

Headnote:

GHDI Groener, Wilhelm. *On Banning the SA*, 1932. [https://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_document.cfm?document\\_id=4438](https://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=4438)

Wilhelm Groener: born 11/22/1867, died 5/3/1939. Groener served in the German military, participated in WWI along with Hindenburg, and advised Wilhelm II to abdicate. After the war he helped to suppress communist uprisings. During the Weimar Republic he served as minister of communications, defense, and interior. He also took measures to oppose Nazi infiltration of the German military, and attempted to ban the SA.<sup>1</sup>



<sup>2</sup>Alarich von Gleich: the recipient of the original letter, there is little to no information on this person, he seems to have been a general of the German Army during WW1 till some time in the Weimar Republic. One of the main sources about von Gleich comes from the Wikipedia page of his son, where he is only mentioned in one sentence, when he is introduced as an officer in the German Army during WW1.<sup>3</sup> Another academic writing that cited Groener's letters to von Gleich claims that they were very good friends. A picture of Groener and other generals of the German Military suggests that von Gleich was still a general in 1930 Germany. Letters between

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<sup>1</sup> The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Wilhelm Groener | Weimar Republic, Reichswehr, Nazi Party," Encyclopaedia Britannica, July 20, 1998, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Wilhelm-Groener>.

<sup>2</sup>Oscar Tellgmann. "Wilhem Groener and his officers during military maneuvers in Thuringia and Bavaria" (1930). [https://ghdi.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_image.cfm?image\\_id=4355](https://ghdi.ghi-dc.org/sub_image.cfm?image_id=4355)

<sup>3</sup> Wikipedia contributors, "Gerold Von Gleich," Wikipedia, September 30, 2022, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gerold\\_von\\_Gleich](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gerold_von_Gleich).

the two indicate that von Gleich was at least alive until 1932. <sup>4</sup> According to the original German source of the document, Alarich (Franz Maria Gerold) von Gleich was a retired major general, it is unclear when he retired.



Original German source of the document: R.H. Phelps, “Aus den Groener Dokumenten,” *Deutsche Rundschau* 76 (1950), p.1019ff. Excerpt from letter to Alarich von Gleich, April 2, 1932.

Author: The publisher of the document is Reginald Henry Phelps. With the help of the professor, we confirmed that GHDI made a typo on its own citation (not Reginald "G."). Reginald Henry Phelps was a lecturer at Harvard University and the former head of Harvard extension school. He was alive during WWII, heard some of Hitler’s speeches in person, joined the OSS and interrogated German prisoners of war. Later he did more research on the Weimar Republic.

After putting the original German text into google translate, it seems that Noakes and Pridham’s translation may have slightly changed the meaning of the original German letter. With the difference like “drawn out” versus “broken”, “force” versus “violence”, and “credibility” versus “right to exist”. The reader’s understanding of Groener as a person can be dramatically changed depending on which version of the translation one chooses. The original complete document also ties the SA much more closely to the communist paramilitary organization, and the role of Kurt von Schleicher is much more notable in the original.

Jeremy Noakes is a professor at University of Exeter and Geoffrey Pridham is a professor at Bristol University.<sup>6</sup>

### The generals of the German Army and the Rise of the Nazis

All the sources seem to highlight Wilhelm Groener as a great military general who helped protect the republic during the Weimar republic and fought to rebuild the military while fighting against the Nazi threat. However, the sources disagree on whether Groener was doing the right thing and was betrayed afterwards, and his policies failed due to lack of support, or whether Groener had

<sup>4</sup> Craig, Gordon A. “Reichswehr and National Socialism: The Policy of Wilhelm Groener, 1928-1932.” *Political Science Quarterly* 63, no. 2 (1948): 194-229.

<sup>5</sup> R.H. Phelps, “Aus den Groener Dokumenten,” *Deutsche Rundschau* 76 (1950), p.1019ff. Excerpt from letter to Alarich von Gleich, April 2, 1932.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.librarything.com/author/noakesjeremy>

the correct idea but was incompetent and failed to support others. It is either Groener tried his best to prevent the Nazi rise to power and failed, or that it was because of Groener that the goal to prevent the Nazi rise to power failed. As the publication date comes closer and closer to the modern day, it seems more articles shift the blame away from the German Army, even sometimes the SA in what resulted in the Rise of Hitler to power, this may have something to do with modern politics, and how we now try to separate average Germans from Nazis during WWII.

### Annotated Bibliography in Chronological Order:

GHDI: Tellgmann, Oscar. "Wilhem Groener and his officers during military maneuvers in Thuringia and Bavaria" (1930). [https://ghdi.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_image.cfm?image\\_id=4355](https://ghdi.ghi-dc.org/sub_image.cfm?image_id=4355)

This picture includes many of the important German military officers during the Weimar Republic. People I can find the name of are Wilhelm Groener, Alarich von Gleich, Kurt von Schleicher, and Ferdinand Noeldechen. The most important people in this context are of course Groener and Gleich who received many of Groener's letter. Schleicher served as one of the biggest oppositions to Groener's campaign in banning the SA, and desired to integrate the SA into the German Military, he was later killed by the Nazis along with the Leader of the SA during the night of the long knives.

Craig, Gordon A. "Reichswehr and National Socialism: The Policy of Wilhelm Groener, 1928-1932." *Political Science Quarterly* 63, no. 2 (1948): 194–229.

This book describes Groener's rise to power, his policies during his time as Reichswehr minister, his action against the National Socialism, and his removal from office. The author made clear that his intention in writing this article is to discredit the idea that the German Army resisted the Rise of Hitler and Nazism from the beginning till all the way at the end of WWII. Craig instead points out the condition of Germany after WWI, dissatisfaction within the army, and conflict between army leadership actually resulted in many within the army to support National Socialism and the SA. SA became a symbol of the future of an expanded German military force to them. And Groening was one of the sole voice of reason left within the Weimar Government and military still opposing the SA. The Author: Gordon Craig is a Historian of German History. His belief that the autonomous German Army and the authoritarian history of Germany serve as the greatest threat to Democracy no doubt influenced this piece of writing. <sup>7</sup>

Hayes, Peter. "'A Question Mark with Epauettes'? Kurt von Schleicher and Weimar Politics." *The Journal of Modern History* 52, no. 1 (1980): 35–65. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1877954>.

This article cites Phelps' document as a source while exploring the politics of Weimar republic and the role of Kurt von Schleicher, which includes a great part about the policies regarding the Nazi SA. The writing describes the rise of Schleicher and his policies and positions on the Nazi, it suggests that Schleicher's goal was always the stability of the republic and the rearmament of the military by any means necessary, of which included working with the Nazis and its brown shirts. Hayes suggests that Schleicher held on until the last second to protect the republic against any opposing forces while others refused to help him, and there may be truth behind Hitler's claim that Schleicher and the SA were plotting against him.

The Author: Peter Hayes is a professor of Nazi history and the Holocaust at Northwestern University and has written extensively on German history and Holocaust history.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Wikipedia contributors, "Gordon a. Craig," Wikipedia, January 29, 2024, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gordon\\_A.\\_Craig](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gordon_A._Craig).

<sup>8</sup> <https://history.northwestern.edu/people/faculty/emeriti/peter-hayes.html>

Fischer, Conan. "The SA of the NSDAP: Social Background and Ideology of the Rank and File in the Early 1930s." *Journal of Contemporary History* 17, no. 4 (1982): 651–70. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/260526>.

This article suggests that SA and the KPD are 2 sides of the same coin, and that the SA's leadership was often separate from the Nazi leadership, and often went against them without actually denouncing the Nazi ideology. The SA leadership followed the party leadership when it suited them, with many of their supporters not often believing in the Nazi ideology, and its violent and disorganization led to its replacement by the much more organized SS.

The author: Conan Fischer is a historian of Europe at the University of St. Andrews with a focus on the inter-war period, German communism and the history of the NSADP's paramilitary wing, the SA. His opinion is that SA drew heavily from the workers, which the KDP did as well, and he wants to explore this idea further.<sup>9</sup>

Hürter Johannes, *Wilhelm Groener. Reichswehrminister am Ende der Weimarer Republik (1928–1932)*. Munich: Oldenburg, 1993.

This book is in German with no English translation. A book review suggests that this book is relevant to the topic as it paints Wilhelm Groener as one of the only German military officer who tried to defend the republic and fought against the Nazi threat.

Book Review: Simms, Brendan. "Wilhelm Groener. Reichswehrminister am Ende der Weimarer Republik (1928–1932). By Hürter Johannes. *Beiträge Zur Militärgeschichte*, Oldenburg, Munich, 1993. Pp. x + 402." *The Historical Journal* 1996: 1137–1138. Web.

Mulligan, William. "Civil-Military Relations in the Early Weimar Republic." *The Historical Journal* 45, no. 4 (2002): 819–41. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3133530>.

Another writing that cites the Phelps book. This writing talks about the formation of the "modern" German Army after WWI under the Weimar Republic and its relationship to both the civilian government, but also the various "state/provincial" government of Germany, and set up the future role that the Germany Army will play in Weimar Politic.

The Author: William Mulligan is a Professor of International History at University College Dublin.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/history/people/cf33/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.ucd.ie/warstudies/members/williammulligan/>