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The Deployment of Bavarian Officers to Greece in the 19th Century

The Election of Bavarian Prince Otto as King of Greece

After the long struggle for freedom (1821-1830) against the Ottoman Empire, Greece achieved its independence from the Turkish sovereignty. King Ludwig I of Bavaria supported the Greek Revolution against the Ottomans with great sympathy, money, and a military mission to Greece. In 1826 Ludwig I had already spent 20,000 guilders for the Greek struggle for freedom and had deployed the first officers to Hellas. The king of Bavaria was a passionate supporter of “philhellenism”, a movement that understood Greece as the birthplace of culture and that was anticipated by the classical intellectual movement that elevated the Greece of antiquity.

As the guarantor powers of Greek independence, Great Britain, France and Russia subsequently sought out a king for the crisis-shaken land. Ludwig I suggested his second born, 16-year-old son Otto. In 1832 the international powers offered him the regality, which his father accepted for him. Until his coming of age, the ruling of Greece was transferred to a Bavarian regent council.

The Bavarian auxiliary corps

The guarantor powers mandated that the new king bring a military troop of at least 3,500 men with him to support his regency. Since the requested “Greek” royal army could not be recruited in the desired strength on such short notice, King Ludwig I of Bavaria, the father, summoned a “Bavarian auxiliary corps” (*bayerische Hilfsbrigade*) consisting of regular Bavarian troops. This was to be the replacement for Otto’s own armed forces, which would then return to Bavaria in its complete installation. The Bavarian auxiliary corps, a thoroughly equipped company of about 3,500 armed uniforms, made their way in November 1832 to Greece in 43 boats. The last units stayed in the country until 1835.

Many volunteers, but also noncompliance from within the Bavarian officer corps

A large number of soldiers volunteered to join the Bavarian army contingent. Aside from the Hellenistic fervor, this opportunity inspired great hopes for careers and adventures as well as the chance to escape the situation in Bavaria. During the peace times of the German Confederation, the Bavarian army was characterized above all by political guidelines: the deeply indebted state’s budget for the army was cut as much as possible without the army having to be fundamentally reorganized. The results were a generally declining power of presence, shortage of usable

munitions and a lack of education and training among the units. In regards to the officer corps, there was a tendency towards obsolescence, a promotion bottleneck among the lower wages in the lower ranks and a monotonous garrison service.

The application of a 35 year old second lieutenant and regiment adjutant from the 11th infantry regiment, who had already served 20 years at this post, exemplifies the officers' career expectations in relation to Greece and their perception of the situation in Bavaria. He writes: *“The current situation in Greece and public announcements give the hope of further progress or advancement to some men who don't have interest in spending the best years of their lives standing still in the garrison [...] Seeing by the state of the army, I could wait ten years before I am promoted to being captain, but in joining a troop destined for Greece, I could perhaps achieve this in the next year.”*

Sources consistently give clues, however, that the assembly of the Bavarian auxiliary corps was not always greeted with enthusiasm by the officer corps - rather, a great number of officers wanted to avoid doing service in this deployment. The diary of Prince Theodor von Thurn und Taxis is an especially impressive testament to this - during the assembly of the Greece corps he notes: *“Complaints from the officers' wives are unending. Our army has adapted to the bourgeoisie mentality that was anticipated. The wives walk up to the Lieutenant-General and protest against the march. There were three officers with me, each of which had 7 children. They recognize self-preservation as the number one duty. I put in a good word for substitutes (Tauschmaenner) with Heidegger. The third clarified that his wife would go crazy if he were to march out and that he would declare himself unfit for service. Such madness is not to be endured!”*

The quote reflects a general tendency among the Bavarian officer corps; namely, that while many Bavarian officers reacted with frustration to the long time of peace, another faction of them got along well. These officers viewed the military as a secure source of income, were rooted in their civilian surroundings, and placed the civilian interests above those of the military. Such tendencies at the time were not unique to the Bavarian officer corps: also in Württemberg and Baden in the middle of the 19th century, the penchant for convenience and material pleasures was named the top malady among the officers. An additional complaint was that many of the married officers took their families more seriously than the obligations of their service.

Officers entering into the Greek service and the repercussions within the Bavarian officer corps

Ludwig I attempted as much as possible to not replace the officers that left for Greece. This was to avoid a “glut of officers”, that, according to him, would have further impaired the poor prospects for promotion. Instead, open positions were filled by periodic removals from officers from other units and older officers were refused a pension. A lighter surge, however, particularly of accessions was not to be prevented, in order to satisfy Bavaria’s military obligations.

The royal guideline to thoroughly avoid retirement was also maintained after returning from Greece. Prince Theodor von Thurn und Taxis noted in his diary that *“the ministry forestalled all appeals for pensions, while it clarifies that those coming back from Greece should not send one in - the air of the fatherland would, no doubt, affect them beneficially. I believe this as well, just not for these men, who already have ten campaigns behind them.”*

The fate of Bavarian officers in Greece

For voluntary officers, the procedure was such that they officially exited the Bavarian army, whereby they received a guarantee of reintegration back into their former rank and a four-year assumption in the Greek army at the rank one level above their own.

In Greece the Bavaria-dominated army fought the coup attempts in the Mani peninsula and the defecting bands of klephts. In the face of the reluctance and sometimes open hostility that the Bavarian military encountered, homesickness and resignation spread among the troops. Additionally there was the fear of epidemics: out of the near 5,400 recruits in the voluntary corps, of them about 3,500 born Bavarians, 2,300 died of disease, 50 fell in combat against insurgents, 100 men deserted and 300 were unfit. It was a grave error to not build a military hospital or to recruit corpsmen. Beginning in March 1834 the auxiliary corps started to pull out. The last units made their journey back home in 1835.

A small portion of the officers entered into the Greek service, joining King Otto’s Volunteer Army which had been recruited in the meantime. In 1835 the Greek army grew to be 7,000 men. Among the officers were 553 Greeks, 144 Germans (predominantly Bavarians) and 54 other nationalities. Bavarian officer Christian von Schmaltz played a special role in this: he was the general inspector of the newly assembled Greek troops in 1832 and held office from 1833 to 1844 and again from 1835 to 1841 as the war minister of the Kingdom of Greece. He built up the armed forces of the country, which earned him the unofficial honorary title “Father of the Greek army”.

King Otto, who was cheered from the Greek public at his ascension to the throne in 1832, became increasingly unpopular throughout the following years. The political resentment against foreigners had grown so strong by 1841 that Schmaltz had to resign as the last non-Greek minister and return to Bavaria. Otto stayed until the Greeks sent even him into exile in 1862, with which the Bavarian sovereignty in Greece came to an end.

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