

Eleana Grant
2-20-24
Professor Marcuse
Hist 133B

“Scandals in the Reich: The Blomberg-Fritsch Affair”

The Blomberg-Fritsch Affair of early 1938 took place during a tumultuous period in German military and political circles, entangling two high-ranking officials in scandals that led to their dismissal from the Armed Forces. The controversy began with the marriage of War Minister Werner von Blomberg to Erna Gruhn, which stirred public and political scrutiny from January 12th onwards due to her criminal past as a prostitute in Berlin. Subsequently, a separate scandal emerged as Hermann Göring and Heinrich Himmler conspired to implicate Commander-in-Chief of the German Army Werner von Fritsch in alleged homosexual activities, following closely behind the Blomberg incident. Notably, both Blomberg and Fritsch had expressed opposition to Hitler's Four Year Plan. Ultimately, the affair concluded with the dismissal of both military officers from their leading positions within the German Armed Forces.¹

According to Blomberg's English Wikipedia page he was born in 1878, in Stargard Germany, which is now part of Poland. He embarked on a military career that began with his enlistment in the army in 1897 and his subsequent education at the Prussian Military Academy. Rising through the ranks, he joined the German General Staff in 1908, and by 1927 had attained the rank of major-general, assuming the role of chief of the Troop Office, a clandestine branch of the General Staff that defied the Treaty of Versailles.² The English Wikipedia version also mentions a visit to the Soviet Union Blomberg had in 1928, where he became impressed with totalitarianism, convinced that it offered the most effective societal, military, and economic preparation for war. He was then transferred to command a division in East Prussia, and diligently prepared for potential conflict with Poland. In 1933 he was appointed Minister of Defense in Hitler's government, emerging as one of the Führer's staunchest supporters and advocates for military expansion. Blomberg's personal life became entangled in controversy in January 1938 when he married his second wife, Erna Gruhn, prompting scrutiny from figures like Hermann Göring and Heinrich Himmler. Göring, in particular, leveraged allegations about Gruhn's past to argue that Blomberg was unfit for his position. Ultimately, facing pressure to annul his marriage to salvage his reputation, Blomberg resigned on January 27, 1938. According to the German and English Wikipedia sites his later years were marked by illness, and he passed away on March 13, 1946, succumbing to colorectal cancer while in detention at Nuremberg.³

¹ “Blomberg–Fritsch Affair.” *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 31 Jan. 2024, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blomberg%E2%80%93Fritsch_affair.

² “Blomberg–Fritsch Affair.” *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 31 Jan. 2024, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blomberg%E2%80%93Fritsch_affair.

³ “Werner von Blomberg.” *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 20 Feb. 2024, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Werner_von_Blomberg.

Werner von Fritsch was born on August 4, 1880, in Benrath in the Rhine Province of the German Empire. At the age of 18 he joined the Prussian Army and later transferred to the Prussian Military Academy in 1901. In 1911, he earned an appointment to the German General Staff, where he served during World War I. In February 1934, he was appointed the role of Commander-in-Chief in the German Army. Fritsch expressed his disdain for democracy and his belief in the detrimental influence of “the propaganda of the Jewish papers” in a letter to Joachim von Stülpnagel, raising concerns about his loyalty to democratic principles. He was also involved in the clandestine German rearmament efforts of the 1920s, violating the terms of the Treaty of Versailles. Following the Nazis' rise to power in 1933, Fritsch became a staunch supporter of the party, with Adolf Hitler's antisemitism being a significant factor in his allegiance. On February 1, 1934, replacing General Kurt von Hammerstein-Equord, Fritsch was appointed General der Artillerie and Chief of the Army Command, earning Hitler's favor for his unwavering support. Despite his alignment with the Nazi regime, Fritsch had reservations about certain aspects of Hitler's plans. According to Hans Bernd Gisevius's memoir *To the Bitter End* there was a focus on the accusations of homosexual activity against Fritsch..Gisevius says that Fritsch's dossier was dismissed upon its initial presentation to Hitler in 1935 and destroyed. In a turn of events three years later the shattered dossier was ordered to be reassembled in January of 1938.⁴ A contemporary article in the *Manchester Guardian* reported on Fritsch's retirement in January 1938, when the allegations against him resurfaced, leading to his forced resignation on February 4, 1938. That article also dives into how Hitler capitalized on this opportunity to strengthen his control of the German Armed Forces by replacing Fritsch and other dissenting figures with loyalists.⁵ Nevertheless, the credibility of the principal accuser, Hans Schmidt, was later called into question, resulting in Fritsch's acquittal on March 18, 1938.⁶ Just before World War II broke out, Fritsch was recalled to inspect the front lines during the invasion of Poland as Colonel-in-chief of the 12th Artillery Regiment. On September 22, 1939, during the Siege of Warsaw, Fritsch was wounded, resulting in his death.⁷

The Blomberg-Fritsch Affair in early 1938 had a significant impact on Nazi Germany, affecting both its military and political spheres. It highlighted the delicate balance between personal loyalty and political interests, leading to the downfall of two prominent figures, Werner von Blomberg and Werner von Fritsch. Blomberg's scandal-ridden marriage to Erna Gruhn was used to discredit him, while Fritsch's resignation amid accusations of homosexuality showcased the

⁴ Gisevius, Hans Bernd. *To the Bitter End*. Translated by Richard Winston, Houghton Mifflin Co., 1947. p. 229-230

⁵ Our Own Correspondent, “HITLER'S SWEEP: TAKES CHARGES OF ARMY AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS GOVERNMENT RECAST BOTH VON BLOMBERG AND VON FRITSCH RETIRED, RIBBENTROP FOREIGN MINISTER.” *The Manchester Guardian*, Feb 05, 1938, pp. 11. *ProQuest*, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/484364601?parentSessionId=FBhNvV3ASsIJTxUS4d%2FGye6IXZ2%2FsD0M5mCTQz75FZ8%3D&sourcetype=Historical%20Newspapers>

⁶ “Blomberg–Fritsch Affair.” *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 31 Jan. 2024, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blomberg%E2%80%93Fritsch_affair.

⁷ “Werner von Fritsch.” *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 11 Feb. 2024, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Werner_von_Fritsch.

regime's ruthlessness in quelling opposition to Hitler. The affair exposed the intricate dynamics between Hitler's inner circle and the military, revealing the risks associated with dissent within the Nazi regime. It serves as a cautionary example of the dangers of political manipulation and the erosion of integrity in both individuals and institutions.

Annotated Bibliography In Chronological Order

1. Manchester Guardian Correspondent. "HITLER'S SWEEP: TAKES CHARGES OF ARMY AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS GOVERNMENT RECAST BOTH VON BLOMBERG AND VON FRITSCH RETIRED, RIBBENTROP FOREIGN MINISTER." *The Manchester Guardian*, Feb 05, 1938, p. 11. *ProQuest*,

<https://www.proquest.com/docview/484364601?parentSessionId=FBhNvV3ASsIJTxUS4d%2FGye6IXZ2%2FsD0M5mCTQz75FZ8%3D&sourcetype=Historical%20Newspapers>

This newspaper article serves as a vital historical document. It focuses on the retirement of Commander and Chief of Germany's Land Armies, Fritsch, shedding light on the reshaping of the German government under Hitler's control. The article not only narrates the events leading to Fritsch's retirement but also delves into Hitler's strategic move of establishing a clandestine advisory cabinet, designed to provide counsel on German foreign policy matters, thus consolidating power in his hands. Moreover, the article provides valuable insights into the intricate interplay between German politics and its military apparatus, highlighting how political dynamics influenced military decisions and appointments. It also touches upon the controversies surrounding Blomberg's marriage, demonstrating the extent to which personal matters intersected with high-level politics in Nazi Germany. This article contributes to our understanding of Fritsch's retirement as Commander and Chief of Germany's Land Armies by aligning with other scholarly sources on the subject.

2. Gisevius, Hans Bernd. *To the Bitter End*. Translated by Richard Winston, Houghton Mifflin Co., 1947. pp. 229-230.

This retrospective narrative unveils a fascinating turn of events as Gisevius writes that Fritsch's once-shattered dossier, dismantled three years earlier, was commanded to be reassembled in January of 1938. Remarkably, upon its second presentation to Hitler, the flawed dossier garnered newfound credibility in his eyes. Blomberg, sensing the shifting tides, opted for a temporary escape, prompting Hitler to exile him and decree his banishment from German territory.

Hans Bernd Gisevius (1904-1974) was one of the few survivors who had plotted against Hitler. He distinguished himself as both a German diplomat and intelligence officer throughout the tumultuous period of the Second World War. Initially beginning his career in 1933 with the Prussian Interior Ministry, he later transitioned into police work within the same ministry. Notably, Gisevius played a pivotal role as a key witness for the prosecution during the Nuremberg trials, shedding light on crucial aspects of the wartime era.

On March 26, 1947, The New York Times published an obituary titled "HANS GISEVIUS, 68,

ANTI-NAZI, IS DEAD.”⁸ There is an inconsistency regarding Gisevius's role as a key witness in legal proceedings. While *The New York Times* article states he testified for the prosecution, a book titled *The Nuremberg Trial*, which is cited by Wikipedia, suggests Gisevius testified for the defense.⁹

In addition to *To the Bitter End*, Gisevius wrote *Valkyrie: An Insider's Account of the Plot to Kill Hitler*. This is a narrative of the events of July 20, 1944, when a bomb was clandestinely planted in Hitler's headquarters, narrowly missing the Führer. The aftermath saw brutal reprisals, with the conspirators either executed on the spot or subjected to show trials and sadistic hangings. Gisevius, among the scarce survivors, utilized his roles within both the Gestapo and the Abwehr to advance the anti-Nazi movement.

3. Deutsch, Harold C. *Hitler and His Generals; the Hidden Crisis, January-June 1938*. University of Minnesota Press, 1974. p. 248

This page discusses the conspiracy to undermine Fritsch and highlights the unwavering adherence to the established hierarchy that none of the other generals dared to challenge.

Harold C. Deutsch was a professor at the University of Minnesota who wrote seven other books about German history.¹⁰

This book narrates the conspiracy against Hitler by his Generals during the Spring of 1938, a clandestine plot that nearly culminated in a coup d'état. The book details Hitler's relentless pursuit to assert dominance over the Wehrmacht. The narrative discusses Hitler's calculated maneuvers to remove the War Minister and Army Commander in Chief, effectively solidifying his grip on military power.

“Hitler and His Generals: The Hidden Crisis” was cited in reputable sources such as JSTOR, Cambridge University Press, and Wikipedia. In an article titled “A. J. P. Taylor, Adolf Hitler, and the Origins of the Second World War” published by JSTOR employs the text to elucidate the replacement of Fritsch and Blomberg by the armed forces high command. Wikipedia draws upon the source to underscore the profound dismay among German officers regarding Fritsch's treatment. Cambridge University Press article was not attainable.

4. "Hans Gisevius, 68, Anti-Nazi, Is Dead." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 27 Mar. 1974, <https://www.nytimes.com/1974/03/27/archives/hans-gisevius-68-antinazi-is-dead-told-of-plots-to-overthrow-hitler.html>

This obituary pays tribute to Gisevius and mentions his two autobiographical books, *To The Bitter End* and *Valkyrie: An Insider's Account of the Plot to Kill Hitler*.

5. Gerwarth, Robert. *Hitler's Hangman: The Life of Heydrich*. Yale University Press, 2011. p.116
This book devotes an entire chapter to the Blomberg-Fritsch affair, detailing the sequence of

⁸ “Hans Gisevius, 68, Anti-Nazi, Is Dead.” *The New York Times* 27 Mar. 1974, <https://www.nytimes.com/1974/03/27/archives/hans-gisevius-68-antinazi-is-dead-told-of-plots-to-overthrow-hitler.html>

⁹ Ann Tusa & John Tusa, *The Nuremberg Trial* (BBC Books, 1983), pg. 329.

¹⁰ “Blomberg–Fritsch Affair.” *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 31 Jan. 2024, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blomberg%E2%80%93Fritsch_affair.

events from start to finish.

Robert Gerwarth, born in 1976 in Berlin, is a distinguished German historian and author. His academic journey includes institutions such as the University of Oxford, Harvard, and others. Currently he teaches at University College Dublin (UCD), Ireland. An intriguing fact of his life is that at the age of thirteen, he bore witness to the historic fall of the Berlin Wall.

Gerwarth published a number of books, This book has been cited by reliable sources such as the Naval War College Review, and Wikipedia utilizes it in the article about the Blomberg-Fritsch affair.¹¹

6. “Blomberg-Fritsch-Krise.” *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 30 Dec. 2023,

<https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blomberg-Fritsch-Krise>

The German Wikipedia entry begins by highlighting the dismissal of Generals Blomberg and Fritsch from their positions. It provides coverage of the scandal, including details of Blomberg's marriage to a woman with a questionable background. It delves into the allegations against Fritsch, emphasizing how Hitler seized on the opportunity to eliminate obstacles to his Four Year Plan. Additionally, it discusses the accusations against Fritsch, notably his alleged homosexuality. Finally, the entry outlines Hitler's decision to disband the Reich War Ministry, marking a significant restructuring within the German military establishment.

This German Wikipedia entry offers insights not found in the English counterpart, notably detailing a crucial meeting where Hitler faced significant resistance to his Four Year Plan from Generals Fritsch and Blomberg, as well as Foreign Minister Neurath. Furthermore, a notable disparity between the two sources lies in Hitler's initial reluctance to remove Fritsch, contrasting with his swift action against Blomberg. According to this entry, Fritsch's downfall stemmed from an ill-fated lunch encounter in 1933/34 with a member of the Hitler Youth, where he inadvertently divulged a story. This anecdote triggered Hitler's suspicions, leading to a loss of trust in Fritsch and ultimately contributing to his demise.

7. “Blomberg–Fritsch Affair.” *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 31 Jan. 2024,

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blomberg%E2%80%93Fritsch_affair.

Wikipedia provides a comprehensive overview of the events that transpired. It delves into Blomberg's marriage to a woman who was a prostitute, and how his involvement with Fritsch unfolded shortly thereafter. The article also covers the affair itself, shedding light on Göring's opposition to Fritsch's potential succession to Blomberg. In 1936, the situation escalated when Reinhard Heydrich compiled a dossier on Fritsch containing allegations of homosexuality, which he then presented to Hitler. Despite Hitler's initial dismissal of the allegations and his directive to destroy the file, Heydrich failed to comply. Furthermore, Hitler exploited the controversy to purge dissent within the military ranks, replacing several generals and ministers with individuals who exhibited unwavering loyalty to him. Lastly, the article addresses the subsequent exoneration of Fritsch, revealing that the accusations against him were unfounded

¹¹ “Blomberg–Fritsch Affair.” *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 31 Jan. 2024, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blomberg%E2%80%93Fritsch_affair.

and levied by a disreputable individual. Despite being cleared of charges, Fritsch's reputation had already suffered irreparable damage.

8. “The Trial of German Major War Criminals: Proceedings of the International Military Tribunal Sitting at Nuremberg Germany.” *Avalon Project - Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy*, <https://avalon.law.yale.edu/imt/04-25-46.asp> Accessed 24 Feb. 2024.

The trial of German Major War Criminals, held at Nuremberg, Germany, provides a comprehensive record of the proceedings. Hans Bernd Gisevius, in his testimony, offered invaluable insights into the events of Nazi Germany. The creation of sources was essential to document and chronicle the events unfolding during the trials. It was imperative to record and preserve a comprehensive account of the proceedings for historical accuracy and posterity. Among the topics Gisevius covers were the details surrounding Blomberg's marriage, the complex relationship between Blomberg and Fritsch. Gisevius's testimony sheds light on the broader context of the era.

9. Museum, Stiftung Deutsches Historisches. “Die Fritsch-Blomberg-Affäre” *Deutsches Historisches Museum*, www.dhm.de/lemo/kapitel/ns-regime/innenpolitik/fritschblom/. Accessed 24 Feb. 2024.

This webpage offers a concise narrative of the Blomberg-Fritsch affair compared to other sources such as Wikipedia. Initially, it delves into Blomberg and Fritsch's dissent regarding Hitler's four-year plan aimed at preparing Germany for war. Subsequently, it elaborates on a scheme against Blomberg and Fritsch for hindering Hitler's plan, resulting in their dismissal from military duties and leaving a stain on their reputations.

Lebendiges Museum Online discusses Blomberg and Fritsch's shared perspective on the excesses of Hitler's four-year plan for Germany, deeming it impractical. In comparison, Wikipedia places greater emphasis on Göring's opposition to Fritsch succeeding Blomberg.

I used AI in this assignment to ensure my grammar was correct and help make my writing sound more academic.