

THE PATH TO RUIN: INFLEXIBILITY, DELUSION, AND DISCORD BETWEEN THE KAISER, CHANCELLOR, AND GERMAN HIGH COMMAND IN THE GREAT WAR

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the political and military decisions of the German High Command during the First World War. After first examining the unresolved historiographic discourse over Germany's fifth Imperial Chancellor, Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg, it explores the backgrounds of Kaiser Wilhelm II, Chancellor von Bethmann-Hollweg, General Erich von Falkenhayn, and General Erich Ludendorff, and studies the argument within the High Command over whether Germany should focus her war efforts on the western or eastern fronts. Two central theses are argued: (1) Germany had numerous opportunities to end the war diplomatically with favorable terms once it was clear they would not be able to win militarily, but these were all thwarted due to the inability of the war leaders to cooperate and agree in any capacity. (2) Falkenhayn, Ludendorff and Bethmann-Hollweg all vied for the support of the Kaiser in key military and political decisions, but by 1917 the Kaiser was largely supplanted by Ludendorff because the Kaiser failed in his constitutional role as Supreme Warlord and mediator between civilian and military branches. [Keywords: Germany, WWI, Kaiser Wilhelm, Ludendorff, Falkenhayn, strategy]

CONFLICTING INTERPRETATIONS: THEOBALD VON BETHMANN-HOLLWEG

The discourse over Germany's war leaders in the First World War has been highly debated since the end of the war. Throughout the 1970s, Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg was scrutinized by the leading European historians of the day. In *Das Deutsche Kaiserreich*, Hans-Ulrich Wehler judged Bethmann-Hollweg as a "conflict shy bureaucrat, who failed in his policy of administering problems in a system that could no longer be governed."¹

Willibald Gutsche's *Aufstieg und Fall eines kaiserlichen Reichskanzlers* argued that the Chancellor's policies were contradictory, and claims that he was a "cunning imperialist politician" who championed the German war of conquest, while at the same time merely pretending to favor pacifism.² However, many American historians have interpreted Bethmann-Hollweg's policies and demeanor more positively within the contextual framework of Imperial Germany. Gordon Craig claimed that Bethmann-Hollweg was "careful and energetic in his policy, but his moderate foreign policy brought about his undoing under the pressure of the egotistic military."³

A contemporary interpretation of Bethmann-Hollweg by Mark Hewitson argued that, "despite occasional forebodings, Bethmann-Hollweg was confident that Germany could win a war of annihilation and achieve a complete surrender of France and Russia."⁴ Hewitson further argued

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that many of Bethmann-Hollweg's decisions during the period immediately preceding the war were based on a policy of continental domination, and the Reich's leaders including Bethmann-Hollweg, were ready for an offensive war.⁵ Although Hewitson's paper focused on Imperial Germany's decisions at the beginning of the First World War, his critique of Bethmann-Hollweg implies that he was little different than any of the annexationist military leaders like Erich Ludendorff.

Despite Hewitson's more recent discussion of the Chancellor, Konrad Jarausch offers the most nuanced interpretation of Bethmann-Hollweg's actions. Jarausch incorporated previously unused documentation to help shape his view of the Chancellor. The Jewish journalist Theodor Wolff was the editor-in-chief of the leading liberal newspaper, the *Berliner Tageblatt*, who conducted several in depth interviews with Bethmann-Hollweg in 1915. The Wolff interviews revealed that the Chancellor harbored deep enmity towards the Pan-German annexationists like Ludendorff.⁶ Bethmann-Hollweg wanted Germany to become the dominant country in the European continent, but he was opposed to large-scale annexations. Bethmann-Hollweg sought to establish indirect political, economic and military ties with Belgium in the west, and Poland in the east to serve as buffer zones, without directly annexing them. During the war, Bethmann-Hollweg championed political reform and peace. However, Jarausch correctly argues that the Chancellor's weakness was his inability to force a moderate course on Germany's immutable military leaders.⁷ Bethmann-Hollweg failed to achieve a peaceful resolution to the First World War, and his efforts were undermined by the inflexibility of Germany's military leaders.

BACKGROUND AND BUILDUP TO WAR

In order to understand how Kaiser Wilhelm II came to his wartime decisions, his role as the German Emperor must be evaluated in the years leading up to the war that defined his character and gave insight into how he would act once war broke out. Kaiser Wilhelm II came to power in 1888 after the premature death of his father, Frederick III. Wilhelm II had grown up with the conflicting ideologies of his progressive, liberal father and his conservative grandfather, Wilhelm I. According to Christopher Clark, Wilhelm II was raised with the some teachings of traditional, militaristic Prussian doctrine like his grandfather, Wilhelm I. However, the marriage of Wilhelm's father to the English Princess, Victoria, and the growing rift between political factions caused Wilhelm's upbringing and education to be pulled in two different directions.

One side was Anglophile, liberal-bourgeois, and based upon the creation of civil virtues, while the other was from the old-Prussian, aristocratic school of thought which centered on the cultivation of military skills and discipline.⁸ The struggle between the different pedagogical ideologies gave Wilhelm a unique personality which allowed him to be thoughtful and responsive to the needs of others, while also allowing him to maintain a sense of admiration for the military, despite not being strategically adept.⁹ Wilhelm's upbringing is of importance for the purposes of

our evaluation because it is the reason why Wilhelm never formed a decisive set of principles and values, and this flaw hurt him later in his reign.

An important part of Wilhelm's reign was his period of "personal rule" from 1897-1900. Wilhelm was a firm believer in the idea of the Divine Right of Kings and as such, he believed it fell to him, and only him, to make the decisions in the best interests of different regions and classes.¹⁰ The Kaiser's period of 'personal rule' included several reform programs such as the Penal Detention Bill (Zuchthausvorlage) in 1898 and the Canal Bill of 1899. Both of these programs were designed with the right intentions. The Penal Detention Bill was supposed to provide legal protection to those who continued to work during a strike. The Canal Bill was the product of the Kaiser's dream of uniting the industrial west with the agricultural east of Germany.¹¹ Regardless of how much influence the Kaiser desired, it meant little in the new world under the Imperial Constitution of 1871. According to the new constitution, the Kaiser could prepare and promulgate new laws, but needed a consensus from both the upper (Bundesrat) and lower (Reichstag) houses to pass them.¹² Most politicians believed that Wilhelm's programs were too far-reaching. As a result, the majority of the Kaiser's bills were quickly shot down by the members of the Reichstag and never came to fruition.

Wilhelm II believed in personal diplomacy, and wished to use existing familial ties between his nation, Britain, and Russia to strengthen Germany's political position.¹³ He attempted to use these ties to alleviate the other nations' fears of a rising, powerful Germany. However, Wilhelm was overzealous in his efforts, often acting without consulting his advisors, and his direct negotiations did not get far.¹⁴ Wilhelm wooed Great Britain, France, and Russia in an attempt to prevent Germany from becoming politically isolated. In the summer of 1890, the Kaiser moved to strengthen Germany's relationship with Great Britain; a few months later he pursued a policy to strengthen Germany's ties with France.¹⁵ However when Wilhelm visited France without first consulting the Foreign Office, he did more harm than good, and relations between the nations cooled. After senselessly allowing former Chancellor Otto Von Bismarck's Russo-German Reinsurance Treaty to lapse, the Kaiser attempted to repair relations with Russia in 1891. However, the Russians were not particularly receptive, as they were in the process of building a new alliance with France.¹⁶

The Kaiser tried to single-handedly improve foreign relations up until 1907 when the *Daily Telegraph* affair took the wind out of his proverbial sails. Wilhelm had stayed at High Cliffe Castle in Surrey, England after visiting Windsor. There he conducted a mock interview with Colonel Edward Stuart Wortley, who published the conversation in the *Daily Telegraph*.¹⁷ Rather than improve relations, the Kaiser's outbursts during the interview treated Great Britain, France, Russia and even Japan with disdain. The Kaiser's conduct infuriated the Reichstag parties, who condemned his conduct. While the current Chancellor Bernhard von Bülow should have been held responsible for allowing the article to be published, he sat on the sidelines while the public berated the Kaiser.¹⁸ Some of the more liberal political parties called for a possible abdication by the Kaiser or even a change in the constitution to prevent the debacle from happening again. The

Daily Telegraph affair left a lasting mark on Wilhelm and thereafter he made fewer public appearances and did not interfere with policies as before.¹⁹

Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg was born in 1856 at Hohenfinow near Berlin and became Reich Chancellor in 1909 after the Kaiser dismissed von Bülow. He was a longtime friend of the Kaiser, and while in power Bethmann-Hollweg attempted to pursue a policy of "diagonals," meaning that rather than leaning left or right (liberal or conservative), his policies sometimes appealed to the Liberals and other times to the Conservatives. Bethmann-Hollweg sought to transcend party politics and build a bridge between the political Left and Right, hence the policy of the diagonal.²⁰ While he was an imperialist by nature, Bethmann-Hollweg was a flexible politician who tried to please the political Right with new territorial annexations, but was realistic enough to pursue more limited means, including advocating for a separate peace with one or more of the Allied powers once the conservative dream of a Greater Germany no longer appeared to be feasible. Unfortunately, Bethmann-Hollweg ended up alienating both the Liberals and Conservatives, as his policies often undercut one side or the other. By the time of his resignation he had practically no supporters on either side, and today is often seen as a tragic character whose policies were undermined by those around him.²¹

Erich von Falkenhayn was born in West Prussia in 1861. He became a cadet soldier at the age of eleven and eventually became the Prussian Minister of War in 1913. He was one of the major players who advocated that Germany declare war in 1914. While he is remembered today as the "bloody butcher of Verdun," he was actually a man who learned from his mistakes and tried to incorporate both his successes and failures into his designs.²² After Germany suffered a defeat on the western front in the beginning of the war, he immediately changed tactics and proposed that Germany should instead pursue a strategy which would propel a military victory into a political negotiation with one of Germany's enemies.²³ However, once Falkenhayn believed he had figured out the best solution to a problem he stuck to his guns on the matter; his inflexibility led him into direct conflict with General Erich Ludendorff, who commanded the armies in the eastern front.

Erich Ludendorff was born in 1865 in the Province of Posen. He was a hard Right conservative who was narrowly focused on complete military victory, with little regard for politics. He had been trained (like all Prussian generals) under the incomplete but influential military doctrine of Karl von Clausewitz, which emphasized the outright crushing of the enemy's forces. After Germany failed to win the war in its opening offensive, and General Falkenhayn failed to win a decisive victory at the Battle of Verdun, it was up to Ludendorff to engineer a decisive battle that would bring victory to Germany.²⁴ This goal led to him into direct conflict with Falkenhayn, Bethmann-Hollweg, and the Kaiser himself. Ludendorff proved to be the most stubborn of the Kaiser's entourage: he deviously, yet brilliantly, increased his own power throughout the war to bring down not only Falkenhayn and Bethmann-Hollweg, but inadvertently, the Kaiser and his government as well.²⁵

The assassination of Austria's Archduke Franz Ferdinand in June, 1914 led to a mounting crisis in the Balkans, as Austria wished to punish Serbia for the death of the Austrian heir to the

throne. The following month, known today as the “July Crisis,” amounted to the buildup of tension between the European powers and eventually culminated in world war. While Germany was the most powerful country in Europe in 1914, historian Niall Ferguson argues that German leaders pessimistically came to the conclusion that Germany would ultimately lose an arms race to Russia, who could have then used their overwhelming numbers to crush Germany. The German generals gambled on a preemptive attack to check Russia’s growing power and consolidate its own status as a major world power. Ferguson provides ample evidence to back up his claims of German paranoia by providing multiple quotes from Generals Moltke, Ludendorff, Grand Admiral von Tirpitz and others.²⁶ When the Archduke was assassinated, it provided Germany with a political opportunity to launch their preemptive attack. This notion is challenged in the Kaiser’s postwar memoirs where he states:

General von Moltke was of the opinion that war was sure to break out, whereas Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg stuck firmly to his view that things would not reach such a bad pass. Not until General Moltke announced that the Russians had set fire to their frontier posts, torn up frontier railways, and posted red mobilization notices did a light break upon the diplomats in the Wilhelmstrasse and bring about both their own collapse and powers of resistance. They had not *wished* to believe in the war. This shows how little we expected—much less prepared for war in July 1914.²⁷

However, one must be wary of apologetic literature written after an event, especially writing that was meant to explain failure. In 1922, the Kaiser had the luxury of defending his actions to make himself appear blameless for Germany’s entry in the war.

Historians disagree as to the extent of the Kaiser’s desire for war in 1914. Historian Christopher Clark maintains that after hearing the news of the Archduke’s assassination aboard his royal yacht, Wilhelm returned to Berlin at once so ‘he could take the situation in and preserve the peace of Europe.’²⁸ In this context, Wilhelm appears as a champion of peace. However, historian John Röhl disagrees with this conclusion, questioning the validity of the statement. Röhl claims that Clark’s quote was actually just a paraphrase by Lamar Cecil, the Kaiser’s American biographer, in a letter written in December 1919 after Germany’s defeat.²⁹ Röhl believes the Kaiser was in favor of the war, saying that on July 30 the Kaiser was determined to ‘settle accounts with France’ and ‘free the Balkans from Russia forever!’³⁰ After two decades of alienating most of Europe, the Kaiser allowed Germany to be plunged into a world war in 1914. Regardless of Germany’s war aims and the Kaiser’s desire for war, Germany had to fight a war on two fronts, and with two relatively weak allies. The Kaiser was Supreme Warlord of the army after all, at least for the time being.

At the onset of the war every member of the German Supreme Command, including the Kaiser, was confident of a quick, decisive military victory through the use of the vaunted “Schlieffen Plan,” which consisted of a sweeping attack through Belgium to get to France more

easily. Although the Kaiser dreamed of upholding his constitutional duty as Supreme Warlord, he quickly relinquished this idea as soon as the war began. The Schlieffen Plan failed at the Battle of the Marne in September 1914, and forced each side to dig in and become locked in trench warfare. The Kaiser's nerves were shaken from this unexpected defeat and he slipped into a depression, consoling himself by reading military dispatches in an overly positive tone.

To combat the Kaiser's hesitancy, his military staff purposefully shielded him from any bad news from the front.³¹ Wilhelm was kept of the loop of current military affairs, and even when the Kaiser visited the war front he was offered only vague or outdated news to keep him busy. The effect of these actions limited the Kaiser's influence and allowed the military leaders to conduct affairs as they pleased without interference.³² For now, the Kaiser was content to remove himself from military affairs, but this isolation was not to last and would result in disastrous consequences for Germany.

After the Chief of the General Staff Helmuth Johann Ludwig von Moltke suffered a nervous breakdown and loss of confidence, the Kaiser relieved him of his command. Under Article 18 of the constitution, the Kaiser had the right to appoint imperial officials.³³ However, by the end of the war this exclusive power of the Kaiser was superseded by Ludendorff. Moltke was replaced by Erich von Falkenhayn, whom the Kaiser personally knew and trusted. The appointment of Falkenhayn was not well received by the rest of the High Command, and he became increasingly loathed as the war progressed and Germany failed to break through in the West. Despite Falkenhayn's flaws (he was known to be a gambler), the Kaiser almost never attempted to alter Falkenhayn's outlook while he was Chief of the General Staff.³⁴ The failure at the Marne prompted discussion as to what direction the war should take from there on out.

EAST OR WEST? THE POLITICAL AND MILITARY DEBATE AFTER THE BATTLE OF THE MARNE

After the Battle of the Marne, Bethmann-Hollweg urged a cessation of hostilities as soon as possible. He lost faith that Germany could win a total victory, and recognized that Germany was outmatched in terms of raw manpower and economic stability. The Allies were content to prolong the war, but Germany needed to end it quickly. To this end, Bethmann-Hollweg proposed that Germany should isolate one member of the Entente Powers and conclude a separate peace with them. Bethmann-Hollweg surmised that if Germany could break up the Entente, they could coerce the other two countries to the negotiating table, on Germany's terms.³⁵

However, Bethmann-Hollweg soon shifted his initial opinion that Germany needed to win the war quickly. He held that Germany must defend the Western Front and outlast the Allies. While the West held firm, the Germans could advance slowly eastward and convince the Russians to sue for peace. Bethmann-Hollweg used the Danish King Hans Neil Andersen as a mediator to determine whether Russia was interested in peace. However, he was quickly disappointed to learn

that Tsar Nicholas II was confident Russia would win the war and thus were not interested in any negotiations.³⁶

Civilian leaders such as Bethmann-Hollweg attempted to feign military competence by dressing in military uniform while giving speeches or talking to military leaders. However, Bethmann-Hollweg admitted that it was impossible for a member of government with only general military knowledge to determine potential military possibilities or necessities.³⁷ Thus, Bethmann-Hollweg and the rest of the civilian government continued the war unsure of their military capabilities. Meanwhile, the military generals forged onwards with complete confidence in their martial skills.

As a result of this dilemma, the flow of information between the two branches decreased. Falkenhayn did not tell Bethmann-Hollweg about his operational agenda and Bethmann-Hollweg neglected to involve Falkenhayn in diplomatic affairs.³⁸ Falkenhayn and Bethmann-Hollweg never worked together, so how could Germany expect to win the war when the two most crucial branches failed to communicate with one another? While Bethmann-Hollweg was busy chasing peace, the generals pursued efforts to win a total military victory.

General Falkenhayn believed that Germany should focus its efforts on breaking through in the Western Front. They were close to achieving this at the Marne, and he believed that by transferring troops from the East to the West, that breakthrough could be achieved. However, General Ludendorff and his like-minded partner Paul Von Hindenburg believed that Germany's forces should concentrate on the Eastern Front since they had already achieved major victories over the Russians at the Battles of Tannenberg, Lodz, and the Masurian Lakes in 1914-1915. Ludendorff was adamant that if Falkenhayn diverted troops to the Eastern Front, he would be able to completely encircle the Russians at Lodz at the bend of Vistula River and achieve the knockout blow that Germany sought.³⁹ Falkenhayn, however, was narrowly focused on the West. He dismissed Ludendorff's pleas and after the war commented on the subject stating that, "It was a grave mistake to believe that our western enemies would give way, if, and because Russia was beaten. No decision in the East, even though it were as thorough as it was possible to imagine, could spare us from fighting to a conclusion in the West."⁴⁰

Falkenhayn was the Chief of the General Staff and outranked Ludendorff. He ignored Ludendorff's protests and launched a second assault on the French city of Ypres, which was repulsed with heavy casualties. Yet even after this defeat, Falkenhayn's resolve did not waver. As a result, by the end of 1915 the Russian armies were severely weakened but crucially still in the field, while Germany continued to fight an exhausting war on two fronts. The commanders in the Eastern Theatre were appalled by this series of unfortunate events and resorted to name-calling and petty hostility to Falkenhayn.⁴¹ In October 1915, Falkenhayn sought to support Austria in an attack against Serbia and wanted to pull troops from the east to support the endeavor. Ludendorff and Hindenburg viewed this as a personal attack on their authority and filed a formal complaint with the Kaiser. However, the Kaiser resolutely supported Falkenhayn, who got his way.⁴² The

Serbs were forced to retreat all the way back into Greece, but they were not completely defeated. With the situation in the east stabilized, Falkenhayn now looked back to the west for victory.

Falkenhayn was not as close-minded as his rival Ludendorff, and he believed that Germany needed to pursue a new strategy to win the war. He didn't think Germany had the strength of numbers to dictate the peace that it had sought at the start of the war. Like Bethmann-Hollweg, he reasoned that Germany needed to broker a separate peace with one of the countries to divide the Entente.⁴³ While he viewed Great Britain as the largest threat, he determined that France should once again be the target. He judged that France's morale was weaker, and an offensive along the Meuse River could "bleed the French army white" and force France to sue for peace with Germany.⁴⁴ This would in turn put Russia in a poor position without her main ally, and force her to sue for peace. Then Germany could focus on its most stalwart enemy, Great Britain.⁴⁵

It is critical to note that at the commencement of the war the generals convinced themselves that the only way they could save the monarchy was through military victory and subsequent territorial annexations.⁴⁶ The Supreme Command regarded a victorious peace associated with large-scale annexations and financial reparations to be the only acceptable outcome of the war. The Supreme Command assumed that a negotiated peace, let alone a military defeat would destroy the status of the officer corps, the monarchy, and the whole fabric of society as well.⁴⁷ Ludendorff maintained this belief throughout the war. He was worried about liberal political reform in the empire and he believed victory could assuage civilian unrest. Conversely, Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg adapted better to Germany's present situation. Whereas Ludendorff championed total military victory, Bethmann-Hollweg pursued separate peace negotiations. While Ludendorff unrelentingly strove for outright annexations in the east and west without regard to the political ramifications, Bethmann-Hollweg favored more subtle measures, such as indirect economic ties and military conventions in those areas.⁴⁸

Which direction, east or west, was the correct front on which to focus? While the greater threat to Germany was the combined might of France and Great Britain in the west, these two were also less likely to break than Russia. After the initial westward thrust by the Germans, only reinforcements from troops in the east might have provided enough manpower to break through. This confusion might have been enough to isolate France, who would have been under immediate threat and thus forced to sue for peace. However, the resistance from Bethmann-Hollweg, Ludendorff and Hindenburg made this a daunting task. The trenches of the western front also reduced the chances of a successful breakthrough offensive.

The successful German Gorlice-Tornow Offensive of May 1915 was a major blow to Russian morale. The Russian Tsar, Nicholas II, declared himself front-line supreme commander to inspire the faltering troops.⁴⁹ Consequently, each subsequent Russian defeat was blamed on the Tsar and his government. Had Falkenhayn transferred the required battalions to the east at the Battle of Lodz, the Russian army would have been completely annihilated—much like the fate suffered by the German 6th army against the Russians in a reverse situation at Stalingrad during World War II. A decisive defeat at the Battle of Lodz could have produced a political and social

crisis significant enough to bring Russia to the negotiating table. With Russia out of the war in 1915, the Central Powers would not have resorted to the question of unrestricted submarine warfare because of the Allied economic blockade, denying the excuse for America to join the war, and allowing most of the eastern forces to bolster the west for a true knockout blow that the High Command desired. However, the inability of the German High Command to work together prevented a favorable outcome, and the struggle for dominance between Falkenhayn and Ludendorff soon reached a climax.

VERDUN, THE FALL OF FALKENHAYN, AND ANOTHER CHANCE FOR PEACE

Ludendorff and Hindenburg worked hard to replace Falkenhayn as Chief of the General Staff, but as long as Falkenhayn maintained the support of the Kaiser, he was nearly untouchable. The chancellor did his best to shape German policy, but the decision was ultimately in the hands of Falkenhayn because he was supported by the Kaiser. A policy of attrition as a means to victory was thus put in place without regard to the political implications.⁵⁰ The Kaiser was unable to reconcile military and political demands and chose to side more with the military views of Falkenhayn, in part because he favored him, but also to curtail the growing popularity of Hindenburg, who had become a celebrity after the victory at Tannenberg in 1914.⁵¹ In order to end the war using his new strategy of “bleeding the French white,” Falkenhayn chose the fortress of Verdun as the target for his next attack. Although this battle is traditionally remembered today as an atrocious meat grinder that amounted to little more than needless bloodshed, the battle was never intended to develop the way it did.

French offensives in the spring and fall of 1915 in the Champagne region using triple the number of men and three and a half times the number of artillery pieces were repulsed by the Germans with little need for reinforcements, who also inflicted heavy casualties on the French in the process.⁵² Falkenhayn sought to goad the French into another major attack while the Germans controlled a strong, defensive position so they could inflict a disproportionate number of casualties on the French. In order to accomplish this, Falkenhayn concluded that the Germans would have to at least threaten to take a strategic objective that the French High Command could not afford to lose.⁵³

Falkenhayn ultimately chose Verdun as his target for several reasons. First, it had significant sentimental value to the French. Second, it was a central point in the French line and its loss would severely weaken the French’s ability to maintain their front. Third, Verdun was located in a salient which could be surrounded by the Germans on three sides and bombarded from above. Finally, the land behind the German front was well supported by rail lines and the German artillery could easily sever the French rail lines.⁵⁴ Thus, Verdun seemed an ideal target on which to focus. To Falkenhayn, it didn’t matter whether the Germans could successfully capture the fortress. He simply wished to launch an assault on Verdun, gain favorable ground, dig in, and wait for the inevitable French and/or British counterattack. Falkenhayn kept a large force in reserve to

thwart the eventual Allied counterattack, and believed that his heavy artillery could produce enough casualties to bring the French to the negotiating table.⁵⁵ However, miscommunication and disagreement between Falkenhayn and the commanders of the German 5th army undermined this unique plan for limited victory.

The commanders of the 5th army, who represented the brunt of the German assault believed that they should employ artillery on the three available sides surrounding Verdun. Artillery would be used to thoroughly bombard Verdun, and then the 5th army could take it. The attack order given to troops on January 27, 1916 urged the soldiers to fight much more aggressively than Falkenhayn intended. "The entire battle for the fortress of Verdun depends upon the attack never coming to a halt, thereby preventing the French from ever having the opportunity to construct new positions in their rear and reorganizing their shattered resistance."⁵⁶

Falkenhayn did not want to risk such a complicated three-prong attack, and instead told the 5th army to limit their attack on just the east bank of the Meuse River; after-all, it didn't matter if they took the fortress, they just needed to be in a desirable position and provoke an Allied counterattack. The discord between Falkenhayn and the 5th army produced disastrous consequences for the German forces. Although the initial wave of attacks against Verdun were successful in inflicting massive casualties on the French, Falkenhayn refused to deploy his reserve force to shatter the faltering French line. Crown Prince Wilhelm, the son of the Kaiser, was one of the commanding generals of the 5th army and after the battle he lamented that:

On the evening of the 24 February, the resistance of the enemy was actually broken; the path to Verdun was open!... We were so close to a complete victory! However, I lacked the reserves for an immediate and ruthless exploitation of the success we had achieved. The troops, who had been engaged in unbroken, heavy combat for 4 days, were no longer in the condition to do so. Thus, the psychological moment passed unused.⁵⁷

Falkenhayn's reluctance to commit his reserves on time allowed the Franco-British forces to reinforce the area. The Germans were halted well short of the line Falkenhayn wished to hold to conduct his offensive-defensive battle, and the French were content to bombard the Germans with their own artillery from the west bank of the Meuse. The Battle of Verdun dragged on with mounting casualties, but the numbers were not lopsided enough to produce the political effect Falkenhayn hoped for. The initiative was finally called off on December 17, 1916. Thus the battle was not only a tactical failure, but a strategic one as well, actually producing the opposite effect than was intended, bringing the French people together as a nation rather than breaking their morale to the point of suing for peace.⁵⁸ This battle served to discredit Falkenhayn, and was a political victory for Ludendorff and Hindenburg.

The Battle of Verdun did not succeed mainly due to the miscommunication of Falkenhayn and the generals of the 5th army. The generals of the 5th army were certain that military victory could have been won outright had Falkenhayn committed his reserves when they were needed in

the initial thrust. However, Falkenhayn proposed a new tactic to win the war through attrition. By December, while the Battle of Verdun was winding down, the German General Mackensen had succeeded in crushing much of the Romanian army in the Balkan Front of the war. Bethmann-Hollweg jumped at this new opportunity to begin peace negotiations while Germany was in a stronger position. Despite more objections from Ludendorff and Hindenburg, the Chancellor managed to convince the Kaiser that this was a prime opportunity to secure peace. However, even though Ludendorff was unable to stop the talks, he did manage to alter the German note to the Allied Powers with his own aggressive rhetoric. The note read, “based on the consciousness of their military and economic strength, prepared to continue the struggle to the last man if need be, but simultaneously inspired by the desire of preventing further bloodshed... the four allied governments are proposed to enter into peace negotiations immediately.”⁵⁹

The Entente Powers swiftly rejected the peace note claiming it was a “maneuver of war.” The Entente clearly did not want the war to end if there was any prospect of German victory, no matter how limited that victory may be. Bethmann-Hollweg looked to American President Woodrow Wilson as a mediator for the two sides, but Wilson was moving closer and closer to the Pro-Entente camp.⁶⁰ Wilson had demanded that Germany give up all claims to a German controlled Belgium if peace was to be attained. However, Ludendorff and Hindenburg simply refused to acquiesce to this demand. They were dead set on possessing Liège and Belgian railways, and on maintaining open access to occupying the country whenever Germany saw fit.⁶¹ Bethmann-Hollweg’s failed bid for peace provided the opportunity for Ludendorff to bring up the notion of unrestricted submarine warfare as a new way to win the war, which ultimately became the great turning point.

By August, 1916 Falkenhayn’s days were numbered. The disaster at Verdun proved to be a massive blow against his credibility, but the knockout punch came when Romania entered the war against the Central Powers. Falkenhayn believed he could handle the situation in the Balkans, but this new war front located in the east proved to be enough for other generals to take action against him. Bethmann-Hollweg, Ludendorff, Hindenburg and Generals Lyncker and Plessen argued for a removal of Falkenhayn as Chief of the General Staff. The Kaiser agreed, and Falkenhayn was replaced by what became known as the Third Supreme Army Command (OHL) under the command of the poisonous duo, Ludendorff and Hindenburg.⁶²

In the same month, Bethmann-Hollweg also attempted to broker peace negotiations separately with Russia. According to Ludendorff’s memoirs, the Kaiser had taken an earnest interest in the peace offer, and he notes that Wilhelm “displayed clearly his high sense of responsibility to bring peace to the world at the earliest moment.”⁶³ Russia demanded that Poland, and especially the capital city of Warsaw, be returned to them. Not surprisingly, Ludendorff and the rest of the High Command flatly refused to entertain such ridiculous demands. Poland was theirs now. The German Governor-General of Warsaw, von Beseler believed that Poland’s manpower could be harnessed to bolster Germany’s numbers in the field. He proposed that Poland be declared independent with the stipulation of a minimum three regiment strong volunteer Polish

army who would fight for the Central Powers. Ludendorff approved of this plan and although Bethmann-Hollweg did not think it would work, he did not actively resist it because he was largely unsupported and outnumbered by the military leaders. However, once the plan was put in place, the military leaders were quickly disappointed. Most Poles believed that even if they fought for Germany they would receive neither compensation nor gratitude. Instead they chose to passively resist all German machinations. Instead of adding to Germany's strength, Poland became another problem.⁶⁴

Here is a case where a purely political matter where peace with Russia could have been possible. However, Ludendorff's expansionist innuendos in the peace note to the rest of the Allied Powers sabotaged real efforts to end the war. Instead, the military sphere was allowed to encroach into a political affair over the chancellor of the political sphere. What is even more astonishing is the sheer lack of reflection by the military leaders. Ludendorff was fixated on winning the war, yet even through a purely military-oriented lens, Ludendorff failed to recognize that conceding a small piece of territory to Russia in exchange for peace would have eliminated a major front in the war and given him an opportunity to win through military means. Then, after the rest of the Allies were beaten or sued for peace, Germany could re-annex Poland with much less fear of reprisal. Ludendorff's narrow-sightedness is astonishing on multiple levels, and his ineptitude continued with the debate over unrestricted submarine warfare.

GRAPPLING OVER UNRESTRICTED SUBMARINE WARFARE, AND THE FALL OF BETHMANN-HOLLWEG

After the failure of the Schlieffen Plan at the beginning of the war, Grand Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz pressed for a "wonder weapon" to defeat the Allied Powers quickly and efficiently. From the beginning of the war the British had used the Royal Navy to apply an economic blockade of Germany. Tirpitz believed that using unrestricted submarine warfare, (using submarines to attack enemy merchant vessels while warning neutral merchant craft to not tread into the designated warzone) would serve as a strong counter to the blockade.⁶⁵ Tirpitz also believed that unrestricted submarine warfare would inflict so much damage on the British shipping industry that they would be forced to surrender within a few months.⁶⁶ The Grand Admiral was supported by Falkenhayn as well as Ludendorff who had this to say on the matter:

The Field Marshall (Hindenburg) and myself, in our view of the whole situation and in our too correct doubt as to the success of the peace proposals, had already had under consideration, as part of our military problems, the possibility of carrying on the submarine campaign in an intensified form Unrestricted submarine warfare was now the only means left to secure in any reasonable time a victorious end to the war... Our honor, our existence, our free economic development, must come unimpaired out of this terrible struggle... In the face of the enemy's will to (our) annihilation, (this is) a call to fight to the last.⁶⁷

Bethmann-Hollweg and as well as the Kaiser were acutely aware of the political repercussions of using an outlawed method of warfare. They correctly argued that if the Germans resorted to this tactic, America would join the war against them, thereby erasing any chance for Germany to win.⁶⁸ Tirpitz and Falkenhayn countered that the U-boat campaign would be so successful that Britain would be out of the war long before America would be able to increase its strength to meaningful numbers.

The question over whether to employ unrestricted submarine warfare took place over three debate phases over the course of 1915-1917, and throughout each phase the military and civilian branches struggled to win the Kaiser's approval. The first phase began in February, 1915. After the sinking of the *Lusitania*, America demanded that Germany cease sinking merchant vessels. In this initial crisis, Falkenhayn was on Bethmann-Hollweg's side and agreed that it was a matter of good military policy to halt unrestricted submarine warfare.⁶⁹ The Kaiser was also firmly against unrestricted submarine warfare, and this coalition denied Tirpitz.

The second U-boat debate phase occurred from January to May 1916. During this phase Falkenhayn switched sides after talking to Tirpitz about the probability of success, and tried to persuade Bethmann-Hollweg by claiming that unrestricted submarine warfare was crucial to his Verdun strategy and without it Germany would lose the subsequent war of attrition.⁷⁰ The Kaiser had the final say in this debate between Falkenhayn and Bethmann-Hollweg. Although he wished to end the war quickly, the Kaiser recognized the significance of the USA's entry into the war, as well as the danger of giving Germany's enemies more propaganda to show how barbaric the Germans were. The Kaiser refrained from declaring unrestricted submarine war, thus temporarily shelving the issue.⁷¹

The third U-boat debate phase took place during January 1917. By this time Falkenhayn's strategy of attrition had failed, and the blockade was taking a toll on the Central Powers' food supply and materials. After the rejection of their peace offer in December 1916, the military leaders believed they had a favorable political opportunity to reinstate unrestricted submarine warfare. In a meeting between all relevant civilian and military leaders, it is evident that Bethmann-Hollweg was still in doubt about unrestricted submarine warfare but did not press his opposition too far, while Ludendorff maintained a firm, pragmatic stance.

Bethmann-Hollweg: The determination to launch the unrestricted U-boat war depends, then, upon the results which we may expect. Admiral von Holtendorff assumes that we will have England on her knees by the next harvest. On the whole, the prospects for the unrestricted U-boat war are very favorable. Of course, it must be admitted that those prospects are not capable of being demonstrated by proof. The U-boat war is the "last card." A very serious decision. But if the military authorities consider the U-boat war essential, I am not in a position to contradict them. However, it may be imagined that the U-boat war might postpone the end of hostilities.

Ludendorff: The U-boat war will bring our armies into a different and better situation. Through the lack of wood needed for mining purposes and for lack of coal, the production of ammunition is hard-pressed. It means that there will be some relief for the western front. And, too, Russia's power of initiative will be detrimentally affected by the lack of ammunition which will result from shortage in tonnage.⁷²

In this critical moment the Kaiser changed his mind and supported the OHL and their request for unrestricted submarine warfare. Although Bethmann-Hollweg still opposed the measure, the Kaiser maintained that this was a purely military matter that did not concern the Chancellor.⁷³ Thus, Germany resumed unrestricted submarine warfare, and two months later, the United States entered the war.

Although Bethmann-Hollweg was initially content with Falkenhayn's dismissal, he soon came to regret the role he played in the former Chief of the General Staff's demise. The Third OHL consisting of Ludendorff and Hindenburg now had control over the military, and they slowly reduced the Kaiser's influence from 1917-1918. The duo also worked very hard to remove Bethmann-Hollweg and replace him with a conservative puppet chancellor who supported their ideals. The Kaiser still looked favorably at Bethmann-Hollweg but against the relentless attacks from the OHL, his days were numbered. David Craig argues that Bethmann-Hollweg might have saved his position as chancellor after losing the battle over submarine warfare had he acquiesced wholeheartedly to the designs of the OHL. However, he stuck to his beliefs.

Up until this point, the civilian population had continually demanded political reform from the government. Bethmann-Hollweg now sought to fulfill the people's desires and regain some support for himself. Bethmann-Hollweg convinced the Kaiser that political reform would get the civilians back on his side and increase the Kaiser's popularity, of which the Kaiser was always conscious. The Kaiser delivered his "Easter Message" to the people on April 7, 1917, promising political reform at the conclusion of the war. This move prompted a backlash from the Conservatives under Ludendorff.⁷⁴

On April 23, 1917 the OHL prompted the Kaiser to call a meeting to reevaluate Germany's war aims. Bethmann-Hollweg was invited by the Kaiser who had been once again making efforts to obtain a separate peace with Russia after the February Revolution forced the abdication of the Tsar and the creation of a provisional government. This meeting, known as the Kreuznach Conference, served as the first real instance in which the Kaiser lost faith in the Chancellor. Bethmann-Hollweg argued that excessive demands would upset this delicate balance and force Russia to fight on. However, the OHL was fixated on expansionist aims including the annexation of Courland, Lithuania, and the maintenance of control of Poland, even though Germany was not in a strong position to demand them.⁷⁵

The Kaiser's Easter Message was an embarrassment for him due to the negative reaction from the Conservatives. He attempted to rectify this mistake by taking the OHL's side during the Kreuznach Conference. Thus, once again peace efforts were thwarted because of the expansionist

demands of the OHL. However, because peace negotiations were in the political sphere, Bethmann-Hollweg, not Ludendorff and Hindenburg was the one who was blamed for the failure. This would not be the last time that the failures of the OHL were placed at the Chancellor's feet.

By June 19 the U-boat wonder weapon had lost its luster. While the tonnage of ships sunk were initially well above the navy's projections, the Allied Powers soon adopted a transatlantic convoy system that limited the number of ships sunk and allowed them to inflict some damage of their own. Amazingly, the OHL blamed the failed U-boat initiative on Bethmann-Hollweg, claiming that the only reason the Allies continued fighting was because they were counting on an internal collapse of Germany stemming from his statements about political unrest in the country.⁷⁶ Ludendorff and Hindenburg then continued their crusade by turning members of the Reichstag against Bethmann-Hollweg by arguing that Bethmann-Hollweg's position in office jeopardized Germany's chance for victory. Confident that Bethmann-Hollweg's support was sufficiently eroded, the duo played their trump card. On the July 12, they telephoned the Kaiser and submitted their resignations, saying they could no longer cooperate with the Chancellor. This childish form of blackmail placed the Kaiser in a hopeless position. The war effort could not afford to lose its two most popular generals. To save His Majesty from embarrassment, Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg resigned as chancellor.⁷⁷

Article 18 of the imperial constitution gave the Kaiser the power to appoint a chancellor. However, Bethmann-Hollweg's successor was chosen by the Supreme Army Command, thus undermining the authority of the monarchy. Georg Michaelis was hand-picked because he was easy to control and would not get in the Supreme Army Command's way like Bethmann-Hollweg did. The Kaiser had never heard of Michaelis, but folded under pressure from Ludendorff, and agreed to Michaelis's appointment as the next chancellor.⁷⁸ Throughout the war the people attributed military victories more to Ludendorff and Hindenburg than their sovereign, who neglected his military responsibilities. Now the Kaiser could not even choose his own chancellor. The constitutional authority of the Kaiser was being eroded more and more by the men who were opposed to political and social reform because it might weaken the power of the crown.⁷⁹ They wished to preserve the monarchy but were too delusional to recognize the damage that was being done.

After Ludendorff's last ditch Spring Offensive concluded in failure on 18 July 1918, the German troops were at their breaking point and to desperate for peace. They believed that if the Kaiser was removed, then the Allied Powers were more likely to accept a swift peace and bring four years of bloodshed to an end. The OHL was also at its breaking point, but Ludendorff continued to vacillate. After telling the Kaiser the war could not be won and Germany should conclude an armistice with the Allies, he reneged on his words and soon avowed that Germany should continue the war and that the civilian leaders who wished for peace were 'pessimists.'⁸⁰ At this point, Ludendorff completely lost the confidence of the Conservatives because of his repeated failures and capricious demeanor. A coup to remove Ludendorff was devised, and when Ludendorff found out he convinced Hindenburg to submit his resignation along with his own, in

an attempt to gain leverage over the Kaiser once again. However, with Ludendorff finally politically weakened, the Kaiser regained temporary fortitude. He accepted Ludendorff's removal but rejected Hindenburg's and demanded that he stay, a request to which Hindenburg acquiesced.⁸¹ However, this act proved to be too little, too late.

The removal of Ludendorff did not improve conditions for the Kaiser and the government. Despite repeated advice urging the Kaiser to abdicate in favor of one of his sons to give the monarchy a better chance at survival, Wilhelm stubbornly believed he could stay in power, saying, "I will not abdicate. It would be incompatible with my duties, as successor to Frederick the Great, towards God, the people and my conscious... My abdication would be the beginning of the end for all German monarchies... But above all my duty as Supreme Warlord forbids me to abandon the army now."⁸²

Unfortunately for him, the army did not share the same sentiments towards their Emperor. In the wake of the German Revolution, Wilhelm II fled to Holland in exile where he lived out the remainder of his life in the hope of someday returning to power. Even after Adolf Hitler took control of Germany, the Kaiser still strangely believed that Hitler would give up his position and reinstate Wilhelm as Kaiser.

By the conclusion of World War I Wilhelm, Bethmann-Hollweg, Falkenhayn, and Ludendorff had all lost their power. Chief of the General Staff Erich von Falkenhayn and Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg were ousted by the machinations of Erich Ludendorff, who was in turn removed by the Kaiser. Although not defeated in battle, the German army and people were tired of the war, and in their eagerness for peace, they forced the Kaiser from power as well. These four men vied for power and tried to pull Germany in their own desired directions. But, because of the inflexibility of Ludendorff and the Kaiser, the delusion of Ludendorff, Falkenhayn, and the Kaiser, and the discord between them all—Germany not only lost its chance to win the war, it lost multiple chances for a favorable peace as well. Had the civilian and military branches worked better together, and the man constitutionally in charge of them been stronger and more self-reflective, Germany's fortunes might have been very different.

¹ Konrad Jarausch, "Revisiting German History: Bethmann-Hollweg Revisited," *Central European History*, v. 21, no. 3, (1988): 227.

² Jarausch, "Revisiting German History," 225.

³ Jarausch, "Revisiting German History," 228.

⁴ Mark Hewitson, "Germany and France before the First World War: A Reassessment of Wilhelmine Foreign Policy," *The English Historical Review*, v. 115, no. 462, (2000): 604.

⁵ Hewitson, "Germany and France before the First World War," 605-606.

⁶ Jarausch, "Revisiting German History," 233.

⁷ Jarausch, "Revisiting German History," 242.

⁸ Christopher Clark, *Kaiser Wilhelm II: A Life in Power*, (London: Penguin Books, 2009), 6.

⁹ Clark, *Kaiser Wilhelm II*, 309.

¹⁰ Clark, *Kaiser Wilhelm II*, 80.

- ¹¹ Clark, *Kaiser Wilhelm II*, 114-119.
- ¹² Articles 5 & 17, Constitution of the German Empire, 16 April 1871. Accessed November 25 2015. http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=1826.
- ¹³ Wolfgang Mommsen J., "Kaiser Wilhelm II and German Politics," *Journal of Contemporary History* 25 (1990): 297.
- ¹⁴ Mommsen, "Kaiser Wilhelm II and German Politics," 297.
- ¹⁵ Clark, *Kaiser Wilhelm II*, 171-172.
- ¹⁶ Clark, *Kaiser Wilhelm II*, 172-173.
- ¹⁷ Mommsen, "Kaiser Wilhelm II and German Politics," 304.
- ¹⁸ Mommsen, "Kaiser Wilhelm II and German Politics," 304.
- ¹⁹ Mommsen, "Kaiser Wilhelm II and German Politics," 304.
- ²⁰ Konrad Jarausch, *The Enigmatic Chancellor: Bethmann Hollweg and the Hubris of Imperial Germany*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), 349.
- ²¹ Jarausch, *The Enigmatic Chancellor*, 5-7.
- ²² Robert T Foley, "A New Form of Warfare? Erich Von Falkenhayn's Plan for Victory in 1916," 1.
- ²³ Foley, "A New Form of Warfare," 4.
- ²⁴ Martin Kitchen, *Silent Dictatorship: The Politics of the German High Command under Hindenburg and Ludendorff, 1916-1918*, (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers Inc., 1976), 21-22.
- ²⁵ Kitchen, *Silent Dictatorship*, 22.
- ²⁶ Niall Ferguson, "Arms and Men," in *The Pity of War*, (London: Basic Books, 1999), 85, 88, 97-98.
- ²⁷ Wilhelm II, *The Kaiser's Memoirs, Wilhelm II Emperor of Germany, 1888-1918*, trans. Thomas R. Ybarra, (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1922), 248-249.
- ²⁸ Clark, *Kaiser Wilhelm II*, 280.
- ²⁹ John Röhl, "*Kaiser Wilhelm II, 1859-1941: A Concise Life*," (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 152.
- ³⁰ Röhl, *Kaiser Wilhelm II: A Concise Life*, 159.
- ³¹ Isabel V. Hull, "*Absolute Destruction: Military Culture and the Practices of War in Imperial Germany*," (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 267.
- ³² Hull, *Absolute Destruction*, 267-269.
- ³³ Article 18, Constitution of the German Empire, 16 April 1871. Accessed November 25 2015. http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=1826.
- ³⁴ Clark, *Kaiser Wilhelm II*, 313.
- ³⁵ Jarausch, "*The Enigmatic Chancellor*, 230-232.
- ³⁶ Jarausch, *The Enigmatic Chancellor*, 235-237.
- ³⁷ Hull, *Absolute Destruction*, 202.
- ³⁸ Hull, *Absolute Destruction*, 203.
- ³⁹ Gordon Craig, *Politics of the Prussian Army: 1640-1945*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), 302.
- ⁴⁰ Erich von Falkenhayn, *The German General Staff and its Decisions, 1914-1916*, (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1926), 61.
- ⁴¹ Craig, *Politics of the Prussian Army*, 304.
- ⁴² Craig, *Politics of the Prussian Army*, 305.
- ⁴³ Foley, "A New Form of Warfare?," 6.
- ⁴⁴ Foley, "A New Form of Warfare," 1.
- ⁴⁵ Foley, "A New Form of Warfare," 5.
- ⁴⁶ Isabel V. Hull, *The Entourage of Kaiser Wilhelm II: 1888-1918*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 274-275.
- ⁴⁷ Mommsen, "Wilhelm II and German Politics," 311.
- ⁴⁸ Hull, *The Entourage of Kaiser Wilhelm*, 274.
- ⁴⁹ Stephen Kotkin, *Stalin: Volume I: Paradoxes of Power, 1878-1928*, (New York: Penguin Press, 2014), 158.

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- ⁵⁰ Jarausch, *The Enigmatic Chancellor*, 270.
- ⁵¹ Jarausch, *The Enigmatic Chancellor*, 270-271.
- ⁵² Foley, "A New Form of Warfare," 11.
- ⁵³ Foley, "A New Form of Warfare," 12.
- ⁵⁴ Foley, "A New Form of Warfare," 13.
- ⁵⁵ Foley, "A New Form of Warfare," 16.
- ⁵⁶ Foley, "A New Form of Warfare," 20.
- ⁵⁷ Foley, "A New Form of Warfare," 20.
- ⁵⁸ Foley, "A New Form of Warfare," 21-22.
- ⁵⁹ Jarausch, *The Enigmatic Chancellor*, 253.
- ⁶⁰ Jarausch, *The Enigmatic Chancellor*, 254-255.
- ⁶¹ Craig, *Politics of the Prussian Army*, 316-317.
- ⁶² Jarausch, *The Enigmatic Chancellor*, 292-293.
- ⁶³ Erich Ludendorff, *Ludendorff's Own Story: August 1914-November 1918*, (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1919), Accessed 5 December 2015.
<https://archive.org/stream/ludendorffsowns05ludgoog#page/n386/mode/2up>.
- ⁶⁴ Craig, *Politics of the Prussian Army*, 313-316.
- ⁶⁵ Clark, *Kaiser Wilhelm II*, 319.
- ⁶⁶ Jarausch, *The Enigmatic Chancellor*, 280.
- ⁶⁷ Ludendorff, *My Own Story*, 369, 382.
- ⁶⁸ Clark, *Kaiser Wilhelm II*, 320.
- ⁶⁹ Holger Afflerbach, "Wilhelm II as Supreme Warlord," in *The Kaiser: New Research on Wilhelm II's Role in Imperial Germany*, ed. Annika Mombauer & William Deist. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 438.
- ⁷⁰ Hull, *Absolute Destruction*, 224.
- ⁷¹ Afflerbach, "Wilhelm II as Supreme Warlord," 439.
- ⁷² *Official German Documents Relating to the World War*, Translated under the supervision of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1923), II: 1320-1321. Accessed December 9, 2015.
http://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/German_Discussions_Concerning_Unrestricted_Submarine_Warfare.
- ⁷³ Röhl, *Kaiser Wilhelm II, 1859-1941: A Concise Life*, 173.
- ⁷⁴ Craig, *Politics of the Prussian Army*, 322-323.
- ⁷⁵ Kitchen, *Silent Dictatorship*, 102-103.
- ⁷⁶ Craig, *Politics of the Prussian Army*, 325.
- ⁷⁷ Craig, *Politics of the Prussian Army*, 326.
- ⁷⁸ Kitchen, *Silent Dictatorship*, 136.
- ⁷⁹ Craig, *Politics of the Prussian Army*, 327-328.
- ⁸⁰ Kitchen, *Silent Dictatorship*, 260.
- ⁸¹ Afflerbach, Wilhelm II as Supreme Warlord, 446.
- ⁸² Röhl, *Kaiser Wilhelm II*, 176.

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