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## **“Forerunners to the West German Bundesmarine: The Klose Fast Patrol Group, the Naval Historical Team Bremerhaven, and the U.S. Navy’s Labor Service Unit (B)”**

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On January 16<sup>th</sup> 1956, Theodor Blank and Karl–Adolf Zenker greeted West Germany’s first 140 naval volunteers, and declared that the day marked the beginning of a new German navy after a ten year hiatus in German naval history.<sup>[1]</sup> Blank, Adenauer’s security advisor and West Germany’s first Minister of Defense, and Zenker, head of the naval planning section in the Blank Office, had been planning and preparing for this day since 1950 and 1951 respectively. Most of the literature on the origins of the West German navy focuses on top level negotiations between the Western Allies and the Adenauer government, on the activities of the Blank Office, on Bundestag debates, and on the extended negotiations pertaining to Germany’s role in the abortive European Defense Community (EDC), and its subsequent integration into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).<sup>[2]</sup> This focus on top–level negotiations and official deliberations misses important elements of the process transforming former Kriegsmarine veterans from defeated enemies to potential partners, overlooking the experiences, collaborative work, and extra–governmental planning which directly influenced the formation of West Germany’s Bundesmarine.<sup>[3]</sup> Furthermore, the narrow focus on EDC and NATO negotiations suggests and echoes the concept that the Bundesmarine started from ground zero, or as its first inspector phrased it, “from less than nothing.”<sup>[4]</sup> This was not entirely candid. While 16 January 1956 did indeed mark a new beginning for the German Navy, West Germany’s Bundesmarine drew upon and benefited tremendously from a number of maritime formations and groups formed well before its official establishment.

During the immediate post–war period, both the British and the Americans utilized former Kriegsmarine personnel to maintain, transfer, and destroy Kriegsmarine vessels and assets; to assist in orderly demobilization and demolition; and to clear mines (the German Minesweeping Administration).<sup>[5]</sup> These organizations should be viewed as post–scripts to World War II, devoted to clearing the debris, residue, and human and material aftermath of that war. Yet with the onset of the Cold War, both the British and Americans drew upon Kriegsmarine personnel for a new purpose, namely to prepare for a potential conflict with the Soviet Union. The Klose Fast Patrol Group, the Naval Historical Team, and the U.S. Navy’s Labor Service Unit (B) were all established after the onset of the Cold War, and illustrate the gradual shift to rehabilitation, reconciliation, and remilitarization that occurred at lower levels while the exact parameters of West

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Germany's naval contribution was being negotiated at higher levels. The process of shifting the relationship between the British and Americans on the one hand, and the Germans on the other, from victor–vanquished to partners in a common cause required changes in perception and interaction at lower levels as well as at the intergovernmental level. The three groups I have selected illustrate this process, spanning from limited rehabilitation and employment of former Kriegsmarine personnel in Western intelligence efforts to barely concealed preparatory organization of naval formations in anticipation of a future West German Navy.

The Bundesmarine fell heir and incorporated the vessels, personnel, and personal connections that these organizations had built up, providing it with a solid basis substantially above the zero mark. West Germany's first operational squadrons – the 1<sup>st</sup> Rapid Minesweeping Squadron, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Deep Sea Minesweeping Squadron, and 1<sup>st</sup> Fast Patrol Squadron – derived from these forerunner organizations, and its highest ranking officers – Vice Admiral Friedrich Ruge and Rear Admiral Gerhard Wagner – had been key players in the Naval Historical Team. What I would like to do for the next fifteen minutes is briefly outline the purpose of these three organizations, the relationship that prevailed between British/American supervisors and their German charges, and how they contributed to or shaped the Bundesmarine.

## **The Klose Fast Patrol Group**

The first organization I would like to describe is the Klose Fast Patrol Group, a British controlled and directed organization employing former Kriegsmarine personnel and vessels in support of British intelligence operations in the Baltic region. With the defeat of Nazi Germany, Britain's Secret Intelligence Service (MI6) renewed its pre–war anti–Bolshevik focus, rebuilding and expanding intelligence networks throughout Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. MI6 believed that the Baltic region presented a particularly good arena for intelligence operations, as a great many Lithuanians, Estonians, Latvians, and Poles had nationalist, anticommunist, and anti–Russian convictions. After the occupation of the Baltic states by the Red Army in the Spring of 1945, many Baltic troops melted into the woodlands that covered much of their countries, continuing the fight against the Red Army as partisans. British intelligence hoped to sustain and capitalize upon this indigenous resistance by inserting agents recruited from the thousands of Baltic refugees and soldiers who had found their way to the British occupation zone of Germany.<sup>[6]</sup> In accord with Britain's traditional maritime inclination, British intelligence believed that the best method of inserting agents and maintaining contact would be via the Baltic Sea. The Royal Navy, well aware of the risks involved in this concept, proved resistant to the scheme so long as it directly involved the lives, reputation, and assets of the Royal Navy. Under pressure from MI6, the Royal Navy devised an alternative that would achieve MI6's objective while shielding the Royal Navy from direct confrontation with the Red Navy: it would refit one of the numerous Kriegsmarine S–boats it had claimed after the war, recruit and supervise a German crew

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to man the vessel, and thereby support MI6's Baltic intelligence endeavor while limiting its liability.

The Royal Navy felt confident that it could find suitable German candidates for this dangerous undertaking, as tens of thousands of Kriegsmarine personnel had worked for the Royal Navy as part of the British supervised German Mine Sweeping Administration and its smaller civilian successor, the Cuxhaven Mine Sweeping Group. Among the Kriegsmarine officers employed by these organizations was one Hans-Helmut Klose, a daring veteran of the Kriegsmarine's S-boat branch. During the last year of World War II, Klose had commanded the 2<sup>nd</sup> Fast Torpedo Boat Training Flotilla, which operated throughout the Baltic during the final desperate months of the Kriegsmarine's existence. Klose's boats performed a wide range of missions, ranging from escorting transport vessels to reconnaissance missions to landing German agents behind lines to rescuing high ranking officials from encircled enclaves. In May 1948, British naval intelligence officer Commander Antony Courtney, RN interviewed Klose, inquiring whether he would be interested in putting his unique experiences and talents to use against the Soviets. While no transcript of the meeting has surfaced and the exact terms of his employment remain shrouded by secrecy, within a year Klose and a trusted crew of veterans which he had selected began operating in the Baltic in support of British intelligence.<sup>[7]</sup>

The Royal Navy refitted and upgraded one of the former S-boats transferred to British ownership in 1945, the S 208. In April 1949, Klose and his crew sailed the S 208 out of Gosport, UK with the Baltic as destination. In Kiel, Royal Navy officers LCDR Harvey Jones and Shaw, two RN radio operators, and six agents boarded the vessel. After dropping off the British officers in Sweden, Klose proceeded to the Latvian coast, where he successfully landed the agents. This operation, along with three subsequent missions originating out of England, was judged so successful that MI6 and the Royal Navy decided to base the S 208 in Germany in order to save wear and tear on the boat and crew. In Spring 1951, the Lürßen shipyard in Bremen-Vegesack received a contract to modernize and upgrade the S 208, with a second contract let to modernize a sister vessel S 130 the following year.<sup>[8]</sup>

Over the next four years, Klose carried out eleven additional missions far behind the Iron Curtain, dropping off and retrieving nearly fifty agents in the Baltic states and Poland for Britain's MI6 and the U.S. backed Gehlen Organization (a German intelligence organization working for the Americans) in fifteen operations spanning the period from April 1949 to April 1955.<sup>[9]</sup> In order to minimize suspicion and controversy, the Royal Navy established the "Baltic Fishery Protection Service" as a cover organization in March 1951. Klose's boat(s), flying the white ensign of the Royal Navy, had a plausible alibi for operating in the Eastern Baltic, as communist patrol craft had begun to harass [West] German fishing boats in the Baltic.<sup>[10]</sup> The British were well pleased with Klose's efforts, replacing the S 208 and 130 with three more capable boats they confiscated from

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West Germany's fledgling coast guard in 1952. These vessels – the SILBERMÖWE (commanded by Klose), STURMMÖWE, and WILDSCHWAN – were outfitted with sophisticated electronics. Operating under the guise of “fishery protection,” Klose's fast patrol boats reconnoitered the Eastern Baltic coastline, probed Soviet coastal spotlight/radar installations, and conducted electronic surveillance in addition to inserting and extracting agents.

The network of agents and spies which MI6 sought to establish as a result of these hazardous voyages was infiltrated by the Soviets almost from its inception. While the endeavor can only be judged a failure as an intelligence operation, the experience dulled some of the mutual antagonism which had characterized relations between Royal Navy personnel and Kriegsmarine veterans during immediate post-war period. On the part of the Royal Navy, the Naval Intelligence Division, the [British] Flag Officer, Germany, and Royal Naval officers familiar with the undertaking came to appreciate the expertise, seamanship, and reliability of Klose and his men. On the part of Klose and the German officers and crews of the patrol boats, resentment toward the British mellowed as renewed hope for mutual respect and cooperation dawned.

The British never envisioned Klose's group as a seedbed for a West German navy, with the Royal Navy remaining suspicious of German naval aspirations even as negotiations on Germany's naval contribution to the EDC and NATO were underway. The Klose group nonetheless contributed to the build-up of the Bundesmarine, as its vessels, personnel, and institutional memory were transferred to the new West German Navy in 1956. Materially, Britain transferred the three fast patrol boats of the “British Baltic Fishery Protection Service” to the Bundesmarine on 28 March 1956. These vessels, along with three others then under construction for the West German Seegrenzschutz (coast guard), formed the core of West Germany's 1<sup>st</sup> Fast Torpedo Boat Squadron, under the command of a recently commissioned Bundesmarine officer – one Hans-Helmut Klose. Klose, along with the other German officers and men of the Baltic Fishery Protection Service who joined the Bundesmarine, helped imbue West Germany's fast attack service with a sense of dash, daring, and drive, never conceding the Baltic Sea to the growing Soviet Navy. His connections to and experience working with the Royal Navy proved important in easing the residual bitterness and resentment stemming from the Second World War, with Cold War intelligence operations paving the way for future cooperation between the Royal Navy and the Bundesmarine.

## The Naval Historical Team

One might evaluate the Klose Group as a limited British experiment in using of Kriegsmarine personnel in pursuit of national intelligence objectives, from which the Bundesmarine benefited incidentally. The U.S. Navy's Naval Historical Team (Bremerhaven), the second group I would like to discuss, soon developed a much broader mandate and directly contributed to the establishment of the Bundesmarine. The Royal

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Navy, the U.S. army, and the U.S. navy all sponsored a number of historical projects that employed Kriegsmarine veterans during the post-war period. The U.S. navy's decision to form a new "Naval Historical Team, Bremerhaven" (NHT) in 1948, however, marks a departure from these earlier efforts. U.S. Naval Intelligence organized and funded the NHT, tasking it with analyzing topics of current interest to the U.S. navy. The team was formed due to mounting alarm about Soviet intentions during the period of the Berlin blockade, with its studies drawing upon the Kriegsmarine's wartime experience with the Soviet navy but addressing issues of current rather than historical relevance.

Captain Arthur H. "Speedy" Graubart, Chief of Naval Intelligence in Germany, possessed an in-depth knowledge of the Kriegsmarine. He studied diesel engineering in Germany in the early 1930s, served as assistant naval attaché from 1940–41, provided advice on naval matters at the Potsdam conference, and subsequently negotiated the division of the Kriegsmarine as a member of the Tripartite Naval Commission. Graubart commanded the Prinz Eugen on its voyage to the Bikini Atoll in 1946, returning to Berlin later that year. Graubart, fluent in German and knowledgeable about the Kriegsmarine, decided to tap the experience of Kriegsmarine admirals as the cold war intensified.<sup>[11]</sup>

Graubart and his assistant, Lieutenant Commander Edward R. Riedel, approached Kriegsmarine admirals Konrad Patzig and Friedrich Ruge about assembling a team of Kriegsmarine experts to assist the Americans. Graubart believed that Patzig might be tremendously useful, combining an in-depth knowledge of the Kriegsmarine and intelligence matters with a critical attitude toward the Nazi regime. Patzig, the former head of the Abwehr (German military intelligence) had stayed in Berlin as the Red Army closed around Germany's capital in April 1945, but had remained in hiding until he could surrender himself to American forces after their entry into the U.S. sector in July 1945. Graubart had befriended Patzig before the Second World War, and had been favorably impressed with the man and his credentials.<sup>[12]</sup> Patzig had been head of the Abwehr in the early 1930s, but was transferred to the less prominent position of chief of the Naval Personnel Department in 1935 due to friction with Himmler and Reinhard Heydrich.<sup>[13]</sup> Patzig more than almost any other would know the skills, talents, and wartime experiences of Kriegsmarine veterans.

During the summer of 1948, Lieutenant Commander Riedel paid him a visit.<sup>[14]</sup> Riedel asked whether Patzig would be willing to assist the Americans, and received a non-committal answer. Soon afterwards Riedel's superior, Captain Graubart, appeared at Patzig's door reiterating the request. Patzig answered that he needed some time to think about it, and then informed the Americans that he would be willing to assist them under the following conditions:

1. Cooperation would only be possible as a member of a team of experienced senior Kriegsmarine veterans.

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2. Cooperation could only proceed on the basis of free expression. German team members must be given the right to help determine themes and issues to be addressed.<sup>[15]</sup>

The Americans proved amenable to these conditions, and Patzig began sounding out senior Kriegsmarine officers about establishing a team of naval experts. Patzig realized that the team could only prosper if it had the blessing of at least one top level Kriegsmarine admiral, and he appealed to the former Chief of the German Naval War Staff, Admiral Otto Schniewind, for assistance. Schniewind must have been floored by the proposal, having recently been charged with war crimes by the Americans. The American tribunal had found him not guilty, but the imprisonment of the grand admirals and his own brush with war crimes tribunals had soured Schniewind on the idea of rapprochement with the Americans or British. His response was short and to the point: "Ohne mich!" (without me!) Patzig was not put off so easily, and during a four day visit he convinced the admiral that collaboration with the Americans was in Germany's best interest since the Soviet threat was real and dangerous. The Americans may have made some "mistakes" but they undoubtedly were preferable to the Soviets. Schniewind eventually came around to Patzig's viewpoint, and agreed to provide the cover that would allow others to assist the Americans. He and Patzig discussed who should be on the team, and soon Patzig was making visits to former admirals in the western zones.

Friedrich Ruge assisted in the effort, capitalizing on the contacts he had reestablished with key Kriegsmarine veterans.<sup>[16]</sup> While Ruge had been shunted aside as German "administrator" of the GM/SA by the British in the summer of 1945, he had shown his willingness to cooperate with the western powers while a POW and after his release. He had mastered English, worked as a translator, and participated in both the U.S. army and U.S. navy historical writing projects. Ruge's historical writings drew attention to his tour as Admiral, Army Group (B) during 1944, closely associating him with one of the few German generals held in high esteem by both the British and Americans, namely the legendary "Desert Fox" Erwin Rommel. Ruge's association with the deceased Rommel enabled him to act as an interlocutor between the British, Americans, German nationalists, and the growing minority of Germans who identified with the German resistance movement and the Twentieth of July 1944 attempt on Hitler's life. Riedel noted in 1948 that Ruge was reestablishing contact with potentially useful former veterans pursuant to his historical research. The American summary report of Ruge's study elaborated that "it is known that he [Ruge] has been in touch with several other ranking, competent former German officers such as ex-Admirals Wagner, Schubert, Heye, Buerkner, [and] Patzig."<sup>[17]</sup> When the U.S. Navy decided to draw upon former Kriegsmarine officers in order to expand its knowledge of the Red Navy, both Patzig and Ruge stood out as a willing, well connected, and politically suitable candidates for recruitment.

Patzig and Ruge faced a difficult task in persuading high ranking veterans to join their team. Former Kriegsmarine officers remained outraged about the imprisonment of the

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grand admirals, and were hostile toward the idea. This intransigence was overcome only by Schniewind's endorsement of the project and mounting concern over the Soviet menace. The combination proved powerful. Patzig was able to persuade Rear Admiral Gerhard Wagner, one of Dönitz's closest assistants and a loyal supporter of the Grand Admiral, to join the team. Schniewind, Ruge, Heye, and Wagner eventually formed the core of the team of experts, with Gaul as acting as a special advisor on naval aviation. Eberhard Godt, Hans Rudolf Rösing and Hans Günther Mommsen provided occasional special outside assistance, with Patzig remaining in Berlin but maintaining close contact with the team. The team, as shown in the table, consisted of top level experts who had occupied important positions in the Kriegsmarine.

## Members of Naval Historical Team (Bremerhaven) <sup>[18]</sup>

Name	Rank in Kriegsmarine	Major Posts held during W.W.II
Otto Schniewind	General Admiral	Chief of Staff, Naval War Staff; Fleet Commander; C-in-C Naval Group Command North
Friedrich Ruge	Vice Admiral	Flag Officer for Mine Sweepers; German Admiral at the Italian Naval High Command; Admiral with Army Group B
Hellmuth Heye	Vice Admiral	CO Hipper; Admiral for Midget Weapons Unit
Gerhard Wagner	Rear Admiral	Head of the Operations Department of Naval War Staff; Admiral with the Supreme Commander, German Naval Forces
Eberhardt Godt	Rear Admiral	Chief of Operations Department, U-boat Command
Walter Gaul	Colonel	Luftwaffe Liaison Officer between the Operations Division of the Naval High Command and the General Staff of the Luftwaffe
Hans Günther Mommsen	engineering expert (civilian)	Specialist, Naval Weapons Development and Production
Hans Rudolf Rösing	Captain	various U-boat commands, Flag Officer U-boats West

The German Naval Historical Team assembled for its first session under the cloud of the Berlin Blockade, meeting in the U.S. Port of Embarkation in the Bremerhaven enclave on 9 April 1949. US Naval intelligence put a small villa in Spekenbüttel at the team's

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disposal, even arranging for a cook and orderly for the admirals. Naval intelligence paid the team members, with the entire program operated on American initiative without the knowledge or input of the fledgling West German government in Bonn.<sup>[19]</sup>

US naval intelligence initially tasked the Naval Historical Team, Bremerhaven with compiling studies of an arguably historical nature. The first study, for example, tasked the team with analyzing the Kriegsmarine experience in the Arctic area and under extreme cold weather, with subsequent studies examining German harbor defenses, the effectiveness of Allied mines, the effectiveness of German countermeasures, and the extent of German knowledge concerning Allied convoy routes during World War II. The detailed requests illustrate the utilitarian purpose of these “historical studies.”<sup>[20]</sup> Graubart soon expanded the scope of the topics that the NHT examined, with studies compiled on “How best to deny Soviet submarine access to the North Sea,” “How to close up the White Sea,” and “Methods and success of German propaganda on the Soviet Navy ... and recommendations for U.S. propaganda against the Soviet Navy.”<sup>[21]</sup>

Riedel became the immediate American sponsor for the team, with Captain Arthur “Speedy” Graubart in Berlin acting as the team’s boss. The German team members earned the respect and appreciation of their American supervisors who began to channel outside studies to them for review.<sup>[22]</sup> U.S. Naval Intelligence, for example, sponsored a four part study of submarine and torpedo employment by two former Kriegsmarine torpedo specialists, ex-Captain Erich Holtorf and ex-Commander Alfred Behr in February 1951. The NHT naval experts reviewed and commented on the study before it was sent up the line.<sup>[23]</sup> Overall, the Americans were pleased with the experiment: they received useful analyses of the Soviet naval threat from top notch German naval experts at the cost of only minor expenditure and effort.

The German admirals benefited from the arrangement as well. Demilitarization remained the law in West Germany, and veteran organizations were still forbidden. The German admirals discreetly used the Naval Historical Team to reestablish contact with and between former Kriegsmarine officers. The admirals, moreover, had agreed to put their talents at the disposal of the Americans on the condition that they could “help determine the themes and issues to be addressed.” This understanding provided the German team members with considerable latitude. The outbreak of the Korean war in 1950 spurred serious discussion about German rearmament, and the admirals in the Naval Historical Team (Bremerhaven) gradually transformed the team from an analysis group operated by the U.S. Naval Intelligence into an unofficial coordinating staff exploring possibilities for a future German navy.

The Naval Historical Team was perfectly positioned for this task, having useful contacts in Bonn and with the U.S. Navy. The team’s leader, Otto Schniewind, knew Konrad Adenauer personally, and Wagner and Ruge had worked very closely with the chief military advisors to the Blank Office, Generals Adolf Heusinger and Hans Speidel.<sup>[24]</sup> In

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1951, the head of the military department of the Blank Office, General Adolf Heusinger, contacted Wagner at the Naval Historical Team (NHT) and asked the NHT to recommend some mid-level naval representatives for positions in his department's personnel section (II/3) and planning section (II/Pl). Wagner recommended two individuals he knew and trusted from the war, former captains Wolfgang Kähler and Karl-Adolf Zenker. Kähler and Zenker, later joined by Heinrich Gerlach, became the naval specialists in the Blank Office and in the German delegation to the EDC negotiations.<sup>[25]</sup> Zenker, Gerlach, and Kähler maintained in constant contact with the admirals at the Naval Historical Team, with one historian characterizing Zenker's role in the Blank Office as little more than a "mouthpiece for the Naval Historical Team."<sup>[26]</sup> Wagner and his colleagues at the Naval Historical Team compiled the naval position paper that became the basis of Germany's negotiating position during discussions between the Allied High Commissioners and the German government (Petersberg Conference, January – June 1951), and between France, West Germany, Belgium, Italy and Luxembourg (Paris Conference on the EDC, February 1951 – May 1952). In short, Wagner and the Naval Historical Team set the agenda for the naval section of the Blank Office, whose members had been selected on the recommendation of the NHT admirals in the first place.<sup>[27]</sup>

Personal ties from the Second World War and post-war captivity enabled the Naval Historical Team to play a far greater role than it might otherwise have assumed. Schniewind and Ruge cultivated their relationship to the U.S. Navy, updating the Americans on the numerous proposals and plans which the NHT forwarded to Bonn. The NHT, in exchange, received information and support from the U.S. Navy which enabled the admirals to establish a wide range of contacts. Ruge, for example, received American travel orders which allowed him to travel around Germany at no cost.<sup>[28]</sup> Ruge and Wagner soon became "operators" working behind the scenes, weaving connections between the Labor Service Unit (B), the Gehlen Organization, West Germany's Seegrenzschutz (coast guard), the Ministry of the Interior, the Interim Committee of the EDC, and veteran groups throughout West Germany.<sup>[29]</sup> Following Schniewind's retirement in September 1951, Ruge and Wagner became the indispensable naval experts to whom these various groups appealed for assistance. The Blank Office appreciated their efforts, and utilized Wagner and Ruge as unofficial naval advisors, informal liaisons to the U.S. Navy, and discrete conduits to the Kriegsmarine veteran community.<sup>[30]</sup>

The U.S. Navy funded the Naval Historical Team through the end of 1952, by which time it seemed that Germany would soon join the EDC. The U.S. Navy undoubtedly assumed that the admirals of the NHT would play an important role in the future. The U.S. Navy groomed and courted Ruge in particular, flying him to the United States in 1952 for a lecture tour of the Naval War College in Newport and the Naval Academy in Annapolis.<sup>[31]</sup> The US ambassador discreetly indicated to Chancellor Adenauer that Ruge would be an excellent choice to lead the future Bundesmarine.<sup>[32]</sup> In 1955, Adenauer selected Ruge to head the naval section of the Ministry of Defense, with Wagner serving

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as his deputy. The goodwill and connections established between the U.S. Navy and the NHT admirals carried over into the Bundesmarine, where U.S. Navy influence was far more pronounced than that of the Royal Navy. While Ruge and Wagner might later publicly emphasize the challenges of building a new navy from ground zero, their private papers and archival records clearly show that they had completed much of the staff work and planning while employed as members of the innocuous sounding Naval Historical Team (Bremerhaven).

## **The U.S. Navy's Labor Service Unit (B)**

The last forerunner organization I would like to address is the U.S. Navy's Labor Service Unit (B), which from its very foundation was conceived as a seedbed for a future West German Navy. In November 1950, the U.S. Navy established three Labor Service Units to "assist in manning the ships, craft, and shore facilities of U.S. Naval Forces, Germany."<sup>[33]</sup> The move seemed unremarkable: after the Second World War, the U.S. Navy had utilized a number of German *Marinedienstgruppen* (naval service groups) to help clear the Bremerhaven area, prepare *Kriegsmarine* assets for disposition, and provide harbor and support services. The U.S. Navy could claim that it was merely organizing a number of new units to meet its present needs. A closer look at the Bremerhaven Labor Service Unit reveals that it came to serve an entirely different function than had the post-war *Marinedienstgruppen*. Indeed, most jobs which had been entrusted to the *Marinedienstgruppen* had been completed, and the civilian Cuxhaven Mine Sweeping Group was doing a fine job finishing the one major task that remained, clearing naval mines left over from the Second World War. The establishment of the Labor Service Unit (B) must be interpreted as a first step by the U.S. Navy toward building up West German naval forces. The U.S. Navy, in short, quietly began to assemble personnel, equipment, and facilities which it planned to put at the disposal of the European Defense Community or the Federal Republic once Western politicians had agreed upon the exact form and nature of West Germany's military contribution to NATO.

The Commander, U.S. Naval Forces Germany (COMNAVFORGER) began to firm up plans to establish German naval "Labor Service Units" under his command shortly after the Americans first broached the subject of limited German remilitarization with their NATO partners. In late September 1950, COMNAVFORGER advised the Naval Historical Team Bremerhaven of his intention to establish "Labor Service Units" (LSUs) in Bremerhaven and Schierstein on the Rhine. He explained that the Americans would equip the units with mine sweeping boats and river patrol craft, and indicated he anticipated eventually transferring the units to the Federal Republic. COMNAVFORGER requested the Naval Historical Team's assistance in finding suitable mid-level German naval veterans who would consider service in the LSUs. Friedrich Ruge, the mine warfare expert of the Naval Historical Team, contacted Hans John and Walter Berger.

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Both had proven themselves in the mine sweeping forces of the Kriegsmarine, had commanded mine sweeping divisions, and were judged ideal candidates.<sup>[34]</sup>

COMNAVFORGER moved rapidly to establish the Labor Service Units. Orders were issued on the 15th of November 1950, and within eight months three LSUs were operational: LSU (A) as a German liaison office at COMNAVFORGER headquarters in Heidelberg, LSU(B) as a minesweeping unit located in the U.S. Naval Advance Base, Bremerhaven; and LSU (C) as a small Rhine River Patrol unit, with flotillas based at Wiesbaden–Schierstein, Karlsruhe, and Mannheim.

During the early 1950s, COMNAVFORGER maintained that LSU (B) had been organized mainly for the purpose of clearing residual World War II mines. The press and public were reassured that LSU (B) personnel had signed civilian contracts, and allegations that the U.S. Navy had ulterior purposes were brushed aside. The U.S. Navy's emphasis on the utilitarian nature of LSU (B)'s mission helped allay public concern. LSU (B) personnel and boats were put to work clearing mines, and while their mine sweeping record was dwarfed by the accomplishments of the much larger G.M./S.A., over 400 square miles of water were cleared by LSU (B) during the period 1951–1956.<sup>[35]</sup>

U.S. naval officers were prone to forget the civilian nature of the organization. LSU (B) personnel wore naval style uniforms, employed the U.S. naval rank and rating system, and were expected to observe military courtesies such as saluting. They were billeted in the same manner as U.S. naval personnel, and their mess facilities operated along the same lines of those which served the U.S. Navy.<sup>[36]</sup> In addition, LSU personnel were subject to a disciplinary code which authorized "non-judicial punishment" ranging from dismissal to fines to arrest up to eight days.<sup>[37]</sup> In short, LSU personnel were organized, provisioned, and housed in the same manner as American naval personnel, and their civilian status seemed somewhat artificial to all involved. Off the record, U.S. naval officers admitted that the organization would be put at the disposal of the West German government once clarity about the role of the Federal Republic in the European Defense Community and NATO emerged.

The ratification of the General Treaty and the EDC Treaty by the Bundestag and Bundesrat in March and May 1953 seemed to indicate that the time had arrived to ready LSU personnel for their transfer to West German control. The U.S. Navy shifted gears, and began to emphasize training over operations in LSU (B). The French parliament's rejection of the EDC the following year forced Western politicians and military experts back to the drawing board, but American and German naval personnel in Bremerhaven continued to assume that LSU (B) would serve as a ready source of personnel for whatever German naval organization was devised. The U.S. Navy put classrooms, material, and equipment at the disposal of the Germans, and encouraged LSU personnel to take advantage of the numerous courses offered through the Education Department. Mine sweeping boats were dry-docked in order to free more personnel for training

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opportunities, and by 1955 fully one third of LSU personnel were attending courses covering topics such as naval weaponry, sonar, navigation, electronics, and engineering. While mine sweeping work was emphasized for political reasons during the period 1951–52, training and professional development became the top priority by 1953–55. The broad range of courses offered to LSU personnel by the U.S. navy during this period makes it clear that LSU personnel were being groomed and prepared for tasks which went beyond mine sweeping. The US Navy abandoned its efforts at concealing the purpose of the German LSUs, with the Army, Navy, and Air Force Journal declaring that “When the new German Navy provided under the London agreement gets underway, it is likely that large numbers of American trained German seamen and officers will be taken in. US leaders hope that this will be done, for they feel that their work with the combined fleets will be greatly facilitated by their American training.”<sup>[38]</sup>

The U.S. Navy owned and operated all the harbor equipment, shore facilities and boats utilized by LSU (B). The U.S. Naval Advance Base Bremerhaven had come a long way since 1945, when over 56% of the city lay in ruin. Task Group 126.1 and the *Marinedienstgruppen* had cleared the harbor, renovated the remains of the former *Marineschule*, unloaded modern harbor equipment, and constructed new warehouses, barracks, office buildings, and mess halls. LSU (B) benefited from the effort. The Commanding Officer, USNAB Bremerhaven, placed four barracks, numerous classrooms, offices, a mess hall, a BOQ (Bachelor Officer Quarters) block, and a variety of training facilities at the disposal of LSU (B).

The U.S. Navy equipped LSU (B) with *Kriegsmarine* vessels which had been assigned to the United States by the Tripartite Naval Commission. The boat complement was meager and motley at the outset. While many boats had been scrapped or sold by 1950, four *Kriegsmarine* mine sweepers remained in mothballs. These Type 40 mine sweepers, in addition to several tugs and harbor craft, were assigned to LSU (B) in early 1951. The July 1951 arrival of twelve mine sweepers previously leased to the Cuxhaven Mine Sweeping Group doubled the number of vessels assigned to LSU (B). The boat pool continued to expand as mine sweepers which had been chartered out to civilian maritime groups were reclaimed by the U.S. Navy, and transferred to LSU (B). The U.S. Navy assembled sufficient vessels to organize three mine sweeping flotillas, with 32 mine sweeping boats, 3 fast patrol boats, 1 coastal ASW boat, 4 tenders, 1 tanker, 1 floating barrack, and assorted small craft making up the entire boat pool of the organization.<sup>[39]</sup> The boats were American property and flew the American flag.

U.S. naval officers and the naval section of the Blank Office began to negotiate the transfer of the American LSUs to German control six months before the West German Ministry of Defense was created in June 1955. American officers and their German employees discovered that their German negotiating partners were eager to acquire the boats and equipment of the LSUs, but were unbending when it came to personnel guidelines for joining the new *Bundesmarine*. Bonn insisted that LSU personnel be

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treated like all other candidates for the Bundesmarine, and declined to honor promotions given out by the U.S. Navy. The implications for young LSU personnel were severe: a young sailor who had advanced to petty officer rank by dint of hard work and study would have to enter the Bundesmarine as a seaman.

Hans John, the senior German officer in LSU (B), attempted to sway Bonn from this course of action. He noted that LSU (B) men had valuable operational expertise, and that many had completed U.S. Navy courses bringing them up to date with recent changes in naval weapons and technology.<sup>[40]</sup> Neither John nor his American superiors succeeded in changing Bonn's policy. Gerhard Wagner, acting as an unofficial spokesperson for the Blank Office, explained to his American contacts that veterans who had returned to civilian life would object to any arrangement indicating special treatment for LSU personnel. Wagner, echoing official American descriptions of the organization, remarked that "Service in LSU (B) has a civilian character just like other civilian occupation into which former officers entered."<sup>[41]</sup> Wagner provided a number of additional reasons why Bonn found it impossible to honor American promotions, but the underlying reason for German intransigence remained unspoken. Wagner and his colleagues had not forgotten how the U.S. Navy had formed the unit over their protests, had selected its first personnel, and had failed to fully integrate Germans into the decision making process. Wagner, Ruge, and the Blank Office were determined that henceforth personnel selection for the Bundesmarine should be a German prerogative.

The naval section of the Blank Office and the U.S. Navy remained committed to transferring the unit to German control despite this disagreement. The U.S. Navy indicated that it would transfer the boats and material of LSU (B) to the Germans as soon as the Blank Office completed screening LSU (B) personnel for entry to the Bundesmarine. A screening committee arrived in Bremerhaven in March 1956, and verified that LSU personnel met the requirements for service in the Bundesmarine. On the whole, LSU personnel without prior service in the Kriegsmarine declined to transfer to the Bundesmarine, but those with prior service in the Kriegsmarine proved willing to join the Bundesmarine at their former rank.

The U.S. navy began to transfer the boats and assets of LSU (B) to the Bundesmarine as soon as the personnel question had been resolved. The first transfer proceedings began in June 1956, and further transfers placed the entire material assets of the organization under Bundesmarine control by July 1958. The Bundesmarine acquired a fully equipped naval facility in Bremerhaven, three mine sweeping squadrons (the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Mine Sweeper Squadrons), and some five hundred and sixty officers and men as a result. Far from starting from a deficit, the Bundesmarine could commence its existence with several well-organized, trained, and experienced units.

## Conclusion

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The three precursor organizations to the Bundesmarine that I've chosen to speak about today illustrate a gradual and more subtle transition from naval demilitarization to naval remilitarization in the Federal Republic than a narrow reading of official dates and top level negotiations would suggest. British, American, and German naval officers first shifted from antagonism to collaboration in the shadowy world of intelligence operations, as the Royal Navy and the U.S. Navy sought to tap Kriegsmarine talent and experience with the onset of the Cold War. The Royal Navy, while willing to employ Kriegsmarine veterans for its own purposes, proved suspicious and wary of West German naval rearmament during the extended series of negotiations leading to the foundation of a new German navy. Once the ink was dry and agreements official, the Royal Navy assisted the Bundesmarine by placing the small Klose unit at its disposal, but during the period 1948 to 1955 the Royal Navy jealously enforced German naval disarmament. The Americans, on the other hand, anticipated the formation of a West German Navy from the 1950 onward, supporting the effort through the formation of a planning staff (the Naval Historical Team) and a small core of boats, personnel, and facilities (Labor Service Unit (B)) assembled for that very purpose. While money and technology in part explain the predominance of American over British influence in the Bundesmarine over the next decades, the U.S. Navy's support and assistance during the genesis of the Bundesmarine better explains this phenomenon. The view from below indicates that U.S. Navy support for a West German navy ran ahead of international agreements, setting the tone and climate for continued close cooperation after the foundation of the Bundesmarine.

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<sup>[1]</sup> Adolf Zenker, "Ansprache an die Marine-Lehrkompanie in Wilhelmshaven," 16 January 1956, Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv Freiburg (henceforth BA/MA), BW 27/13.

<sup>[2]</sup> See for example Lutz Köllner et al., *Die EVG-Phase*, vol. 2, *Anfänge Westdeutscher Sicherheitspolitik 1945-1956* and Hans Ehlert et al., *Die NATO Option*, vol. 3, *Anfänge westdeutscher Sicherheitspolitik, 1945-1956* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1990 & 1993); David Clay Large, *Germans to the Front: West German Rearmament in the Adenauer Era* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

<sup>[3]</sup> For a detailed, comparative account of naval dissolution and rebirth in both East and West Germany, see Douglas Peifer, *The Three German Navies. Dissolution, Transition, and New Beginnings*. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002).

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<sup>[4]</sup> Friedrich Ruge, "Rede des Inspektors der Marine in der Marineschule," *Leinen Los!* (January 1961), 22.

<sup>[5]</sup> Chris Madsen, *The Royal Navy and German Naval Disarmament, 1942–1947* (Portland OR: Frank Cass, 1998).

<sup>[6]</sup> See Tom Bower, *The Red Web: MI6 and the KGB Mastercoup* (London: Mandarin, 1993) for details of MI6's failed intelligence effort in the Baltic region. Stephen Dorril and Peter Grose provided a broader analysis of British and American intelligence operations during the period. Stephen Dorril, *MI6. Inside the Covert World of Her Majesty's Secret Intelligence Service* (London: Free Press, 2000); Peter Grose, *Operation Rollback. America's Secret War behind the Iron Curtain* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2000).

<sup>[7]</sup> Much of the following information is thanks to retired Rear Admiral Dr. Sigurd Hess, who knows the Klose story better than anyone else. See Sigurd Hess, "Die Schnellbootgruppe Klose und der British Baltic Fishery Protection Service," *Marineforum* 3&4 (2001);

<sup>[8]</sup> Hess, "Die Schnellbootgruppe Klose und der British Baltic Fishery Protection Service," 24–25, 29.

<sup>[9]</sup> *Ibid.*: 31. The Gehlen Organization was a German intelligence organization working for the Americans. For details, see Mary Ellen Reese, *General Reinhard Gehlen: the CIA connection* (Fairfax VA: George Mason University Press, 1990) and Heinz Hoehne and Hermann Zolling, *The General was a Spy. The Truth about General Gehlen and his Spy Ring*. Translated by Richard Barry. New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1972.

<sup>[10]</sup> Tom Bower, *The Red Web. MI6 and the KGB Master Coup* (London: Aurum, 1989), 102; Hess, "Die Schnellbootgruppe Klose und der British Baltic Fishery Protection Service," 24.

<sup>[11]</sup> Captain Arthur Graubart to author, interview January 18, 2002.

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[12] Graubart, Patzig, and their wives played bridge together. Ibid.

[13] Charles S. Thomas, Charles S. *The German Navy in the Nazi Era* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1990), 92–93.

[14] Heinz–Ludger Borgert, "Der Einfluß verschiedener Marinekreise (Naval Historical Team, 'Meisel' Kreis etc.) 1945–1955 auf die Marineplanungen der Dienststelle Blank unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Marinedienstgruppen." (Freiburg: unpublished Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt study, 1976), 11; Friedrich Ruge, *In vier Marinen: Lebenserinnerungen als Beitrag zur Zeitgeschichte*. (Munich: Bernard & Graefe, 1979) 278.

[15] Interview between Güth and Patzig, January 10, 1975. BA/MA, Wagner Papers, N539/42.

[16] Borgert, "Der Einfluss verschiedener Marinekreise," 11; Ruge, *Lebenserinnerungen*, 278.

[17] *Essays by German officers and officials on World War II* (Wilmington DE: Scholarly Resources, 1991), 3: 916.

[18] For detailed career paths in the Kriegsmarine, consult Walter Lohmann and Hans H. Hildebrandt, *Die Deutsche Kriegsmarine 1939–1945* (Bad Nauheim: Podzun, 1956).

[19] Captain Arthur Graubart to author, interview January 18, 2002.

[20] Wagner Papers, BA/MA, N539/4a.

[21] "Survey of Work rendered by NHT," (Bremerhaven: n.d.), BA/MA, Wagner Papers, N539/10.

[22] *Essays by German officers*, 3: 238–355.

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[\[23\]](#) In addition, the Americans fostered contact between the NHT and the naval section of the Gehlen Organization: by late 1952, the two groups had collaborated on a variety of staff exercises and were planning a war game entitled "Baltic Approaches" for March 1953. See BA/MA, Schulze–Hinrich Papers, N516/17.

[\[24\]](#) Heinrich Gerlach, "Aus den Anfängen der Bundesmarine" (paper presented at the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Admiralstabsoffizierlehrgang, 1971), 8.

[\[25\]](#) Zenker, "Aus der Vorgeschichte der Bundesmarine," 97; Wagner to Zenker, 1 November 1951, BA/MA, MSG 1/2061.

[\[26\]](#) Borgert, "Der Einfluss verschiedener Marinekreise," 38.

[\[27\]](#) Gerlach, "Aus den Anfängen der Bundesmarine," 9.

[\[28\]](#) Ruge, *Lebenserinnerungen*, 282.

[\[29\]](#) BA/MA, Wagner Papers, N539/42.

[\[30\]](#) Borgert, "Der Einfluss verschiedener Marinekreise."

[\[31\]](#) Ruge, *Lebenserinnerungen*, 288.

[\[32\]](#) Captain Arthur Graubart to author, interview January 18, 2002.

[\[33\]](#) COMNAVFORGER Order 20–50, BA/MA, ZA 6/89.

[\[34\]](#) Berger to Ruge, 5 October 1950, BA/MA, ZA 6/89.

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[\[35\]](#) Ledebur, "Die Räumung von Seeminen," 463.

[\[36\]](#) COMNAVFORGER Order 20–50, BA/MA, ZA 6/89.

[\[37\]](#) Ledebur, "Die Räumung von Seeminen," 346.

[\[38\]](#) Source: "'Saltless Navy' Busy." Army, Navy, & Air Force Journal, LXXXXII, no. 11 (November 13 1954).

[\[39\]](#) Gerhard Freiherr von Ledebur, "Die Räumung von Seeminen in den Gewässern von Nord-, West- und Osteuropa nach 1945," *Marine Rundschau* 67, no. 1,6,7,8 (1970): 343.

[\[40\]](#) John to Kähler, 7 February 1956, BA/MA, MSg1/2064.

[\[41\]](#) Wagner to Admiral Howard F. Orem, "West Germany, a Candidate for Membership in NATO," *US Naval Institute Proceedings* May (1955), 6.1.1955; BA/MA, Wagner Correspondence, MSg 1/2061.