

Prussian War Ministry

By [Markus Pöhlmann](#)

Summary

The Prussian War Ministry (*Preußisches Kriegsministerium*) was the highest administrative agency in the German army and was responsible for the organization of military personnel, the procurement of weapons and equipment, and for payment and pensions. The minister of war was neither involved in the army's war planning process nor did he – except for a brief episode in early 1919 – exercise any command over German troops.

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Constitutional Position

The Prussian War Ministry (*Preußisches Kriegsministerium*) was founded in 1809. The provisions of the German constitution of 1871 and the military conventions that followed between Prussia and the other German states guaranteed ministries of war to the major army contingents of the kingdoms of Bavaria, Saxony, and Wurttemberg. Nevertheless, since the mobilization, the war ministry effectively operated as an Imperial ministry.

Ministers

The following generals served as ministers of war: [Erich von Falkenhayn \(1861-1922\)](#) was in office from 7 July 1913 until 20 January 1915, [Adolf Wild von Hohenborn \(1860-1925\)](#) from 21 January 1915 until 28 October 1916, [Hermann von Stein \(1854-1927\)](#) from 29 October 1916 until 8 October 1918, [Heinrich Scheüch \(1864-1946\)](#) from 9 October 1918 until 2 January 1919, and [Walther Reinhardt \(1872-1930\)](#) from 3 January until 30 September 1919, as colonel. Due to the fact that, from September 1914 onwards, Falkenhayn also held the position of chief of the general staff, the daily business of the ministry was taken care of by his deputy in Berlin, General [Franz Gustav von Wandel \(1858-1921\)](#). This arrangement was adhered to during the tenure of Falkenhayn's successor, Wild von Hohenborn.

Structure and Missions

Upon mobilization, the war ministry subdivided into a central section (*Zentralabteilung*) responsible for ministerial staff, financial and parliamentary matters, press bureau, archives, a human resources section (*Armee-Abteilung*), a procurement department (*Allgemeines Kriegs-Departement*), a provisions department (*Kriegs-Verpflegungs-Departement*), a cantonment department responsible for barracks, training grounds, uniforms, a department for welfare, pensions and legal matters (*Versorgungs- und Justiz-Departement*), a remounts section (*Remonte-Abteilung*) responsible for the supply of horses), and a medical services section (*Medizinal-Abteilung*).

With regard to the economic utilisation of the [occupied territories](#), the ministry was considerably dependent on co-operation with the governors-general in [Brussels](#) and [Warsaw](#), the military administrations of [Ober Ost](#) and in [Romania](#), and with the armies in the field. During the war, the ministry experienced a substantial growth in size along with bureaucratic restructuring. One of the first organizational adaptations was the build-up of a [raw material](#) section (*Kriegsrohstoffabteilung*) on 13 August 1914, following a proposal of the industrialist [Walther Rathenau \(1867-1922\)](#). On 1 October 1916, the organisation of a procurement office for [weapons](#) and ammunition (*Waffen- und Munitionsbeschaffungsamtes*; Wumba) initiated a process of centralisation within the ministry's procurement sector. Just one month later, Wumba was integrated into a newly organised war office (*Kriegsamt*, not to be confused with its British namesake). The task of this office was to oversee the enforced mobilisation of industrial production and the national [labour force](#) as part of the "Hindenburg program". Although the *Kriegsamt* was formally subordinated to the ministry, it effectively followed directives from the general staff, headed by field marshal [Paul von Hindenburg \(1847-1934\)](#) and General [Erich Ludendorff \(1865-1937\)](#) from August 1916 onwards. Nevertheless, their plan to install General [Wilhelm Groener \(1867-1939\)](#) as a loyal executor of their will finally failed. As head of the *Kriegsamt*, Groener began to follow a pragmatic course, especially towards labour policy. With his inclusion of the trade unions and his move against war profiteering, he antagonised the leaders of heavy industry. On 15 August 1917, Groener was ousted from office.

In the fields of domestic security and [war economy](#), the ministry grew into the role of a coordinating agency for the hitherto decentralised organisation of territorial military commands from 8 December 1916 onwards. In the wake of parlamentarisation, on 28 October 1918, the war ministry took over control of the Imperial military cabinet, responsible for the officers corps' personal services. The [demobilisation](#) of the German army became the ministry's final task. The Prussian War Ministry was disbanded on 30 September 1919.

Conclusion

The war ministry represents an institution transitioning from a 19th century military bureaucracy to an organisation capable of the management of 20th century mass [warfare](#). With regard to the mobilisation of [Germany's](#) human resources, it appears that the ministry had fulfilled this task under conditions hitherto unknown to all military powers. After all, recruiting men and forming them into military formations had been the ministry's primary missions for nearly 100 years. For [armament](#), the assessment appears more critical. Historians have tried to explain deficiencies in this field by referring to the general technophobic attitude rampant within the ministry. Yet this interpretation ignores that the officers were well aware of the importance of modern military [technology](#). The problem was rather that the ministry had not managed to develop a competence for modern research and development management, as well as an awareness for the needs of industrialised mass production. The price was a rough process of institutional restructuring under the conditions of war and a loss of responsibility to the general staff.

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External Links

- [Das deutsche Militärwesen - Deutsches Reich 1871 - 1918, 15 June 2013 \(Bundesarchiv\) \(Article\)](#)
- [Kriegsministerium \(Landesarchiv Baden-Württemberg\) \(Database\)](#)
- [Rathenau, Walther: Deutschlands Rohstoffversorgung, Berlin 1916 \(Bayerische Staatsbibliothek\) \(Book\)](#)
- [The Hindenburg Program, 1916 \(German History in Documents and Images\) \(Primary Source\)](#)

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