the “Liebenberg Circle”’, in John C. G. Röhl and N. Sombart (eds.), *Kaiser Wilhelm II. New Interpretations*, Cambridge 1982, p. 212. For a dismissal of Moltke’s belligerent statements, see e.g. L. C. F. Turner, *The Origins of the First World War*, London 1970, p. 21.

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political pressure that he was able to exert, and in his considerable personal influence arising from his special relationship with the Kaiser. As the official German history of the war noted in 1924, 'in peacetime he [Moltke] had often been able to advocate army matters successfully and effectively vis-à-vis the War-Lord (*Kriegsherrn*), owing to the special relationship of trust that he had with the Kaiser'.¹³ Given Moltke's political role, an area in which he wielded much more influence than Schlieffen had ever done, this study focuses primarily on Moltke in a political context. It asks how Moltke reacted to the international conflicts and crises that provided the background to his time in office, and it seeks to uncover his personal role in impressing on the civilian leadership that Germany's aggressive foreign policy could be backed up by strong force, and that Germany should fight a war – the sooner, the better.

A NOTE ON SOURCES

In view of the controversial role that Moltke played in the events leading up to the outbreak of war, it is unfortunate, although perhaps not surprising, that the availability of primary source materials is so limited. Documentary evidence from Moltke himself is scarce, and this lack of primary sources has meant that Moltke's role has been difficult to evaluate. His 'Nachlaß' in the military archive in Freiburg is relatively insubstantial and contains no private or personal accounts. His diaries have not survived, for the bulk of Moltke's papers were burned by his eldest son Wilhelm von Moltke in 1945 when the Russians reached Berlin. Even before this date, material among Moltke's papers had been selected and removed. Following Moltke's death in June 1916, his former adjutant Wilhelm von Dommès was seconded to 'select the important papers' from his possessions.¹⁴ It is unclear what he was looking for and what he selected for removal, but it is likely that any documents relating to military matters would have been weeded out at that time. Fragments remained in the possession of Moltke's younger son Adam, and copies of some documents were made in 1933 for a planned new edition of Moltke's memoirs by Jürgen von Grone, who made this material available to the Bundesarchiv in Freiburg after the Second World War.¹⁵

¹³ Reichsarchiv (ed.), *Der Weltkrieg 1914–1918*, vol. 1, *Die Grenzschlachten im Westen*, Berlin 1924, p. 180.

¹⁴ BayHSTA-KA, NL Rudolf Ritter von Xylander, Kriegstagebücher II, HS2309, 19–20 June 1916, pp. 603–4.

¹⁵ Egmont Zechlin, 'Ludendorff im Jahre 1915. Unveröffentlichte Briefe', *HZ*, 211, 1970, p. 318, note 10.

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The edited letters and memoirs, published in 1922 by Moltke's widow under the title *Erinnerungen, Briefe, Dokumente*,¹⁶ offer an insight into Moltke's personality, particularly in private letters to his wife. However, the edition is thoroughly unreliable. The material was both selected and heavily edited by Eliza von Moltke, and we cannot be certain how much she left out or altered. Published at a time when the question of war-guilt dominated the political agenda, it is likely that potentially 'incriminating' evidence was excluded and perhaps ultimately destroyed by Moltke's widow in an attempt to offer an apologetic account of her husband's activities. Where it is possible to compare original documents with the edition that Moltke's widow prepared, minor alterations are clearly noticeable, showing that, at best, she was no professional editor.¹⁷

After the death of Moltke's widow in May 1932, the papers in her possession were passed on to her daughter Astrid Gräfin von Bethusy-Huc (1882–1961), who in turn passed them on to Jürgen von Grone, a friend of the family and fellow Anthroposophist, under the condition that no material be passed on to the Anthroposophical Society in Switzerland or any other public or private institution. The documents later found their way to Thomas Meyer, who prepared an edition of the 1922 *Erinnerungen* with new additions, which he published in 1993.¹⁸ The Rudolf Steiner

¹⁶ Helmuth von Moltke, *Erinnerungen, Briefe, Dokumente 1877–1916. Ein Bild vom Kriegsausbruch, erster Kriegsführung und Persönlichkeit des ersten militärischen Führers des Krieges*, ed. Eliza von Moltke, Stuttgart 1922.

¹⁷ Reichsarchiv, *Weltkrieg*, vol. 1, p. 63, cites one of Moltke's memoranda, and refers to the discrepancies in the *Erinnerungen* publication. That the 1922 *Erinnerungen* seem very heavily edited and contain little reliable information on the pre-war period is also emphasized by Holger H. Herwig, 'Clio Deceived', in Steven Miller *et al.* (eds.), *Military Strategy and the Origins of the First World War. An 'International Security' Reader*, Princeton 1991, p. 294. See also Isabel Hull, *The Entourage of Kaiser Wilhelm II 1888–1918*, Cambridge 1982, p. 366, note 21; John C. G. Röhl, *1914: Delusion or Design? The Testimony of Two German Diplomats*, London 1973, pp. 37–38.

¹⁸ Thomas Meyer, *Helmuth von Moltke 1848–1916. Dokumente zu seinem Leben und Wirken*, 2 vols., Basel 1993. An English translation entitled *Light for the New Millennium: Rudolf Steiner's Association with Helmuth and Eliza von Moltke: Letters, Documents and After Death Communications* was published in 1998. Meyer made use of a several-month gap in Swiss copyright laws to edit material without seeking authorisation from surviving members of the Moltke family. In a meeting with the author in Brühl, Germany, in June 1997, Moltke's granddaughters Rose-Marie van Berghes and Marie-Liza von Bethusy-Huc expressed their outrage upon discovering that private papers, pertaining among others to their mother, Astrid von Bethusy-Huc, neé Moltke, had been published without their consent. Most of Meyer's edition is of little value for historians. While a second edition of the Moltke *Erinnerungen* would be welcome (the first is very difficult to obtain today), the mistakes Meyer made in transcribing the text do not commend his edition and are evidence of the hurry he was in to meet the copyright deadline. The 'after-death communications' from Moltke to his widow via Rudolf Steiner are probably only of interest to Anthroposophists, although they shed interesting light on the link between Eliza von Moltke and Steiner. (The connection between Moltke and Steiner is more fully explored in Chapter 2 below.) Meyer further included documents from the Moltke Nachlaß in Freiburg, as well as unpublished material in family possession, making his two volumes – despite their obvious shortcomings – the most comprehensive collection of primary material pertaining to Moltke.

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Nachlaß Verwaltung in Dornach, Switzerland, keeps a collection of letters exchanged between Eliza von Moltke and Rudolf Steiner, but this apparently contains no material on Helmuth von Moltke himself.¹⁹ Because of the troubled history of the Moltke papers it is difficult to get access to what little material remains, or even to determine what is still available.

Moltke's published *Erinnerungen* replaced a pamphlet entitled 'The War-Guilt' – *Die 'Schuld' am Kriege* – written by Moltke in November 1914, which Eliza von Moltke had edited and intended to publish in 1919 with an introduction by Rudolf Steiner.²⁰ Steiner and Eliza von Moltke wanted to publish this justificatory account a few weeks before the Allies' meeting at Versailles. By demonstrating how chaotic military decision-making had been in the pre-war Germany, they aimed to undermine the 'war-guilt' thesis and hoped to be able to avoid the signing of the notorious paragraph 231, the 'war-guilt' clause.²¹ When the contents became known to the German Foreign Office (Auswärtiges Amt) and the army, its members were anxious to prevent the publication of the pamphlet. Moltke's former adjutant, General Wilhelm von Dommes, was sent to advise Eliza von Moltke and Steiner that 'Berlin did not desire' Moltke's memoirs in print, and the publication was subsequently withdrawn. When Dommes met with Eliza von Moltke, she read the pamphlet to him and he recorded in his diary: 'Contains nasty stuff.'²² The Auswärtiges Amt objected to the publication because of fears that details of the Schlieffen Plan, particularly regarding the violation of Holland, might be made public.²³ At a time when the Kaiser was living in uncertain circumstances in exile in Amerongen, his fate heavily dependent on continued Dutch refusal to extradite him to the Allies for trial, public knowledge of Germany's initial intention to violate not only Belgian but also Dutch neutrality could have been disastrous.²⁴

¹⁹ Information from Professor John Röhl, who was allowed access to the Rudolf Steiner archive and from Konrad Donat of the Steiner Nachlaß Verwaltung in Dornach, Switzerland.

²⁰ *Die 'Schuld' am Kriege – Betrachtungen und Erinnerungen des Generalstabschefs H. v. Moltke über die Vorgänge vom Juli 1914 bis November 1914*. The text of the pamphlet was later included in the 1922 edition of Moltke's *Erinnerungen*.

²¹ See Eliza von Moltke's introduction to Moltke's *Erinnerungen*, p. vii; Jürgen von Grone, 'Zum Kriegsausbruch 1914', *Die Drei, Zeitschrift für Anthroposophie und Dreigliederung*, Herausgegeben von der Anthroposophischen Gesellschaft, Stuttgart, 1964/1, p. 3.

²² Dommes's diary of May and June 1919, BA-MA, NL Dommes, NL512/4. Excerpts also printed by Meyer, *Helmuth von Moltke*, vol. 1, pp. 410ff., who claims that the diary is a new discovery (p. 409), when it has in fact been available in Dommes's Nachlaß in Freiburg and is no recent find.

²³ Wallach, *Dogma*, p. 127.

²⁴ On the Kaiser in exile following his flight from Spa on 9 November 1918, and the Dutch refusal to extradite him, see Sally Marks, "'My Name is Ozymandias': The Kaiser in Exile', *Central European History*, 16, 1983, pp. 122–170.

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This lack of primary evidence is not restricted to Moltke's personal papers. Documentary source material for the German army before the First World War is in short supply, and this has impeded the work of military historians since the Second World War. Military documents relating to the Wilhelmine period are scarce, owing to the destruction of the military archive in Potsdam. However, during the last few years it has transpired that the archive was not, in fact, completely destroyed during the bombing of Potsdam in 1945, and that important military records and documents were seized by the Red Army and taken to Podolsk, south of Moscow, where many tons of material apparently still await inspection.²⁵ Some of these documents were returned to Potsdam in December 1988 (around 40 tons, including 3000 Prussian and German army files), and have been available to western scholars since the collapse of the GDR in 1989.²⁶ In 1993, the material was moved from Potsdam to Germany's military archive, the Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv in Freiburg. The initial excitement with which scholars awaited this new material proved somewhat exaggerated: the substantial gaps in the primary source material relating to German military history of the period were not completely closed by the documents unearthed in Moscow. However, the files contain a wealth of evidence that can be used to shed light on Moltke and the General Staff during the time under investigation.

Among the files returned are those of the Kriegsgeschichtliche Forschungsanstalt des Heeres (Army Research Centre for Military History), founded in October 1919.²⁷ This institution consisted primarily of former members of the General Staff and the army (of the 65 members, 13 were civilians, and 52 active or retired officers),²⁸ and its aim was an

²⁵ Bernd Wegner, 'Deutsche Aktenbestände im Moskauer Zentralen Staatsarchiv. Ein Erfahrungsbericht', *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 2, 1992, pp. 311–319. See also Horst Romeyk, 'Das ehemalige sowjetische Sonderarchiv in Moskau' and 'Die deutschen Bestände im Sonderarchiv in Moskau', *Der Archivar*, 45, Heft 3, July 1992.

²⁶ Uwe Löbel, 'Neue Forschungsmöglichkeiten zur preußisch-deutschen Heeresgeschichte', *MGM*, 51, 1992, pp. 143–149.

²⁷ For the history of the KGFA, see Helmut Otto, 'Der Bestand Kriegsgeschichtliche Forschungsanstalt des Heeres im Bundesarchiv-, Militärisches Zwischenarchiv Potsdam', *MGM*, 51, 1992, pp. 429–441; Adolf Brenneke, *Archivkunde. Ein Beitrag zur Theorie und Geschichte des europäischen Archivwesens*, bearb. u. ergänzt von Wolfgang Leesch, Leipzig 1953, pp. 304ff.; Karl Demeter, *Das Reichsarchiv. Tatsachen und Personen*, Frankfurt/M. 1969; Hans Schleier, *Die bürgerliche deutsche Geschichtsschreibung der Weimarer Republik*, Cologne 1975, pp. 128ff.

²⁸ Arden Bucholz, *Hans Delbrück and the German Military Establishment: War Images in Conflict*, Iowa City 1985, p. 142. However, according to Reinhard Brühl, 110 former officers were taken on by the archive in October 1919, 41 of whom had been members of the General Staff for over 20 years, and 54 for over ten years. Those who stayed were officially dismissed from their military duties on 31 March 1920 and became civil servants with civilian titles. Brühl, *Militärgeschichte und*

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analysis of the war (preparation, planning, conduct, strategy, failures) along the lines of military history writing as it had been practised within the General Staff throughout the nineteenth century. Research was undertaken in order to publish Germany's official military history of the war. As early as in the autumn of 1914 it had been decided that a 'popular' history should be published as soon as possible, and in December 1914 the new Chief of the General Staff Erich von Falkenhayn ordered the establishment of a 'Kriegsnachrichtenstelle' to collect reports about various battles with the aim of using these after the war to compile an official history.²⁹

After the war, the Reichsarchiv collected documentary evidence by approaching key military and political figures and assembling information based on their diaries and memoirs. The result of this work, the 'Weltkriegswerk' in 14 volumes plus two additional volumes of documents, was published from 1924 onwards.³⁰ The archive's files, which have recently been returned to Germany, include copies and citations from documentary evidence that had been lost in the original. In addition to this, they boast a collection of first-hand accounts and comments by leading military figures on controversial topics such as the outbreak of war and the lack of economic preparation for the war in peace-time, as well as major battles and certain individuals, such as Moltke. For an investigation of Moltke's role in the events leading to war in 1914, the eye-witness accounts and unpublished memoirs of his contemporaries, collected by the archive from 1919 onwards, are an invaluable source, especially in view of the otherwise limited evidence available.

footnote 28 (*cont.*)

Kriegspolitik. Zur Militärgeschichtsschreibung des preussisch-deutschen Generalstabes, 1816–1945, (East) Berlin, 1973, pp. 245–246. Even as late as 1939, of the 20 active officers that were employed as civil servants in the archive, 15 had been in the General Staff before 1918, 12 of those had been high-ranking General Staff officers. Memorandum Major a.D. Reymann, 'Wie es kam, daß wir äußerlich Zivilisten wurden', February 1939, BA-MA, W-10/50021, p. 3.

²⁹ See BA-MA, RH61/v. 20, KGFA, 'die Bearbeitung des Werkes "Der Weltkrieg 1914–1918"'.

³⁰ *Der Weltkrieg 1914–1918*, 14 vols.; *Kriegsrüstung und Kriegswirtschaft*, 2 vols. and documents, Berlin 1930. Other publications include *Die Schlachten und Gefechte des Großen Krieges 1914–1918* (1920) and *Forschungen und Darstellungen aus dem Reichsarchiv* (7 vols.) as well as the series *Schlachten des Weltkrieges* (38 vols.) and *Erinnerungsblätter deutscher Regimenter* (approx. 250 vols.). Although *Der Weltkrieg* was officially published by the Reichsarchiv and was often referred to as the 'Reichsarchivwerk', it was commonly also referred to as the 'great German General Staff work about the World War', clear evidence that the General Staff was still considered in charge of military history writing in the Reichsarchiv after Versailles. Major a.D. Reymann, February 1939, BA-MA, w-10/50021; Erich Murawski, 'Die amtliche deutsche Kriegsgeschichtsschreibung über den Ersten Weltkrieg', *Wehrwissenschaftliche Rundschau*, 9, 1959, 2 parts, pp. 513–531, 584–598; Markus Pöhlmann, 'World War Experience and Future War Images in the Official German Military History', paper delivered at the Shadows of Total War Conference, Bern, August 1999, forthcoming in Roger Chickering and Stig Förster (eds.), *The Shadows of Total War: Europe, East Asia, and the United States, 1919–1939*, Washington DC and Cambridge, Mass., 2001.