

# Don't Count on GERMANY to Fight

Remagen, Germany

**H**ERR WILHELM ROTHE, grizzled proprietor of the Central Hotel, backed through the door of the smoky *Weinstube* with another trayload of beer steins, set them down on our table and looked meaningfully at the clock.

It was past midnight and we were the last customers in the place—14 young Germans and myself. For two hours we'd been discussing a subject that affects every one of them personally: German rearmament.

My neighbor, a twenty-year-old student named Paul Krahfurst, leaned back and laced his hands behind his head. "So far as I can make out," he said, "the problem is really quite simple. We just don't want war. If you Americans have to fight the Russians, go ahead, but *ohne uns*. Don't count on us."



Peter Berhausen (r.) favors stand against the Reds but won't fight. Christian Iven is a pacifist

Rudi Josten (l.) and Ferdinand Elfgang insist Germans would be sacrificed first in any war

I glanced around the table—at Rudi, the ex-officer with five years service on the Russian front; at Karl, whose parents were killed in an Allied air raid; at Georg, who was a child of fifteen when Hitler put him in uniform to man Germany's crumbling defenses.

These three, and the others too, were nodding at Paul's words and looking at me, some blandly, some defiantly, some with faint mockery.

"Isn't it true," said Karl, "that you need German soldiers to cover your retreat to the Atlantic? What proof have we that you intend to defend our country?"

I cited last fall's declaration of the Big Three Foreign Ministers that any attack on Free Germany would be considered as aggression against the whole Western World; and I reminded them of General Eisenhower's statement while in Germany this winter: "For my part, bygones are bygones . . . As one gang we will build the strength necessary to protect ourselves."

"You ask us to believe Eisenhower!" Karl almost shouted, his face suddenly red. He yanked a piece of crumpled paper from his pocket and shoved it across the table. It was an American surrender leaflet of 1945, signed by General Eisenhower, that promised German soldiers good treatment if they gave up. "Lies!" said Karl. "I have friends who died of starvation in your camps. You want me to trust your Eisenhower?"

"Moment!" Rudi spoke sharply; the other fell silent. "Now wait a minute, Karl. Those charges can't be proved. They're beside the point anyway. We must give some kind of answer to our American friend. At least he's taken the trouble to consult

us, which is more than the big shots have done. Now, does anyone have anything positive to suggest?"

"Who wants to be a rear guard for the *Amis*?" Karl said sullenly.

"If the Russians come and find me in uniform, it's a firing squad or Siberia," said Willy, a farm hand. "My brother's there already. Who'll support my parents?"

"The American here says a big Western army will secure peace," Karl went on, turning to the others. "Where have we heard that before?" The others laughed.

I finished my beer, glanced at my watch and stood up. We shook hands all around, cordially, and they thanked me for the beers. I settled the bill, then put on my coat to go out for a breath of fresh air. Rudi was waiting in the vestibule.

"I hope you don't feel too discouraged," he said as we went into the frosty night. "At least we all spoke frankly. And can you really blame us? After 10 years of war and the consequences of being beaten?"

A moment later, on a bluff overlooking the broad, swirling Rhine, we gazed down at the broken stanchions of Remagen's bridge—the bridge the Wehrmacht didn't blow up in time and across which our armies poured into the heart of Hitler's Reich just six years ago.

"It's funny," said Rudi. "If we'd destroyed that bridge you might have been held up at the Rhine for weeks, long enough for the Russians to take the rest of Germany. Then there wouldn't have been any German rearmament problem for the West."

We walked back through the town. The narrow streets were empty at this hour. Silhouetted against the starry sky were skeletons of ruined buildings, ghostly in the moonlight. Here and there we passed heaps of rubble, or a bomb crater, reminders that to the Germans war never seems so far away.

But we also passed bright new buildings and spick-and-span, freshly painted store fronts, their darkened windows filled this winter with an assortment of goods. Here were the fruits of peace, the first most Germans have tasted in a decade.

### Seeking Draft-Age Men's Opinions

This was Remagen, population 6,097, as typical a small town as you'll find in West Germany today. I'd come two days before to find out how its draft-age young men felt about the problem stumping Allied diplomats, the problem of getting the Germans to participate in the defense of the free world.

The seminar in Rothe's *Weinstube* was just part of my survey. I'd started out by calling on Remagen's burgomaster, an affable, vigorous man named Hans Kenning, who had held office under Hitler, gone through "denazification" proceedings, and was now back in his former job.

Remagen, he told me, after we'd exchanged cigarettes, was having its troubles. One out of every five houses in town had been totally destroyed or badly damaged during the war; the tourist trade, once a major industry here, hadn't come back, and the town's four furniture factories didn't provide enough jobs even for Remagen's depleted male population. "Ach, but we're no worse off than most German towns," he added.

I told him the purpose of my visit. He nodded and consulted the ledger. "We have 926 young men in the town between the ages of 17 and 30. You'll find many cynical, perhaps defeatist. But do not be too concerned with what they tell you." He paused. "If the Allies will give full authority to the Germans who know how to run Germany"—the ex-Hitlerite slapped the desk hard—"then we'll make our young men march!"

My next stop was at Remagen's biggest factory, the Pomp Moebelfabrik. *Herr Direktor* Paul Pomp, stern and stout and crippled in both legs by war wounds, told me I could interview as many of his 120 workers as I wished. "If you want my own opinion, as an officer who fought in both wars," he added, "I would never serve again so long as German officers are being held in jail as war criminals. And I saw how rottenly the Americans behaved who took Remagen." His mouth tightened, then relaxed. "Mensch, but I've had a bellyful of wars! Talk to my men—you'll see they feel the same way."



**Hotelier Wilhelm Rothe and group of army-age men. Youths told writer the West wants Germans to serve as cannon fodder against Russian**

Pomp was right. In his woodworking shop, Rudi Josten and Ferdinand Elfgang left their lathes long enough to answer my questions: Did they favor a German army? Would they serve in it? Did they believe in the threat of Soviet aggression?

Josten, a Navy veteran and former prisoner of war in England, had no particular objection to a German army—for volunteers only. Not for him. Why? "The German mercenaries would be sacrificed first. No, thanks."

Elfgang, dark, animated, the father of two children, agreed emphatically. "We've all had enough. A war's the worst thing that could happen. Danger from the East? I think that's a fairy tale. You could settle your quarrel with the Russians if you really wanted to."

I found no other employee in the factory who didn't feel basically the same way. All were convinced that Germans in uniform would be used as cannon fodder by the Western high command.

### **Too Young for Hitler's Army**

At Jean Bieler's hardware store on Main Street, Reinhold Saifer and Hans Friedlich, both nineteen, were working in the machine shop in the back yard. Too young for Hitler's Wehrmacht, they'd seen enough of war as kids to know what another would be like.

"I like being alive," said Reinhold with blunt simplicity. "Let those who want to wage war do the fighting."

"But not in Germany, please," added Hans, and bent back over his workbench.

At the city hall, I found two talkative clerks. Christian Iven, twenty-four, explained he was an out-and-out pacifist. "I didn't resist the Americans and I won't resist the Russians," he said. "War's just a business."

What if he were drafted?

"Read Article 4 of our new constitution," he replied. "It states that no German can be made to bear arms against his will. That's my out."

His colleague, Peter Berhausen, sounded more militant. "Without the United States, Europe is doomed," he declared. "If we Germans are given political equality with the Allies, there's no reason why we shouldn't contribute men to a European army. We must co-operate to stop Soviet aggression."

At last I was hearing a positive note. And would Berhausen serve in such an army?"

"*Jawohl*," he replied, "certainly—if it weren't for the fact that I'm married."

Nearby stands the shop of Anton Klute, Remagen's watchmaker. Klute, a solid, middle-aged man, was mustered into the Nazi home guard assigned to protect the bridge the day the Americans seized it. As a prisoner of war 10 days later he saw the

bridge collapse under the weight of U.S. military traffic.

When I told him of my conversations around town, he nodded slowly. "Of course," he said, "and don't think the youngsters feel very differently from anyone else. Does it surprise you? For nearly five years now you Americans have been busy demilitarizing us, as you put it. You've forbidden Germans to own guns or wear uniforms or even fly planes; you've told us that making war is a crime.

"Now you turn around and tell us to hurry up and rearm. Demilitarize, remilitarize. The transition is rather sudden, *nicht wahr?*" He smiled. "At least you might make us full-fledged allies, give us *Gleichberechtigung*, before asking us to fight on your side."

*Gleichberechtigung*. Equal rights. A jaw-breaking catchword that Kurt Schumacher, Germany's fiery, crippled Socialist leader, used again and again last fall to attack Chancellor Konrad Adenauer's government after Adenauer had agreed in principle to participate in the defense of Western Europe. Touting political equality as a condition for Germany's co-operation, the Socialists swept local elections in Hesse and Württemberg-Baden on November 19th.

That's when we began to wake up to the fact that most of West Germany's 45,000,000 people weren't so eager as we'd assumed to take up arms again.

At the Foreign Ministers' meeting in New York, two months before, the main obstacle to German rearmament seemed to rest on our differences with the French over how large and what kind of army we would permit Germany to mobilize.

"The Germans should be enabled, if they want, to defend their own country," said U.S. High Commissioner John J. McCloy in Washington on September 5th. "You can't say to them that they can't defend their own country if attacked."

Here in Remagen, I began to feel that "if they want" had become the most important phrase in McCloy's statement. If the young men of Remagen were typical of West Germans as a whole, I thought, then the task of making soldiers out of our former enemies will be a lot tougher than just ironing out differences between the Western Allies.

So I checked my findings with both Allied and German officials in Bonn, Frankfurt, Düsseldorf and Berlin; and wherever I went I spoke with other young potential draftees.

With minor variations, the pattern of German opinion was the same: First give us full political equality and send over enough troops to guarantee our security; then, and then only, we might consider contributing to joint defense.

Schumacher certainly knew the temper of his people when he pegged his campaign last fall on "no rearmament without guarantees."

"Remember that Germany is a convalescent country," I was told in Düsseldorf by a top British political officer. "These people have lost two wars in a generation. The last one cost them nearly 3,000,000 dead and another 1,000,000 or so still missing—to say nothing of some 4,000,000 wounded.

They just don't want to take a chance of being on the losing side again."

### **In a Fog of Defeatism**

So far, we haven't persuaded them that ours is the winning side. A wave of defeatism has swept over West Germany like a winter fog ever since United Nations forces began suffering reverses in Korea. Watching our troops driven back by numerically superior Chinese Communists, they began wondering how long the West's relative handful of infantry divisions in Germany

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could hold the line against at least three times as many Russian divisions now stationed in Eastern Europe. What help would it be to throw in a few hastily mustered German troops?

"Our regiments," said the influential *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* recently, "are to be there only to cover the retreat of the others to the Channel ports."

Herbert Puschmann, a twenty-eight-year-old press analyst employed by the U.S. High Commissioner's office in Frankfurt, had fought on the Russian front for two years, as an artillery noncom. "If the Russians attack," he told me as we walked along the corridors of the huge Farben building, "it wouldn't take them long to smash through Germany. We all know that. And we know that every German they found in uniform would be dealt with as a war criminal. That means death or a slave camp."

"And what if you were a civilian?" I asked.

"As a civilian, at least I could stay and take care of my family. Life would be hard under the Russians, but it would still be life."

Puschmann took my arm. "Now don't get me wrong. If I were an American I'd be all in favor of having a German army sharing the burden of defense. But as a German who would have to serve in that army—no. Maybe you think that is selfish." He shrugged. "I guess it is, but I can't help it."



**Furniture manufacturer Paul Pomp, officer in two world wars, says: "I would never serve again so long as German officers are held in jail"**

**If You Were Herr Puschmann**

Put yourself in Puschmann's shoes. Think of the Russians being a day's march from your home. Consider that the new Soviet German "peace law" prescribes the death penalty for anyone serving in a West German army. Then ask yourself what your answer would be.

You begin to understand why German sentiment for rearming fell from 60 to less than 30 per cent between May and December, while American support for such a move, according to the Gallup poll, was rising from 34 to 63 per cent.

Needless to add, the pro-army Germans are by and large older people who would not have to put on a uniform. Of the men giving affirmative answers in a recent survey conducted by the State Department's

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Research and Analysis Branch, only 7 per cent said they'd be willing to serve.

"And these volunteers are the worst elements we could want in a defensive army," Dr. Leo Crespi, director of the survey, told me in Bad Nauheim. "They are the ex-Nazi troopers, the jobless, the misfits, and the refugees who want to start a war to recover their lands in the East."

According to officials of the German Ministry of the Interior in Bonn, no more than three divisions could be raised in West Germany today on a volunteer basis.

"A conscripted army is the only solution," I was told by Erich Ollenhauer, deputy chairman of the Socialist party. "But any government advocating conscription just now would be promptly overthrown. First, Germany must have a new political status, then we must discuss the details of Germany's contribution, and finally we must set up the machinery to mobilize men. All that will take at least a year."

A year. Maybe more. During this time, the Kremlin can be expected to bombard the frightened West Germans with propaganda exploiting their yearning for "neutrality," holding out the promise of a unified Germany and warning them to expect no real help from the United States.

The propaganda has already started. Statements by American neoisolationists are being bannered in the German Communist press, with telling effect. "Unity for



**Mayor Hans Kemming, ex-Hitlerite, says if "Germans who know how to run Germany" were given control, they would force young men to serve**

peace" slogans are blared over the East German radio. In December, Otto Grotewohl, Communist premier of East Germany, invited the West German government to discuss German unity as a means of keeping the nation from being dragged into war. Soviet agents and go-betweens are quietly telling Ruhr industrialists that their best markets—and future security—lie in the East.

Communist efforts are bearing fruit. Such eminent Germans as the Reverend Martin Niemöller and Gustav Heinemann, former Federal Minister of the Interior, are now avowed "neutralists" who tell their fellow citizens that casting their lot with the

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West will end all hope of a unified nation. In January a new organization called the Freedom League began distributing thousands of neutrality cards in Hamburg declaring that the bearer "will fight neither for the West nor for the East." Businessmen, seeking to reinforce their ties to the East, have urged the government to treble licensed exports to the Soviet zone during 1951.

The extent to which West Germans cling to the myth of neutralism was revealed in a survey conducted in January by Dr. Crespi's staff. A cross section of thousands of Germans throughout the American zone were asked to choose between a neutral, united fatherland and participation in a Western defense system *on their own terms*. Answers were just about evenly divided.

"Either they don't see the Soviet menace or they don't want to see it," said Dr. Crespi. "Sometimes I think it's the latter."

Fear, confusion, defeatism. These are the dominant moods in Germany today—with one striking exception.

### **West Berlin Favors Defense**

The exception is West Berlin, that isolated outpost of the free world 120 miles inside the Soviet zone. There, some 2,200,000 people who live in the democratic sectors of the city have shown by their actions and votes that they understand the Communist threat and are not intimidated by it. Saved by the U.S. air lift, they are staunch friends of America; according to recent polls, sentiment in Berlin is 85 per cent in favor of German participation in Western defense.

But Berlin, which knows at firsthand what Communism means, can't be considered a factor in defense plans. Surrounded as it is, the city would be doomed in case of a Soviet attack, as the 6,000 Americans living there know only too well. (We'd shoot with everything we have," said General Maxwell Taylor, former U.S. commander in Berlin, when I asked him how long the Western sectors could hold out. I saw what we have to shoot with. It isn't much.)

"What a pity," said a British colonel I met in Berlin, "that we can't move all these Berliners into the Western zone. They'd soon enough convince their fellow Germans that Communism can't be appeased."

But we can't move them; meanwhile, the fear, the confusion and the defeatism prevail. Under the circumstances, what do we do about our German "allies"?

The French have an answer. I heard it from a young French diplomat who'd invited me to lunch in his villa perched high on a bluff overlooking the Rhine. "If the Germans don't want to help defend Germany," he said, as we sipped coffee, "then we should tell them bluntly that we'll pull our troops out of their country and make our stand right here, on this river. That'll change their minds soon enough."

"What if they don't change their minds?" I said. "What if they turn around and make some deal with the Russians?"

He shrugged—an eloquent French shrug. "That," he replied, "is the risk we must take."

The risk is too great, in the opinion of British and American policy makers. Those I spoke to are convinced we cannot hold Europe, if war comes, without keeping West Germany's massive industrial plant and skilled population on our side of the line. The question is, how do we hold it?

And is German rearmament the answer just now?

### **The Pros and Cons**

There are arguments on both sides. These are the four main reasons against building up any kind of German army at this time:

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1) On October 18th. Russia warned the Western World that it "would not tolerate" the creation of a West German army. Was this bluff? Remember that China's Red boss, Mao Tse-tung, warned us via India's Peking envoy that he wouldn't tolerate our crossing of the 38th parallel. We thought that was bluff, and discovered it wasn't. So why should we invite similar Soviet retaliation in Germany before we have the strength to cope with it?

2) In view of West Germany's shaky morale, no conscript army could be trusted in a pinch. If the Communists seemed to be winning, West German units might well defect to the Reds, whose East German militia is commanded by such prominent ex-Nazi generals as Lattmann, Von Weichs, Weisenberger, Mueller and Schubert.

3) West German soldiers, especially hot-headed refugees, would probably provoke border incidents with the Russians that could easily plunge us into a war for which we were not yet prepared.

4) Most Germans don't want an army. Four arguments are advanced in behalf of setting up West German armed forces as soon as possible:

1) The West desperately needs man power in Europe. West Germany's potential is 35 divisions. Where else in Western Europe could we find them?

2) Germans are reputed to be the world's best soldiers.

3) We must not be intimidated by Red threats. After all, the Russians are building up a German army in the Soviet zone. Why shouldn't we do the same?

4) If the Communists decide to pull a Korea in Europe and launch a "liberating" invasion of West Germany with East German militia, it would be sounder, psychologically, to help repel such an attack with German troops than to do it with Allied forces alone.

Today, in view of Germany's prevailing state of mind, our policy makers are giving increasing consideration to the reasons *against* rearmament. As has often been pointed out, our announced intention to give the Germans weapons only alerted the Russians and alarmed the already confused Germans.

The task ahead now is to repair the damage by building up our own strength and that of our dependable allies, and by giving Germans the political equality which may eventually move them to take part in Europe's defense of their own free will.

"They'll climb on our band wagon all right," said an American diplomat in Bonn. "once they're convinced it isn't going to break down."

Last December, Richard H. S. Crossman, one of the intellectual leaders of the British Labor party, and reputed to be influential in the formation of foreign policy, offered an interesting suggestion.

Writing in the American monthly, *Commentary*, he proposed that the West go about rearming without Germany, meanwhile pressing for an expansion of German police forces to match the strength of the *Volkspolizei* of the Soviet zone. Such a police force, he pointed out, would not invite Russian retaliation and could serve as a trained cadre whenever the time was ripe for building a regular German army.

I mentioned this proposal to McCloy when I called on him at his Berlin office. The high commissioner conceded that the Crossman formula might be a solution to a problem that has grown more and more complex ever since it was first officially

Commissioner McCloy got up from his desk and gazed thoughtfully out of the office window.

"The Germans are a vigorous and not a submissive people," he said at last. "But they are sick, in many ways. We have got to help them get over their psychoses."



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I thought of my evening in Remagen with Rudi and Karl and Georg and the others. I remembered their profound bitterness their cynicism.

"It won't be easy," I observed.

McCloy shook his head. "No," he said, "it isn't going to be easy at all." THE END