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Alfred von Waldersee, monarchist: his private life, public image, and the limits of his ambition, 1882-1891

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ALFRED VON WALDERSEE, MONARCHIST:
HIS PRIVATE LIFE, PUBLIC IMAGE, AND THE LIMITS OF HIS AMBITION,
1882-1891

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Acknowledgements

In late autumn 2010, while browsing through the shelves of Louisiana State University’s Middleton Library in search of a Master’s thesis topic, I stumbled across the three-volume memoirs of Count Alfred von Waldersee. At that time, I could not fathom the year-and-a-half long journey that would culminate with the completion of this thesis. Since this endeavor began, I have come to think about history in different ways; I became a better writer and researcher; I traveled to places I had never been before; I learned and experienced new things; and I reexamined, questioned, and revised the traditional depictions of Alfred and Mary von Waldersee. All of these things would have been impossible without the assistance of a number of individuals and institutions.

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Because archival research has played a large role in this undertaking, I would like to express my appreciation to the Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz in Berlin, Germany for allowing me to access the Waldersee Papers and the staff of Houghton Library at Harvard University for their assistance as I journeyed through the many volumes of the Von Waldersee-Lee Collection. I would like to thank Dr. Victor Stater and the Louisiana State University Department of History for their financial support for my research trips and for a teaching assistantship, which, among other things, allowed me to spend more time and energy on my thesis. LSU’s Interlibrary Loan Department has been incredibly helpful in obtaining essential books throughout this process. As teachers and members of my committee, Drs. David Lindenfeld and Benjamin Martin have in their own ways helped and encouraged me in the development of my thinking about history and my thesis project.

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Abstract

In the decades following the Second World War, historians writing about militarism and politics during the German Empire have often mentioned Count Alfred von Waldersee (1832-1904), the army’s Quartermaster-General (1882-1888) then Chief of the General Staff (1888-1891), portraying him as a stereotypical warmongering Prussian political general who sought to enhance his own influence, especially by aspiring to the chancellorship. They have typically viewed Alfred von Waldersee within the contexts of civil versus military relations and the era and entourage of Wilhelm II (r. 1888-1918), but these frameworks do not help accurately explain the man, his motivations, how he saw himself, and his relationship to power.

Using archival material that has never before been utilized judiciously and extensively by a professional historian, this study seeks to question, reevaluate, and revise the traditional interpretation of Waldersee by analyzing his private life, public image, and the limits of his ambition. This thesis argues that Alfred von Waldersee needs to be understood as a man formed by his experiences in the age of Wilhelm I; this was the era in which his opinions about domestic and international affairs solidified and he became a political partisan in Berlin. He was a monarchist, but one whose conception of the Prusso-German monarchy was based on the rule of Wilhelm I, his friend and ideal sovereign. In his actions throughout the 1880s, Waldersee sought to defend the traditional power of the Kaiser against what he considered the sovereign’s enemies: threatening foreign powers, constitutionalism, democracy, socialism, Jews, and Catholics. This project also focuses on his relationship with his American-born wife, his anti-Semitism, his views on preventive war, and his relationship with the press.
During his life, but especially from 1882 to 1891, Waldersee did not aspire to gain political power for himself; he never wanted to become Chancellor. As an intimate and aide-de-camp to the Kaisers, Waldersee did not operate outside the convoluted power structure of the German Empire. In the colorful, modernizing Europe of the late nineteenth century, Waldersee saw the world in black and white and represented one of the last gasps of an earlier age.
Introduction

At dawn on April 29, 1945, Soviet troops crossed the Moltke Bridge near the heart of Berlin. Their objective was the Reichstag, but in their struggle to secure this bridge over the Spree River, which German troops had failed to destroy completely, they stormed the nearby building of the Ministry of the Interior. Within the halls, offices, and chambers of this massive complex, the remnants of Hitler’s army attempted to hold back the “Red Horde” from the east. The death, destruction, and hell of war entered the very rooms, where in the 1880s, Count Alfred von Waldersee, the Quartermaster-General then Chief of Staff of the Imperial German army, had lived and worked, planning and preparing to defend the Fatherland against its enemies – especially, and ironically, the Russians and Socialists.

In the late nineteenth century, Berlin was a bustling and budding metropolis of the new, formidable German Empire, and the Military Staff Building was – unlike in 1945 – in a peaceful and picturesque area of the capital. By the end of the 1880s, Waldersee detested and opposed the powerful Chancellor Otto von Bismarck, forming just one episode in the history of civil and military relations in Imperial Germany. In a quite fitting, though perhaps unintentional, symbol of the ultimate victory of civilian-led government over military influence, in 2001 the Office of the Chancellery of the Federal Republic of Germany opened in Berlin on the former site of the Military Staff Building. Walking across the Moltke Bridge today, in a city that has experienced such great physical transformations, one can barely sense the horrific nightmare that engulfed this area in the final days of the Third Reich, much less the imperial grandeur, which emanated from this district during the time of Alfred von Waldersee.
Image 1: Berlin, around 1900. The Moltke Bridge in foreground with the Military Staff Building center-right. In the background, the Reichstag is to the left, and the Victory column is behind the Military Staff Building. http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moltkebrücke

Image 2: Berlin, July 5, 2011. The Moltke Bridge with the Reichstag in the distance and the Office of the Chancellor, the former site of the Military Staff Building, on the right. Photograph taken by the author.
In 1832, Frederick William III ruled the Kingdom of Prussia. His 35 year-old son, who would one day be crowned Kaiser Wilhelm I, had become a father the previous year to the future Kaiser Frederick III. At 17 years old, Otto von Bismarck began studying law at the University of Göttingen in 1832, one of the first steps in his illustrious career. That same year, a 31 year-old Helmuth von Moltke was about to be promoted to the Prussian army’s General Staff, which he would one day famously head. On April 8, 1832, Alfred von Waldersee was born in Potsdam into an aristocratic Prussian military family, and his name would also become known throughout the German Empire, Europe, and the world. Following in his father’s footsteps, he would join the Prussian army, become an officer, and rise through the ranks, serving as a staff officer in the Austro-Prussian War (1866) and the Franco-Prussian War (1870-71). Most famously, he would become a Chief of the German General Staff (1888-1891), a Field Marshal (1900), and the Commander-in-Chief of the Eight-Nation Alliance, which suppressed the Boxer Rebellion in China (1900-01).

These positions are certainly noteworthy, but Alfred von Waldersee did not receive military fame and glory. His predecessor, Helmuth von Moltke, and his successor, Alfred von Schlieffen, have overshadowed his short tenure as head of the General Staff. By the time he arrived in Asia in September 1900, major military action had already ended. Beginning in 1887, Waldersee would become known more for his influence in politics than in military affairs. This trend would continue in twentieth-century historiography. In 1922-1923, the archivist Heinrich Otto Meisner published his three-volume *Denkwürdigkeiten des General-Feldmarschalls Alfred Grafen von Waldersee*, which Frederic Whyte would heavily abridge and translate into English.

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1 His father – Franz Heinrich (1791-1873) – commanded the 5th Army Corps and was later the military governor of Berlin (1864-1870). His mother had been a lady-in-waiting to the Duchess of Cumberland and died in 1859. His maternal grandfather was General Lieutenant Baron von Hünerbein, a friend of the popular Queen Louise, who had died in 1810.
in 1924. These books are not traditional memoirs because they are largely composed of Waldersee’s letters, memoranda, and journal entries. Although Meisner uses his subject’s different military positions as the organizational basis for his work, politics – both domestic and international – and court affairs are the dominant themes of Waldersee’s writings and thus of Meisner’s Denkwürdigkeiten. In 1928, Meisner published letters from Waldersee’s military correspondence in his book titled, Aus dem Briefwechsel des Generalfeldmarschalls Alfred Grafen von Waldersee, 1886-91. The next year, Hans Mohs published military documents from Waldersee’s life in his two-volume work, General-Feldmarschall Alfred Graf von Waldersee in seinem militärischen Wirken (1929).

In 1935, Wolfgang Fornaschon wrote the only scholarly book exclusively about Waldersee. In his Die Politischen Anschauungen des Grafen Alfred von Waldersee und seine Stellungnahme zur deutschen Politik (The Political Views of Count Alfred von Waldersee and his Response to German Politics), the author analyzes Waldersee’s political views and his role in political affairs from 1891 until 1900. “The conclusions [Fornaschon] arrives at are neither new nor original,” writes Ian Morrow in a 1936 review, “Thus he finds that Waldersee was not endowed with political gifts, but was the victim of his own insatiable desire for political power.” Although references to Fornaschon’s work in later publications have been rare, the multi-volume works edited by Meisner and Mohs have formed the basis for understanding Waldersee in the later twentieth century.

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In the first decades after the Second World War, three books and their authors have been important to the understanding of Waldersee in recent historiography: Walter Goerlitz’s *History of the German General Staff, 1657-1945* (1954), Gordon Craig’s *The Politics of the Prussian Army, 1640-1945* (1955), and Martin Kitchen’s *The German Officer Corps, 1890-1914* (1968). These books have helped form and promote what I will refer to as the traditional interpretation of Alfred von Waldersee. Taken together, they portray him as an intriguer at court who sought to enhance his own power, an ambitious political general who aspired to become Chancellor, and an irrational, simple-minded, and reckless warmonger. These three basic tenets, which developed in the 1950s and 1960s, have appeared largely intact ever since in biographies and books concerning the politics of Otto von Bismarck about Wilhelm II.

Perhaps no one has sought to reevaluate the traditional interpretation because it can conveniently serve arguments about the Iron Chancellor’s capability to maintain peace and the last Kaiser’s desire to assert his authority. The most recent publication that upholds the traditional interpretation is Annika Mombauer’s 2004 work on Wilhelm II and Waldersee during the Boxer Rebellion (1900-01). “Waldersee had once before been aiming to become Chancellor,” she writes, referring to the late 1880s, and later noting, that “his long-standing dream of becoming Chancellor was never fulfilled.”

This thesis is a significant departure from twentieth-century historiography about Waldersee in terms of its focus, approach, and sources. Fornaschon was concerned largely with Waldersee’s political ideas and political role in the 1890s, but I will explore Waldersee’s career

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in the 1880s, when he became part of the elite in Berlin and when he transformed into a politically-motivated individual. In contrast to Kitchen, I will provide a more detailed and thorough examination of Waldersee’s life and the development of his views from 1882 through 1891. Unlike virtually every historian who has to some extent written about or mentioned Waldersee, I shall look beyond the conventional image of an ambitious political general and seek to uncover, illuminate, and understand him as a human being, one whose life illuminates important aspects of the early decades of the German Empire. Although my focus on Waldersee’s private life and the development of his opinions will give this thesis the feel of a biography, each section centers on an important issue or relationship in his experience in Berlin, and at the core of most sections is an argument against the traditional interpretation of Waldersee.

This thesis is divided into two parts, and though each has its own detailed introduction and explanation of the major themes and arguments covered, the following is a brief overview of the content of this thesis. Specific issues in historiography will be addressed in each section.

In Part I, “Suaviter in Modo, Fortiter in Re, 1882-1887,” I emphasize the exclusive, private world of the elite, in which Waldersee lived and became politically active. The social and political elite were one and the same, and thus I highlight the role social events and casual dealings played in political relationships and official interactions. Although social activities – both formal and informal – played an important role throughout Waldersee’s life, I illustrate his participation in the capital’s social life in the section “Talk and Tables.” Waldersee’s relationships with certain individuals who play significant roles in the late 1880s frame the other sections of Part I. In “God Bless this Happy Pair,” I illuminate his relationship with his wife,

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5 Using a chapter of his book on the German officer corps, Kitchen made an honest yet timid attempt to explain Waldersee thoroughly, but he arrived at the same conclusion that Goerlitz and Craig did. Martin Kitchen, The German Officer Corps, 1890-1914, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 64-95.
Mary, and her life during this period. “Ultima Ratio” focuses on Waldersee’s relationship with Otto von Bismarck, especially concerning the issues of foreign policy and war. The development of his relationship with Prince William of Hohenzollern, the future Wilhelm II, is described and explained in “The Father who art in Herwarthstrasse 2.” Lastly, Waldersee’s connection with the controversial Adolf Stoecker is a central concern in the final section, “Christian Philanthropy and Anti-Semitism.”

In Part II, “A Transformational Time, 1888-1891,” I emphasize the clash of Waldersee’s private life with the creation of his public image through the press. The relationships he formed, the beliefs he held, and the actions he committed in the exclusive world of the elite from 1882 to 1887 would have public, political implications from 1888 to 1891. In the first section, simply titled, “The Stoecker Affair,” I show how this event became a turning point for Waldersee, especially by thrusting him into the limelight. The next section, “The Coming Man?” deals specifically with his public image in the press and the extent of his political ambitions. “The American Egeria?” focuses on the depiction of Mary von Waldersee in American and European newspapers and on her rumored political intriguing. The last section, “The Monarchist and the Changing Monarchy,” will explore Waldersee’s last years in Berlin, his relationship with Wilhelm II, and his conception of the monarchy.

At its most fundamental level, this thesis seeks to answer a simple question: Who was Alfred von Waldersee? As mentioned above, historians have considered him within the contexts of civil versus military relations and the entourage and era of Wilhelm II, but these frameworks do not sufficiently help make sense of Waldersee. According to German historian Fritz Hartung in his 1924 review of Meisner’s work, the most important part of the Denkwürdigkeiten is 1882-1891, when Waldersee “observed and attempted to influence events in Berlin from the closest
proximity.” “It is initially still the time of the old Kaiser [Wilhelm I] into which Waldersee leads us, but the new generation already stands waiting at the door,” he notes.6 Hartung’s observation points to something that historians have failed to consider earnestly: Waldersee, who was in his 50s during this period, was a member of Wilhelm I’s entourage before he ever met the future Wilhelm II. I argue therefore that Waldersee needs to be analyzed and understood within the context of Wilhelm I’s reign, during which his Weltanschauung – his ideas about domestic and international politics – became firmly established.

One could call Waldersee a number of different things – as historians have – but by looking at his basic beliefs, the way he saw himself, and the motivations behind his actions, I believe he should be called first and foremost a monarchist, but one whose conception of the Prusso-German monarchy was based on his experience of the rule of Wilhelm I, his friend and ideal sovereign.

The reader of this thesis should keep in mind that the diffusion of the monarch’s power at court, in the government, and in the military was not always clear-cut and neatly organized. Beginning in the late seventeenth century, the ruler of Prussia had rewarded the nobility’s loyalty to the crown through privileges and honors, such as a monopoly over high-ranking positions in the army. By the nineteenth century, the military and the aristocracy provided the bulwark of the monarch’s traditional absolutist power against the tides of constitutionalism and democracy. Despite advances in establishing a parliamentary form of government, ultimate power remained in the person of the Prussian king and later German Emperor, who determined how to exercise his power, especially in the personal and political relationships with his subordinates. This power structure meant that individuals or groups clamored for the monarch’s favor, resulting in a

system of fluid political relationships, especially among the people closest to the monarch. Although I will often refer to Waldersee in terms of his office, his direct relationship to the sovereign was more important at court and in high society. On his calling cards, the title of his association to the monarch is printed before the name of his position in the military establishment; royal invitations to events at the palace were addressed to His Majesty’s Adjutant General (aide-de-camp), not the Quartermaster-General of the army’s General Staff.\(^7\)

In May 1870, King Wilhelm I of Prussia made Waldersee one of his personal assistants, a \textit{Flügeladjutant}. When the Franco-Prussian War began that summer, Waldersee wrote in his journal that he “would have the fortune to take part in the war as a immediate attendant to this excellent master.”\(^8\) According to \textit{Das Buch vom Deutschen Heere} (1891), a \textit{Flügeladjutant} was in an “extraordinary position of trust,” which not only required “extensive military knowledge and ability,” but also “excellent skill in the mastery of all social manners.”\(^9\) The monarch formed personal relationships with these men, whom he could also name Generals à la Suite or Adjutants General – as Waldersee was in 1880 and 1885, respectively – “even though [they] have taken a position in active military service.”\(^10\) In order to understand Waldersee, recognizing the importance of his relationship with Wilhelm I is essential. As he wrote after leaving the palace in 1873, “A better and kinder master I will never have again; how I must thank him for everything!”\(^11\) There is no specific section in this thesis about Waldersee’s

\(^7\) Calling cards & invitations, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volumes 13 & 17.
relationship to Wilhelm I, instead it will appear like a Wagnerian leitmotif throughout this thesis just as it played a significant role during Waldersee’s life in the 1880s.

I have used a number of different sources in crafting this thesis, but some play a larger role than others. Waldersee’s published writings provide an important basis for this work, but Meisner’s Denkwürdigkeiten are, as John Röhl calls them, “scandalously expurgated.”12 In his research for his massive biography of Wilhelm II, Röhl is a rarity among the historians who have written about Waldersee because he has thoroughly read and utilized the general’s original journals.13 Despite his view on Meisner’s editing, the unpublished entries that Röhl incorporates into his work do not necessarily contradict the published ones, and they have been helpful for my own interpretation of Waldersee.

This Master’s thesis also utilizes unpublished, archival material from the Geheimes Staatsarchiv and from Harvard University’s Houghton Library.14 During my short time looking at the Waldersee Papers (Nachlass Waldersee) in the Geheimes Staatsarchiv in Berlin, Germany, I was mainly interested in newspaper articles about Waldersee because the press played an important role in his life, and – unlike American, British, and French newspapers – the major German newspapers of the nineteenth century do not have online archives. At Harvard University’s Houghton Library in Cambridge, Massachusetts I examined the Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, which contains primarily letters and memorabilia that Waldersee’s widowed mother-in-law, Mrs. Anne Lee, wrote, collected, and sent to her cousin in Connecticut for decades. This

13 I have seen and touched Waldersee’s journals myself at the Geheimes Staatsarchiv, but I did not have the time and resources to attempt to dive into them and to dissect his handwriting while researching in Berlin in July 2011.
14 Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz, VI. HA Familienarchive und Nachlässe, N1 Alfred von Waldersee Rep. 92. Houghton Library, Harvard University, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, MS AM 994.PF.
collection formed the basis of a 1962 book about Mary von Waldersee written by an amateur historian whose shameful distortion of her is made worse by the fact that he does not properly cite his evidence.\textsuperscript{15} Therefore, I am the first person to utilize in a responsible, extensive, and professional way the material in the Von Waldersee-Lee Collection. Mrs. Lee’s letters about, and objects from, everyday life inside and outside the Military Staff Building have been invaluable to understanding the Waldersees.

In the interests of time and length, I have not been able to cover everything about Waldersee from 1882 through 1891. The reader will not find in-depth discussions about his military life, his influence in German strategic thinking and planning, or his relationships with others in the military establishment, such as the War Ministers, Paul Bronsart von Schellendorf and Julius von Verdy du Vernois and the Chiefs of the Military Cabinet, Emil von Albedyll and Wilhelm von Hahnke. I also have not extensively explored Waldersee’s relationships with civilians, from newspaper editors and leaders of political parties to members of the court and royal government, such as Friedrich von Holstein and Philipp zu Eulenburg. I discuss and incorporate Mary von Waldersee in this work, but I do not go into detail about her specific philanthropic activities. She kept diaries, but their location is unknown if they exist today. According to her niece, who wrote a book about Mary that is heavily couched in religious language, she did not want her private diaries to become public.\textsuperscript{16}


\textsuperscript{16} Countess Elisabeth Waldersee, \textit{Von Klarheit zu Klarheit!} (Stuttgart: Buchhandlung des Deutschen Philadelphia-Vereins, 1915). Anna Katterfeld, \textit{Unseres Herrgotts Schatzmeisterein: Ein Lebensbild der Gräfin Marie Esther von Waldersee}, (Berlin: Acker-Verlag, 1931). Because \textit{Von Klarheit zu Klarheit!} went out of print, this small book was written with the Countess’s permission and is similar to her book in its style, bias, and lack of citations.
Although this thesis project may be complete, by no means do I consider it the final word about Alfred von Waldersee. More research needs to be done to gain an even better understanding of this man, his world, and the numerous issues upon which his life touches. I hope that the story I tell and the arguments I advance in these pages may become the foundation of a more comprehensive work in the future.
Part I: Suaviter in Modo, Fortiter in Re, 1882-1887

On January 2, 1882, The Times of London reported that through a cabinet order of December 27, Kaiser Wilhelm I had appointed Count Alfred von Waldersee the Quartermaster-General of the army’s General Staff. In this newly-created position, Waldersee would be the assistant to – and the presumptive successor of – the great strategist and Chief of Staff Helmuth von Moltke. After noting the importance of this day for Prussian military history and providing a short biography of the man who was then Chief of Staff of the 10th Army Corps in Hanover, the correspondent stated the following:

The Count comes to Berlin with a reputation for other recommendable qualities besides great accomplishments in all the principles and details of his profession. He is a man of tall and most distinguished military presence and polished manners, combining a high degree the suaviter in modo with the fortiter in re 1 – an attainment which is by no means common in Prussia in any sphere of life whatever, especially in army circles. In fact, in addition to being an illustrious soldier, Count Waldersee is also a brilliant courtier – an impression which General Roberts and his critical colleagues from England did not fail to carry away with them from Hanover, when last autumn they attended the maneuvers of the 10th Army Corps and were objects of so much hospitable attention from the chief of its staff. 2

Stepping off the train in Berlin, Waldersee began a new, eventful chapter of his life, bringing his military and social talents with him.

From 1882 to 1887, Alfred von Waldersee established himself in the social life, court, and politics of the German capital. He entered the exclusive world of the empire’s elite suaviter in modo – gentle in manner – but he did more than just become a well-dressed member of the Kaiser’s entourage and an aristocratic socialite. In the halls and offices of government buildings, he acted fortiter in re – strong in deed – through his advocacy and enactment of policies and

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1 gentle in manner . . . strong in deed
through his forging and fostering of relationships. By the end of 1887, Waldersee was on the threshold of a new era in his life, one which would be determined by the issues he concerned himself with and the relationships he formed before 1888. In order to reevaluate the traditional interpretation of Alfred von Waldersee, Part I focuses on the important relationships and issues during the first half of his time in Berlin.

In “God Bless this Happy Pair,” I examine Alfred von Waldersee’s marriage to the American Mary Lee – his most consistent, stable, and happiest relationship. I also discuss Mary’s beliefs and her relationship to her husband and German high society. In “Talk and Tables,” I illustrate the Waldersees’ social life in Berlin. Among the elite, there was a blurry line between a policymaker’s private and political life; the social life of the upper class provided places of exchange, where one formed opinions, spread gossip, shared information, and developed personal and political relationships. Understanding this exclusive world helps illuminate how Alfred von Waldersee related to other officials and aristocrats and provides the backdrop for his political actions and relationships.

Apart from his marriage with Mary, Waldersee’s three most important relationships in 1882-1887 each connect to a questionable claim that has been made about him in historiography. In “Ultima Ratio,” I argue that Waldersee should not be casually labeled with the pejorative term “warmonger” by illuminating the evolution of Waldersee’s view on foreign affairs and the methodical development of his advocacy for preventive war. His differences in foreign policy with Bismarck did not break their amicable relationship, but the Chancellor became concerned about Waldersee’s relationship with Prince Wilhelm, the future Wilhelm II. In “The Father who art in Herwarthstrasse 2,” I argue that Waldersee did not attempt to form a relationship with the prince in order to use him for his own ambitions. Instead, Prince Wilhelm found a friend and
father-figure in Waldersee, who saw in the prince a strong Kaiser for the future of the German Empire. In 1887, Waldersee encouraged Prince Wilhelm to support the City Mission, an institution in Berlin devoted to aiding the poor and working class while turning them away from godless, democratic socialism and toward Christianity and monarchicalism. This organization had been established by Adolf Stoecker, the founder of the Christian Social Party and of a new kind of anti-Semitism. This fact caused Bismarck and the liberal parties great anxiety. In “Christian Philanthropy and Anti-Semitism,” I clarify Waldersee’s early relationship with Stoecker and argue that even though he was an anti-Semite, Waldersee’s motivation for becoming involved with the City Mission was his belief in promoting and defending the Christian, Prussia-German monarchy.

The one theme that runs through these relationships is Waldersee’s monarchicalism; his overriding desire to defend and promote the power, sovereignty, and lands of the Hohenzollerns was so simplistic and passionate that it may seem exaggerated. This principle was, however, the basic motivation for his actions. On a political level, he was a Protestant noble – a Count – and a Prussian officer, unwavering and selfless for his warrior-king. On a personal level, he was a friend and aide-de-camp to Kaiser Wilhelm I, with whom he socialized at hunts, dinners, and tea parties.

Through the relationships Waldersee made or nurtured and the issues that concerned him from 1882 to 1887, we can perceive not only the combination of volatility, constancy, anxiousness, and gracefulness among the German elite in the last years of Wilhelm I’s reign, but also gain a better understanding of Waldersee himself. In his efforts to promote and defend the monarchy of Wilhelm I against the threats of a rapidly evolving and unstable world, Waldersee became an active partisan in the political intrigue of the capital. Drawn by the attractions of
certain individuals, he would continue to be a star on the rise, though always remaining loyal in the Kaiser’s orbit.

**God Bless this Happy Pair**

On February 18, 1874, Mrs. Anne Lee, the widow of a New York merchant, was staying at her daughter Josie’s estate of Lautenbach in southwest Germany. She penned a letter to her cousin in Connecticut to announce the engagement of Mary, her youngest daughter and the widow of the Danish Prince of Noer, to Count Alfred von Waldersee, a colonel, aide-de-camp to Wilhelm I, and Chief of Staff for the army corps in Hanover under the command of Prince Albrecht of Prussia, the Kaiser’s nephew:

Mary met him for the first time at a neighboring château where he was visiting mutual friends the past autumn. By his own saying he was greatly impressed by Mary at that time – it was at a dinner there to which we were all invited – and finding his heart on the verge of departure, if not gone, he lost no time in cultivating the acquaintance in every available way. He came several times to Lautenbach and finally professed himself exceedingly attached to Mary. She would not give encouragement – as she said she could not without knowing more of his inner feelings – as she would never sacrifice her principle or heart to marry again – but was certainly much pleased with the Count. So time wore on ‘til the attachment became mutual and the betrothal took place in December [1873] . . . he seems to be esteemed wherever he is known and his intimate friends are loud in his praise . . . I believe that God sent him to be a loving companion and to cheer the heart of my dear child – and in consequence that their union will be blessed with happiness . . . He is very fond of hunting and brought with him a deer and hares – so we feasted. I will tell you that he is a favorite aide-de-camp of the Emperor – [and] when the Count went as German etiquette required to ask his sovereign’s assent to his marriage, he reported his Majesty as being much pleased, giving it freely, laughingly saying, “Ah I find you have been hunting in Württemberg!” and sending his congratulations to Mary.⁴

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⁴ Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, February 18, 1874, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume B. Mary’s first husband, the much older Prince Frederick of Schleswig-Holstein-Noer, died eight months after their marriage in 1864 while touring through the Holy Land.
On the long-awaited wedding day – April 14, 1874 – the small, modest medieval church in the village of Kochendorf was filled to capacity. From an evergreen archway built over the main doorway, a sign stated, “God bless this happy pair.” Evergreen trees and wreaths, camellias, and other flowering plants decorated the altar, before which stood two armchairs for the bride and groom. Led by the pastor, the wedding party exited the sacristy. Escorting Mrs. Lee, Alfred von Waldersee was dressed in his blue, scarlet, and silver colonel’s uniform; seventeen medals hung on his chest, and a white feather plume draped the silver decoration on his Prussian helmet. Following the mother and groom, Mary’s brother Dave, who had arrived from New York, entered with the bride. Her Parisian-made, white silk dress had a high neck and long sleeves; its skirt trimmed with silver netting and fringe. On her head sat a wreath of white Persian lilacs, white azaleas, silver leaves, and pendants, behind which hung a short tulle veil. On her chest hung Alfred’s wedding gift: a diamond cross set in silver. In her hands, she held a bouquet of white flowers her groom had brought from Berlin. After the long ceremony of prayers, songs, organ music, and a solemn sermon, twenty-four guests were invited to the wedding dinner, which lasted nearly three hours and included toasts, speeches, and the reading of telegrams wishing the happy couple well. Mary and Alfred quickly changed their clothes to catch the train and began their honeymoon journey through Italy, where they spent a week in Naples. The family decided that in the future, Mrs. Lee would stay with her daughter Josie at Lautenbach during the summer, but would reside with Alfred and Mary at Hanover, where her new son-in-law was stationed, for the rest of the year.  

This section will describe Mary von Waldersee and her relationship with her husband from 1882 through 1887. Her philanthropic activities during these years would bring Waldersee

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4 Anne Lee to Frances, April 6, 1874, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume A.
into contact with a controversial preacher (See “Christian Philanthropy and Anti-Semitism”), and this connection would open the floodgates for press gossip about both Alfred and Mary von Waldersee. Beginning in 1888, American newspapers would portray a false image of Mary because they believed she played an important political role at court (See “The American Egeria?”). Consequently, it is important to illuminate Mary’s beliefs and her relationship with Waldersee before 1888.

Mary’s mother was especially proud of her new son-in-law. “I tell you so much of Alfred,” Mrs. Lee wrote to her cousin in December 1874, “because I feel that you sympathize in my gladness that my dear child has such an affectionate husband, and above all, one who puts his trust in God.” 5 “Alfred is as kind as ever,” she wrote in February 1875, “On the 1st the sun shone brightly, and he came in with a pot in each hand of the sweet spring violets all in bloom; one for

5 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, December 12, 1874, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume A.
Mary, and one for me.” Simply put, life was good for the Waldersees in Hanover, and during their time there, Alfred von Waldersee, through his social graces and military abilities, became a well-known figure to the army’s General Staff. He made an especially good impression on the Chief of Staff, Field Marshal Helmuth von Moltke, who, beginning in 1880, increasingly conversed with Waldersee about his future. The demands of his offices burdened the aging Moltke, who found in Alfred von Waldersee an energetic man of talent and character. On December 31, 1881, the Kaiser appointed Waldersee to the newly created position of Quartermaster-General, Moltke’s right-hand man and presumptive successor. In 1882, the 50 year-old Waldersee, his 45 year-old wife, Mary, and his 79 year-old mother-in-law, Mrs. Anne Lee, left Hannover and arrived at their new home in Berlin.

Located to the west of the capital’s old center, the Military Staff Building was an imposing three-story structure of red brick. The northwest corner of the building touched the left bank of the Spree River, which the Waldersees could view from their apartment – Herwarthstrasse 2 – in the west side of the complex. Sitting in her room, Mrs. Lee could look out on swans swimming carelessly among the boats passing on the murky blue water. In the distance, elevated trains dashed over their iron supports across the skyline. The southern end of the building abutted the Königsplatz, the centerpiece of which was the Victory Column that commemorated the Wars of Unification. Beyond this manicured park stood the trees of the Tiergarten, Berlin’s largest green space. “The scene is peaceful – suggestive of the country – yet full of life,” Mrs. Lee wrote, “I often think how favored we are by such a quiet spot in so large a city.”

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6 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, February 3, 1875, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume A.
7 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, June 20, 1883, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume B.
8 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, June 20, 1883, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume B.
Image 4: Floor plan of the Military Staff Building. Based on a drawing by Alfred von Waldersee for Mrs. Lee’s cousin, Mary Hoppin. The original is located at Harvard University, Houghton Library, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, MS AM 994.PF, Volume 4. According to Mrs. Lee, Waldersee made the sketch in May 1887. Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, May 9, 1887, Volume B.
In the bustling and industrializing imperial capital, the Waldersees certainly lived in a serene area, but in the following years, the constructions of the Moltke Bridge across the Spree and the Reichstag at the opposite side of the Königsplatz would bring more life to this quiet neighborhood. Inside the Military Staff Building, too, the Waldersees brought a new energy to the headquarters of the General Staff, hosting family, friends, dinners, holiday gatherings, birthday celebrations, religious services, and philanthropic activities. Alfred and Mary had been active in the social life of Hannover, but now they were in the heart of German high society.

When Mary arrived in Berlin, she received a warm welcome from the royal family, upon whom she would make a strong impression.⁹ On New Year’s Day 1885 Waldersee went to the palace, where the wheelchair-bound Empress Augusta reached for his hand and told him among

⁹ Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, April 24, 1882, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume B.
other things to send her greetings to Mary, who “is an excellent woman, of whom I have the highest confidence.” Her judgment delighted Waldersee.  

After visiting Their Majesties one day in April 1885, he returned home, where, Mrs. Lee wrote, Alfred “was greatly amused, telling [us] how the empress called him to her side and saying all sorts of pleasant things of Mary – how much she liked her – was always sure to find her where any good was to be done, and wondered if he realized what a treasure he possessed!” In the same letter to her cousin, she stated, “I do think it literally true that Alfred is more attached to Mary than to his career, however high it goes.”

The ideas of Alfred’s “possession” of Mary and of the relationship between his career and his marriage evoke a quote that constitutes possibly the only surviving words Alfred wrote to Mary. Whenever they were apart, especially when Waldersee was travelling on military business, they would write to each other often, at least once a day. During one such time in August 1876 – two years after their marriage – Waldersee was promoted to Major General, and when he heard of his appointment, he wrote immediately to Mary:

Should I rise to higher rank, this happiness can never compare to that which I enjoy in possessing you. Everything else is vastly secondary to this one great happiness. You are the greatest gift which God has bestowed on me . . .

Mrs. Lee, who included his tender words in a letter to her cousin Mary, noted that it “above all else, touched my heart” and “as this was only intended for Mary’s eye, it is for me of more

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11 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, April 24, 1885, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume B.
12 Mary von Waldersee; quoted in Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, September 11, 1876, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume A.
value.” In one of her few surviving letters, Mary expressed to Mrs. Mary Hoppin in 1888 her feelings for Alfred:

> After eight and a half years of widowhood, the dear Lord, of His great mercy, restored to me again the hope of happiness, in causing me to meet . . . my present loving and devoted husband . . . and I can never enough thank the Lord for my present and happy home.14

The difference in Mary and Alfred’s national origins did not have any significant consequences because the foundation of the Waldsees’ marriage was their shared Protestant faith. In December 1874, Mrs. Lee noted that before going to bed every night, Mary and Alfred read a chapter of the Bible together.15 Earlier that year, in the letter to her cousin about the engagement, Mrs. Lee stated that Alfred and Mary’s common religion was the most important element for the success of their marriage: “That he is a firm believer in the precious truths of the Bible had great influence,” Mrs. Lee wrote, “for I think that is the surest foundation for lasting happiness.”16

In 1888, Mary believed that her American family was the only one in which all the sisters married Protestant Europeans, and stated, “I am glad that we make this exception to the pretty general rule.”17 For the July 1903 issue of Harper’s Bazar, an American women’s magazine, Mary wrote an article titled, “The Story of My Life.” She had often been asked about international marriages, and took the opportunity to preach on the subject:

> Americans do not seem to think that such marriages are happy, as a rule. It is true that there have been a large number of unhappy marriages between American girls and

13 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, September 11, 1876, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume A.
14 Mary von Waldersee to Mary Hoppin, August 31, 1888, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume B.
15 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, December 12, 1874, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume A.
16 Anne Lee to Frances, April 6, 1874, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume A.
17 Mary von Waldersee to Mary Hoppin, August 31, 1888, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume B.
foreign noblemen, but most of these have been, I think, where one was a Protestant and the other a Catholic, in which case a great gulf was put between them at the beginning. Then, of course, marriage merely for position with a foreigner, on the one hand, and for the money of the American girl, on the other, can never be a guarantee for happiness. But in a marriage for love between two of the same religion—and this I consider most important—there is no reason why happiness should not result from these international marriages.\(^{18}\)

She continued to opine about American women in Europe, showing a clear European bias:

> The independent character of the American girl is not a great drawback; it depends upon her ability to make these qualities respected in her husband’s eyes. American women are remarkably pliable, and seldom find difficulty in complying with European conventions. And while it is true that women have not the position, technically, in Europe which they have in America, they have perhaps more devotion from their husbands in Europe than men in America, engrossed in business, have time to give. Count Waldorsee and I, for instance, have never been long separated . . . we are generally together.\(^{19}\)

Undoubtedly, her own experiences formed her opinions. As an American, she had adapted herself to European life, married a fellow Protestant, and consequently had a happy marriage.

> The Waldorsee’s happy marriage was reinforced not only on their yearly anniversary – April 14 – but also on the 14\(^{th}\) of every month. On May 14, 1885, for example, they went to church and had an early dinner, at which Mrs. Lee toasted them, “that they might pass many a 14\(^{th}\) with as much happiness as the present.” Afterward, they took a ride in Waldorsee’s favorite open carriage, which he drove himself. Despite her daughter’s pleading, Mrs. Lee thought it was too cold to join them. Instead, she stayed behind and arranged the flowers Alfred had brought for Mary, arrangements she proudly showed them upon their return. That evening Baron Ende and his wife – Alfred’s niece – came to have tea, and Mrs. Lee finished the day beating her son-in-law at his favorite game, backgammon.\(^{20}\) On April 14, 1875 – their first anniversary – a group


\(^{19}\) Mary von Waldorsee, Harper’s Bazar, July 1903, pg. 606. HH, Von Waldorsee-Lee Collection, Volume 11.

\(^{20}\) Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, May 12, 1885, HH, Von Waldorsee-Lee Collection, Volume B.
led by one of Waldersee’s fellow officers serenaded the couple. Friends came to congratulate them and a photographer took a picture of them on the balcony of their home in Hanover, and later, Alfred and Mary went riding together and gave each other presents.21

On March 22, 1885, flags fluttered in the wind throughout Berlin for the Kaiser’s eighty-eighth birthday. Upon leaving church, the Walderssees had difficulty passing through the dense throngs of people by the palace. About 65 members of Europe’s aristocracy and royalty had arrived for the festivities. The highlights were a dinner and soirée at the palace in the evening, to which Alfred and Mary were both invited. Mary politely refused to go, however, because she, as her mother noted, “has taken great pains to have it understood here, she cannot enter into visiting on Sunday.”22 On January 3, 1886, imperial banners bedecked the capital for the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Kaiser’s reign. Alfred, dressed in full military uniform, and Mary, donned in a dark purple satin dress, attended religious service in the palace’s chapel with the German court and royalty from throughout Europe. Afterward, the Walderssees congratulated the Kaiser in the White Hall of the palace, but Mary was able to get herself excused from the rest of the day’s activities, which Alfred attended by himself. That evening, Mary went to church.23

Despite the customs of court society, Mary adhered to her religious convictions, which others found admirable. As her mother noted, “from the Empress down, her motive is appreciated.”24 In her 1903 Harpers Bazar article, Mary opined about her Sunday custom:

During my long residence abroad my Sundays have been passed in the quiet religious American way, neither accepting invitations nor receiving visits, but spending the day for higher interests. The Count [Alfred von Walderssee] sympathizes also in my views. My sister, the Baroness de Waechter-Lautenbach, has always observed the same habits,

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21 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, April 14, 1875, HH, Von Walderssee-Lee Collection, Volume A.
22 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, April 24, 1885, HH, Von Walderssee-Lee Collection, Volume B. Walderssee got her excused from the events.
23 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, January 3, 1886, HH, Von Walderssee-Lee Collection, Volume B.
24 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, April 24, 1885, HH, Von Walderssee-Lee Collection, Volume B.
and it has long been the source of grief to us to see Americans, taught to keep the Sunday at home, show themselves, when they come to Europe, false to their principles and sailing with the stream. In our position it has sometimes been hard for my sister and myself to be true to our American conscience regarding Sunday, but it has frequently been our experience that a queen or an empress has been perfectly willing to accept our excuses in declining Sunday invitations, and readily sympathized with our scruples.\footnote{Mary von Waldersee, “The Story of My Life,” Harper’s Bazar, July 1903, pg. 606. HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume 11.}

To Mary, her observance of Sunday was also a matter of pride as an American. Her mother also shared this view. After Mary got herself excused from the Festival of Orders which took place on a Sunday in January 1886, Mrs. Lee opined to her cousin, “The fact is when one sees these things in their true light they are folly. Still, I am glad to say the keeping of the Sabbath is gradually improving and this is cause for gratitude.”\footnote{Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, January 3, 1886, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume B.} Two years later, though, the practice was evidently not changing for the better: “Germans I’m sorry to say have no idea of the observance of the Sabbath as we [Americans] have.”\footnote{Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, January 18, 1888, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume B.}

Alfred was sympathetic to Mary’s practice, but he had to attend Sunday events because he was a member of the Kaiser’s entourage. Getting excused from a court event, Mrs. Lee wrote to her cousin, was “no easy matter, as an invitation from royalty amounts to a command.”\footnote{Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, April 24, 1885, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume B.} As an officer and aide-de-camp to the monarch, Waldersee had to be present. He did voluntarily sacrifice for Mary a typical practice of gentlemen: smoking cigars. The day before the wedding in 1874, Waldersee smoked over a dozen. According to Mrs. Lee, Mary knew how much men enjoyed their cigars and would not have thought of requesting her husband to give them up, but he decided to because it was not a good habit and he thought it would please Mary. “You know
what inveterate smokers Germans are,” Mrs. Lee wrote to her cousin, “and will think this is something in the way of moral power.”

Mary not only refused to be social on Sunday, but also declined invitations to formal dinners if Alfred was unable to go with her. She broke this rule once, however, in May 1885. The Waldersees were invited to a dinner held by the recently appointed American envoy John Kasson, a lawyer, diplomat, and former Republican congressman from Iowa. Waldersee had a prior engagement with the Kaiser, and thus Mary had to send her regrets. Upset, Kasson sent her a note urging her to come. Mary could not turn down his personal plea, especially because he had become friends with the Waldersees. “As it was our Minister,” Mrs. Lee wrote, “we liked so much and were intimate with, she broke the rule and went.” They were saddened to learn that he was going to be replaced. “Minister Kasson speaks highly of his successor,” Mrs. Lee wrote, “but for us, it will not be the same.”

Of all the people Alfred von Waldersee formed relationships with throughout his life, the one with Mary was his most stable, enduring, and happiest. She would not become involved in high politics like her husband, but she would remain faithfully at his side until his death. The Waldersees complemented each other well and became respectable members of Berlin’s high society, but Mary chose not to sacrifice her deeply held religious beliefs for the expectations of upper class life.

29 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, December 12, 1874, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume A.
30 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, May 12, 1885, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume B.
In May 1885, the new American Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary, “Gentleman George” Pendleton of Ohio, and his family arrived in Berlin. The former Democratic congressman faced difficulties getting settled into his new home, from obtaining funds and legation offices to presenting his credentials to the Kaiser, who was too ill to receive him until June 21, 1885. He set to work reestablishing relations with Germany, which had become strained over disagreements about Germans with American citizenship evading conscription and control of the Samoan Islands in the South Pacific. Just like Waldersee, George Pendleton did not just establish himself in the political life of Berlin, but also in its social scene. In December 1885, the Pendletons threw a soirée, but the Waldersees had a prior engagement and were unable to attend. Although Mrs. Lee was also invited, she preferred not to take part in big gatherings.

In January 1886, the Waldersees attended the Pendletons’ first formal dinner. The Russian ambassador escorted Mary to her seat at the left of the American envoy, and Alfred, who mistrusted the Russians, led in the Russian ambassador’s wife, next to whom he sat. The British ambassador took his place to the right of Mrs. Pendleton, the daughter of Francis Scott Key, who had penned “The Star Spangled Banner” after observing the British bombardment of Fort

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32 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, January 3, 1886, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume B.
McHenry during the War of 1812.\textsuperscript{33} Given the individuals’ nationalities and their backgrounds, these seating arrangements are amusing, but this setting was the world of the elite. They had their diverse and often antagonistic national identities, yet they formed a cosmopolitan, pan-European upper class.

Military officers, diplomats, and government officials – of both aristocratic and bourgeois origins – did not simply maintain working relationships with one another, but social ones, too. Of course, sometimes these relationships were not always cordial. For example, in February 1887, during an Austro-Russian war scare, the Austrian and Russian ambassadors in Berlin both attended a dinner, during which each bickered about the war preparations of the other’s country.\textsuperscript{34} Political, diplomatic, and military history have traditionally overlooked or ignored the social world of the elite, but shedding light on how policymakers interacted provides a better understanding of political developments – and of Alfred von Waldersee. In Berlin, the political elite was the same as the social elite. Social events provided opportunities for members of the upper class to form opinions, exchange gossip, share information, and forge relationships. This section will survey the social life of Alfred and Mary von Waldersee and the Berlin elite – specifically dinners, soirées, Christmas festivities, hunting trips, tea gatherings, and birthday celebrations – but the importance of social activities will become more evident in the following sections that explore Waldersee’s relationships, actions, and beliefs.

Formal dinners were the core events for the elite and provided forums for political discussions. In May 1885, Mrs. Lee wrote, “dinners in abundance.” At this time, Alfred and

\textsuperscript{33} Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, January 3, 1886, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume B. Mary reported to her mother that the dinner was very elegant and attended by 18 other “distinguished people.” Mary and Mrs. Lee agreed that beginning the dinner at 7:30 pm was too late, and they should have observed the German custom of dining earlier.

\textsuperscript{34} Waldersee, February 2, 1887, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 312.
Mary attended banquets hosted by the Court Marshal of Crown Prince Frederick, Prince and Princess Wilhelm, the Duke and Duchess of Sagan, the former cabinet minister Rudolf von Delbrück, the French ambassador, the British ambassador, and the British military attaché. These high society feasts were often elaborate and elegant affairs. At the Kaiser’s palace in Berlin, menus for a Königliche Mittagstafel – Royal Luncheon – could include such delicacies as oysters, oyster pâté, lobsters, turbot, turtle soup, venison, veal, Alsatian chicken with truffles, chicken soup with champagne, pheasant, snipe with breadcrumbs, duck breast with morels, artichoke, asparagus, apricot pudding, pineapple pudding, and champagne jelly with strawberries.

Mrs. Lee was reading late on the night of May 7, 1885 when Alfred and Mary returned from a dinner given by the French ambassador. Waldersee asked her if she wanted to play backgammon, but Mrs. Lee declined, stating it was too late and time for bed. Before retiring for the night, however, they told her about the elegant dinner held in the beautiful salons of the French embassy. Of particular note, there were strawberries, and Mary was taken back by the large size of the asparagus served, telling her mother that one spear was enough. Among the thirty-two guests at the table were Sir Edward Malet, the British ambassador, and Colonel Swaine, the British military attaché, and their wives. Just two days before this dinner, the Walderees attended an evening reception at the British embassy, where Malet introduced his new wife to Berlin’s high society.
Alfred and Mary had also recently dined at the Swaines. The invitation to this dinner was unique because there was a representation of “Cleopatra’s needle,” which Mrs. Lee did not find surprising because “we thought [it] very appropriate for such a dinner when Egypt would be the subject most talked of.” Colonel Swaine had been the British military attaché in Berlin for a long time, but he was temporarily transferred to Sudan, where he took part in Lord Wolseley’s 1884 Nile Expedition to relieve the besieged forces under General Gordon in Khartoum. After becoming ill, he returned to his position and family in the German capital. Mrs. Lee learned after the French embassy dinner that Swaine intended to rejoin Lord Wolseley’s campaign, but it then appeared that the commander was about to return to London.38

Several years after their arrival in Berlin, the Waldersees began to host their own social events. There were two large dinners in the beginning of March 1887, one of which was attended by the Spanish ambassador, Count Benomar, who began his career as an attaché in Washington D.C. On March 16, the Waldersee’s held an annual soirée, which almost 300 people attended, to celebrate the birthday of Mary’s brother Dave.39 In their apartment they also hosted evenings for officers. In May, Moltke, Waldersee, and a group of officers played whist – an English card game – and stayed up past 11 o’clock that night. “A Russian lady was also here that interested me,” wrote Mrs. Lee, “speaking of war, she said ‘there will be no war.’”40 At a time when the threat of war with Russia was acute, who she was and the reason for her being in the Military Staff Building are interesting mysteries. Dinners were not only hosted for officers and friends, but also for family. Upon the announcement of his nephew’s engagement, Alfred

38 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, May 7, 1885, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume B
39 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, March 11, 1887, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume B. “Alfred had punch made as I like it more than wine and with thorough clicking glasses we drank to Dave’s health at our early dinner.”
40 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, May 9, 1887, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume B. “In fact the disturbing rumors have now ceased and I hope peace will last.”
“felt a dinner was necessary,” Mrs. Lee wrote. On December 26, 1887, eighteen other family members gathered that evening for a dinner Mrs. Lee described as “very handsome and very good.” “As it was such a family affair I was persuaded to join,” she wrote, “We were up very late and slept it out this morning.”

The Waldersee family had gathered at Herwarthstrasse 2 that December to celebrate Christmas. After they sang carols, to which Mary provided musical accompaniment on the harmonium, the doors were thrown open to a present-filled room, where a lit Christmas tree almost touched the ceiling. “Tables all around this salon were loaded with souvenirs for this one and that,” wrote Mrs. Lee. Waldersee received from Prince Wilhelm of Prussia a life-sized bust of the young prince, and from the Kaiser he received a small bronze statue of a Saracen fighting an infidel. For the previous Christmas, the monarch had given Waldersee another gift of bronze: a pillar topped with a revolving apparatus, the four sides of which were a clock, a barometer, a German thermometer, and an English one. Arrows crowned the device to show the direction of the wind. The gift impressed Mrs. Lee, who wrote, “I like this trait in Germans – as a rule they do not sacrifice utility to show.” As she wrote this statement, however, an exception suddenly occurred to her. Waldersee’s banker had given him a “pyramid of confectionary” that stood about five feet high. Soldiers, cannons, drums, bugles, flags, and sentry boxes made of sugar adorned this delicacy along with candied fruits and bonbons. “I could not but regret so much beauty must soon perish without real advantage to anyone, save the men who made it.”

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41 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, December 20, 1887, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume B.  
42 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, January 3, 1886 and December 20, 1887, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume B.  
43 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, December 20, 1887, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume B.  
44 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, December 20, 1887, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume B.
Mrs. Lee opined, “for the price must have been large.” There was another unique Christmas present for Waldersee in 1886. A friend sent him the head of a goat from the Himalayas. “It is curious,” noted Mrs. Lee, “I never looked at such horns.” It was placed amid the deer horns, boar heads, and elk heads that decorated the front stairway’s platform, an exhibition of “Alfred’s fondness for shooting.”45

In December 1887, when King Albert of Saxony invited Waldersee to go hunting with him, Mrs. Lee stated to her cousin, “Germans never tire of shooting.”46 Waldersee was an avid hunter, and by 1903 – a year before his death – he had a collection of more than 500 pairs of antlers.47 Traditionally an aristocratic sport, hunting provided a good challenge to proud German nobles and military men. Waldersee thought nothing of getting up early in the morning and enduring rain or snow while walking and standing for hours over several days. When he returned, he was always in good spirits despite the tough conditions.48 “It is wonderful how Germans cling to their love for the chase,” Mrs. Lee wrote in 1878.49

On July 1, 1876, the Waldersees vacationed at Norderney on Germany’s North Sea coast, a popular destination for tourists where Alfred liked to take his annual sea bath. Mrs. Lee recounted for her cousin the amusing story of Waldersee’s seal hunt:

Alfred went off with his gun, two dogs, and two fishermen in their little vessel to a distant sand bank to shoot, as they said, seals, but I think, seadogs. The plan was for the

45 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, January 3, 1886, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume B. In a corner of front stairway platform stood Mary’s present that year: a “man in armor.” In the other corner stood “a Japanese in quaint uniform.”
46 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, December 20, 1887, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume B.
48 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, November 25, 1875 and November 18, 1878, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume A.
49 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, November 18, 1878, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume A.
men to stretch themselves on the sand close to the water covered with the skins, so as to induce the unwary seal to suppose it was their own kind, and come up on the bank for relaxation, and receive a bullet instead. Alfred said they were very shy; he could not shoot them in the water, for they would sink. He thought, and so did the fishermen, that he was fortunate in securing two. He was absent nearly three days, and had to rough it; nothing in the little vessel to lie on at night but straw, and his bag for a pillow, and for food – to depend on what he took with him. I should have thought it downright hardship. But being a pleasure excursion quite altered the view.

Several glasses were turned to watch for the returning vessel, while we gazed from our windows; finally, to the pleasure of all, it was sighted, and ere long Alfred arrived, not as we had supposed ‘used up,’ but in the best of spirits declaring he had had a ‘grand time,’ and taking us at once to the beach to see his trophies. The skins, which are heavy like a dog, and mottled in color, were sent to Hanover as souvenir mats.  

In the 1870s, Waldersee hunted often in the company of the Kaiser and Prince Albrecht of Prussia, for whose army corps Waldersee was the Chief of Staff in Hanover. At one royal hunt in 1875, the Kaiser shot twenty-six wild boars; Waldersee had the second greatest number. Mrs. Lee marveled at how the monarch could stand for three to four hours at a time. By the 1880s, the monarch’s age had advanced even more. On November 3, 1883, Waldersee lamented that Wilhelm I was the only living member of the old generation of the Hohenzollerns and that his eighty-six year old sovereign could no longer go hunting as he used to. Amid a “swarm” of young princes, he realized that he was the oldest general. “A new time is coming!” he wrote in his journal.

Although Waldersee could no longer tread alongside the Kaiser in Germany’s forests, he could still sit with him. Waldersee was a frequent guest at the palace in Berlin for Their

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50 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, September 11, 1876, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume A. While there the whole family celebrated Independence Day on July 4 and swam in the North Sea. “I took twenty-one baths, and so did the others,” Mrs. Lee wrote, “Except when waiting for Josie [to arrive], we went under the waves every morning but Sunday – no baths are so exhilarating.”

51 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, November 25, 1875, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume A.

52 Alfred von Waldersee, November 3, 1883, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 231.
Majesties’ weekly tea gatherings. In his journal, he described one typical get-together on January 24, 1886. The small circle of guests gathered in a room on the ground floor of the palace and took their seats once the empress, who was wheelchair-bound in her later years, was first rolled into her position at the small, round table. After a short while, the Kaiser would enter and take his seat to the left of the Empress after greeting each guest individually. As a general rule, the attendees were men from the military, political, and academic professions, but female members of the royal family would occasionally join, too. First, tea was served, followed by mandarin oranges, a glass of wine, and then ice cream.

The conversation, often led by Empress Augusta, took place among all members of the table, but sometimes the emperor or empress engaged in a side conversation with the person sitting next to him or her. The subject would often be about politics. At one gathering in 1884, the conversation centered on the latest trouble the Center and Progressive parties were causing in the Reichstag. At another in 1887, the empress expressed her concern to Waldersee that relations with Austria were not on the right track. What was especially appealing about these tea gatherings, Waldersee noted, was that one could be with Their Majesties in a casual manner. “The old man is always the same,” he wrote of the Kaiser in 1886, “friendly, cheerful, participating in all conversations, and of a charming informality.” These social gatherings provided an informal setting where political issues were discussed, opinions were formed, information was shared, and friendships between the emperor and his entourage were fostered.

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53 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, December 10, 1886 and March 11, 1887, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume B.
54 Waldersee, January 24, 1886, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 271-272.
56 Waldersee, December 21, 1884, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 247.
57 Waldersee, May 4, 1887, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 324.
58 Waldersee, January 24, 1886, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 271-272.
Birthday celebrations provided the German elite with occasions to further socialize and cultivate relationships within Berlin society. For Kaiser Wilhelm, birthdays provided an opportunity not just to receive praise and honor, but also to offer them to his friends and servants. On March 22, 1885 – his eighty-eighth birthday – Wilhelm I promoted Waldersee to Adjutant General, the highest rank of the emperor’s personal assistants, along with Prince Anton Radziwill and Count Heinrich August von Lehndorff, Waldersee’s old friends who had served with him during the war as the Kaiser’s aides-de-camp. The three men visited His Majesty to congratulate him on his birthday and to thank him for their new honors. Shaking their hands, Wilhelm stated that the pleasure was his.\(^{59}\) Waldersee had been surprised and overjoyed by the promotion, which he saw as “new evidence of the gracious goodwill of the emperor.”\(^{60}\)

Although Chancellor Otto von Bismarck’s seventieth birthday was on April 1, 1885, civic groups decided to hold a parade for him on March 27 to avoid a conflict with Holy Week festivities. Count Otto von Stolberg-Wernigerode, former Vice-Chancellor and then current Minister of the Royal House, invited the Waldersees to watch the procession from the windows of his home, which stood near Bismarck’s Chancellery on the Wilhelmstrasse. On the day of the parade, Waldersee had to go to Potsdam to inspect artillery with Prince Wilhelm, and when he returned, the prince was with him. He had decided to dine with the Waldersees and then accompany them to Count Stolberg’s for the torchlight parade. The group was running late and, though the streets were supposed to be closed to traffic, they were able to make their way down the Wilhelmstrasse. They ascended to the top of the grand staircase, where Count Stolberg graciously received them and then escorted them through the main hall, where his other guests were beginning to crowd around the room’s three big windows. The host provided the

\(^{59}\) Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, April 24, 1885, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume B.

\(^{60}\) Waldersee, March 22, 1885, *Denkwürdigkeiten I*, 254.
Waldersees with a small, private room with a good view, where, as Mrs. Lee noted, they were able to talk freely. Prince Wilhelm and Waldersee had gone to the smoking room, but the latter returned to his wife and mother-in-law for the parade, which took over an hour to pass. Bands, student groups, clubs, and trade societies processed with horse-drawn floats and torches and cheered when they passed the Chancellery. “All torchlights I had previously seen paled in comparison,” Mrs. Lee wrote, “No citizen ever before had such an ovation.”61 Her son-in-law likewise opined, “Never have we experienced a similar ovation for someone who is not a sovereign.”62 The next day, Waldersee and a number of officers visited Bismarck to wish him well for his birthday. “The Germans are proud that he belongs to them,” wrote Mrs. Lee, “In way of mental power he is certainly a remarkable man.”63

On April 8, 1885, a little more than a week after Bismarck’s torchlight birthday parade, Alfred von Waldersee turned 53 years old and, unlike the Chancellor, had a humble celebration. That morning, he and Mary took a long carriage ride, and when they returned, a military band of about 35 musicians performed for an hour in the plant-filled conservatory of the Military Staff Building. Afterward, the couple had breakfast with the pastor who had confirmed Waldersee. For at least a week, gifts had been arriving at Herwarthstrasse 2 for the Quartermaster-General’s birthday, and Mary had kept them hidden from her husband in order to surprise him. She and Mrs. Lee arranged all the gifts on a table, for as the latter wrote, “there cannot be a German

61 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, April 24, 1885, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume B.  
62 Waldersee, April 1, 1885, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 255. Waldersee also commented on the political nature of the event: “The festival was a decidedly German and conservative demonstration, on whose peak stood the Emperor. How small appeared the adversaries, with whom everything that is called progressive and ultramontane is naturally associated.”  
63 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, April 24, 1885, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume B.
birthday without a ‘table.’” There were plenty of flowers, and Waldersee’s cake, standing about
a foot tall, was made to look like a beehive complete with bees and butterflies made of sugar.\footnote{Ann Lee to Mary Hoppin, April 24, 1885, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume B. Prince Wilhelm had given Waldersee a photograph of himself costumed before, and it was hung on a wall in Waldersee’s room. Prince and Princess Wilhelm had recently come from the Princess’s sister’s marriage, for which the guests appeared in costume. The Prince had taken the opportunity to have himself photographed dressed like Charles X.}

For Waldersee, birthdays provided a moment for reflection, thankfulness, and a new beginning. On April 8, 1886, he wrote in his journal:

How much gratitude I owe to the Almighty for everything that He grants me! I begin the new year with fresh health and with fresh courage for the work, which can be humbling to me. Before all things go my wishes to continue happily with my dear Mary and to not invest in pride and earthly things, but in the preparation for the next world.\footnote{Waldersee, April 8, 1886, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 288.}

In 1887, his birthday and Good Friday fell on the same day. He attended religious services that evening at Berlin’s Friedrichswerder Church with Mary and Mrs. Lee, and after arriving back at Herwarthstrasse 2, he wrote, “I cannot begin a new year of life in a better manner.”\footnote{Waldersee, April 8, 1887, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 323.}

Since arriving in Berlin in 1882, Alfred von Waldersee embraced the social life of Berlin’s high society and court. The exclusive world of the upper class provided the backdrop to Germany’s political, military, and diplomatic developments. At dinners, hunts, tea gatherings, and other social events, the men of the elite exchanged information and gossip, formed opinions, and forged and fostered relationships. In this environment, Waldersee combined the suaviter in modo with the fortiter in re, and continued his relationship with the man who dominated German politics: Otto von Bismarck.
Ultima Ratio

On December 3, 1886, Baron Walter von Loë, a Catholic Westphalian aristocrat and the commander of the 8th Army Corps in Koblenz, Germany, wrote the following letter to Count Alfred von Waldersee:

From all sides one says to me, “The Chancellor does not want war.” The situation appears, however, not to culminate in the question of whether he wants war or not because the time has past when the Chancellor set up the pieces on the European chessboard and directed the game. In today’s Europe, no man who has five good senses and a trace of humanity can wish for a war, which for an unforeseeable duration would ruin the prosperity of all people. For Germany and its leading statesman, the main interest at the current moment appears to me to be the European dilemma, which we have gotten into through the conquest of Alsace-Lorraine (1871) and the Peace of Berlin (Congress of Berlin, 1878), and which has cost us a great financial sacrifice. The Chancellor, who has rightly been preoccupied for years with the idea of the dilemma, has until now sought to get out of it through the calming of Russia, [but this has been a failure] because the intimacy between France and Russia is closer and more than ever Germanophobia and insolence in St. Petersburg are at their greatest . . .

Certainly one must . . . be ready and determined for the ultima ratio (the last resort; i.e. war), and whether the Chancellor is prevented from it through earlier agreements with St. Petersburg, that I do not know . . . You believe the Chancellor can be employed to create a political situation with a changed basis. That may not be so simple because first, his influence in Europe has declined simultaneously with the respect for Germany’s power, second, the political constellations become fixed primarily through the interests of individual countries. The European antagonism toward Russia’s penetration into the Balkans . . . is rooted simply in the interests of other countries to keep the Dardanelles open. Why the Chancellor has not been pleased about this basis for the ultima ratio is not visible to the uninitiated. From the military point of view, I can only agree with you, that at this time, in a completely favorable situation, we could bring about war on two fronts, and that otherwise the chances only become worse . . . What I . . . and many others see with me, is that until now the game of the Oriental policy (Spiel der Orientpolitik) has not run brilliantly, because it forms more than ever the quite bothersome end of the dilemma.67

Loë believed Europe was swiftly approaching a crisis, if not a war, and that even Bismarck could no longer control the situation he once mastered. After the defeat of France in the Franco-Prussian War in 1871, the new and powerful German Empire sat in the middle of Europe surrounded by the other great powers. To protect European peace and German security, Otto von Bismarck created a series of defense alliances with the overall goal of isolating France and preventing conflict on Germany’s eastern border. In 1873 he formed the Three Emperors’ League, in which the rulers of Russia, Austria-Hungary, and Germany promised to work together to resolve crises. Throughout the 1870s and 1880s, however, Russia became an unstable factor in Europe because St. Petersburg’s assertive foreign policy in the Balkans antagonized Vienna, threatening the maintenance of Bismarck’s diplomatic system. In 1879 Germany and Austria-Hungary signed the Dual Alliance, a defense agreement aimed toward Russia. If their eastern neighbor declared war on one of them, the other would come to its aid, but if either declared war on Russia, the other was not required to act. Italy joined Austria-Hungary and Germany in the Triple Alliance in 1882, creating a defensive agreement aimed toward France.

Under Bismarck’s diplomatic system, Waldersee, as the new Quartermaster-General of the General Staff in 1882, began preparing for a possible war. Until 1885, he would not question the Chancellor’s foreign policy skills, but from the end of 1885 through 1887, Waldersee would gradually come to see the Bismarckian system as unsustainable as events threatened the Chancellor’s carefully crafted alliances. He looked out on the European situation and believed that a great war was not only inevitable, but also an opportunity to create a better diplomatic situation for Germany. Although he originally maintained that Germany should wait and be prepared for the moment this war would erupt, from the end of 1886 through 1888, he believed the German Empire should actively seek to bring about a conflict. He thus became a proponent
of preventive war, arguing that at the soonest, most favorable opportunity, Germany should launch a war that would give the empire the advantage to be successful; otherwise, he insisted, if the opportunity and advantage were lost, Germany’s future chances of success in the next war would become worse as warfare increasingly industrialized.

After the Second World War, historians, in their denunciations of German militarism, have rightly criticized Waldersee for his advocacy of preventive war, but they do not attempt to understand why he felt so passionately about this matter. John Röhl states that his “obsession with war is unparalleled in German, if not world, history,” but he leaves Waldersee’s motivations unsettled:

Readers of [the] excerpts from his unexpurgated diaries must decide for themselves whether the Count’s desire for war – at home and abroad – can be considered a legitimate option available to the Reich’s policy-makers, or whether it needs to be classified as a form of paranoid, megalomaniac derangement. Some may perhaps be inclined to see Waldersee’s preventive war as a relatively bloodless clinical operation, and view such a ‘cabinet war’ as a legitimate continuation of policy by other means which even aimed at preventing ‘something worse.’ Others will wish to consider that even in the ‘limited’ Franco-Prussian war of 1870-1, some 40,000 German and 90,000 French soldiers lost their lives. They will recall that between 1801 and 1805 alone, 6 million soldiers died during Napoleon’s campaigns. They will say that an officer of the general staff must have known what even a civilian like Holstein foresaw, that in every future war, armies of millions would be mobilized thanks to the railways. Was a ‘limited’ war even conceivable under such circumstances? Waldersee himself repeatedly observed that the ‘preventive’ war which he urged Germany and Austria to wage against France and Russia would almost inevitably escalate into a ‘world conflagration.’

The question is answerable, but not in the terms that Röhl sets.

In the late nineteenth century, Waldersee saw preventive war as a tool of the state; it was the ultima ratio – the last resort – in a situation he deemed hopeless for the continued security of the German Empire. He viewed the European situation, as Loë did in his letter, as moving pieces on a chessboard; the policy in the Balkans was a game. Raison d’état ruled his thinking, but this

idea was common in the nineteenth century; in fact, it was the basis of Bismarck’s foreign policy of *Realpolitik*. Writing that Waldsee “was capable of expressing [his idea of preventive war] with a sang-froid which, even today, is disconcerting,” Gordon Craig quotes a sentence from one of the general’s letters in November 1887: “A good many men will be killed; however, as long as no one can prove to me that a man can die more than once, I am not inclined to regard death for the individual as a misfortune.”\(^{69}\) What Craig does not cite, however, is the preceding sentence: “The times are really serious; I have a firm confidence, however, that we will raise our flag through all storms and triumph over all enemies.”\(^{70}\) To Waldsee, the state was greater than the individual. In his letter to Waldsee above, Baron voe Loë wrote, “no man who has five good senses and a trace of humanity can wish for a war” because of the unpredictable devastation it would cause, but he also stated, “from the military point of view, I can only agree with you.”\(^{71}\)

As the Quartermaster-General, Waldsee’s duty was to prepare for war to defend the empire’s interests and existence.

Waldsee knew Russia was modernizing, especially through railroad construction, and becoming capable of fielding greater numbers of men. Defeating Russia or France in a war sooner rather than later, he believed, would allow Germany to dictate the peace and create a more sustainable balance of power in Europe. The preventive war he proposed, at least subconsciously, would be similar to the Wars of Unification – relatively quick and decisive.

Contrary to what Röhl insinuates, Waldsee would not have expected a war to be a “relatively

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\(^{70}\) Italics are my emphasis. Waldsee to General Consul Baron von Rechenberg, November 16, 1887, *Aus dem Briefwechsel*, 113.

bloodless clinical operation.” He had seen plenty of men killed in 1866 and 1870-71, including one of his own brothers. A war in the 1880s – and its casualty lists – would have most likely been similar to one in the 1870s than to one in the 1910s, after the increased industrialization of the 1890s-1900s.

In this section, I will argue that the development of Waldersee’s view on foreign affairs and his advocacy of preventive war were more complex and methodical than historians have assumed. They have traditionally been too quick to judge Waldersee’s belief in preventive war. Typically citing a select few journal entries, historians have not sought to understand more deeply the development of his views and his advocacy of war; they have been perfectly willing to accept the conventional image of a reckless and dangerous Prussian general. Isabel Hull, who states that Waldersee’s opinions “were a virtual parody of the Junker Weltanschauung,” writes:

Waldersee’s . . . anxiety to fight was so great that he was indifferent in his choice of enemies. He grasped at any opportunity to develop a small event into a casus belli (cause for war). In rapid succession he advocated preventive wars, now against France, now against Russia, against them both . . .

The development of Waldersee’s views and advocacy of war in the 1880s was more complex than Hull’s description.

Because Otto von Bismarck dominated Germany’s – and Europe’s – diplomacy, I will also highlight in this section Waldersee’s relationship to the Chancellor from 1882 to 1887. Since meeting during the Franco-Prussian War, the two men had a friendly relationship; Bismarck had even made Waldersee his special representative in Paris to obtain the French reparations after the war. In 1880, Mrs. Lee had spotted the Chancellor twice during a trip to the baths at Kissingen, and with a little exaggeration wrote to her cousin, “Had Alfred been with us

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72 Röhl, Young Wilhelm, 617.
it might have gone better, for the Prince and himself are the best of friends.” Increasingly throughout the 1880s, Waldersee’s vocal interest in foreign affairs and his advocacy of policies that contradicted Bismarck’s became an annoyance, if not a threat, to the Chancellor’s efforts to maintain his alliance system in Europe; however, their cordial relationship would not be broken over their differences over foreign affairs.

On January 6, 1882, Count Alfred von Waldersee arrived at the Military Staff Building in Berlin to assume his new post as Quartermaster-General, the Adlatus – or assistant – to the Chief of Staff, Field Marshal Helmuth von Moltke. The great strategist, who directed the successful military campaigns of the Wars of Unification, presented Waldersee to the department heads as their new supervisor. Afterward, the Adlatus roamed through the halls of the military complex, introducing himself to the officers in the various departments. That evening, he dined with Bismarck, who was “extraordinarily friendly and cordial.” Waldersee idolized the aging Moltke and took over many of his chief’s responsibilities. Within the first few months of

74 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, December 13, 1880, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume A.
75 Waldersee, January 6, 1882, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 218.
assuming his new position, Waldersee began having daily discussions with the Field Marshal about a possible war with Russia.\textsuperscript{76} He advocated urgent changes to their mobilization plans, especially by focusing attention on the eastern border because conditions in Russia, the “apparently weak and timid” Tsar Alexander III, and an uprising in Herzegovina were “quite alarming circumstances.”\textsuperscript{77}

As a military planner in the Industrial Age, Waldersee had to take into consideration developments in foreign affairs, a realm that Bismarck dominated. The two men maintained a very cordial relationship in the early 1880s and spoke to each other openly about Russia. In March, Waldersee had dinner with the Bismarck family, and afterward the two men conversed for about an hour and a half. They discussed the possibility of a war with Russia, but although Bismarck found conditions in Russia “alarming,” he did not believe there would be a war. Waldersee found the conversation particularly interesting and valuable as the Chancellor entertained his many questions. Upon the Quartermaster-General’s departure, Bismarck invited him to stop by more often even without an invitation.\textsuperscript{78} The appointment of Nicholas de Giers as Russian Foreign Minister had not convinced Waldersee that relations with Germany’s neighbor would improve.\textsuperscript{79} By late November, Giers, who looked to establish good relations with Russia’s western neighbor, had visited Bismarck, but Waldersee believed Germany still needed to be cautious.\textsuperscript{80} “Our relationship with Russia is outwardly reasonable, but actually very uneasy,” he wrote that month, “they assemble constantly, prepare for war, and in contrast we

\textsuperscript{76} Waldersee, March 15, 1882, \textit{Denkwürdigkeiten} I, 219.
\textsuperscript{77} Waldersee, March 1, 1882, \textit{Denkwürdigkeiten} I, 219.
\textsuperscript{78} Waldersee, March 1, 1882, \textit{Denkwürdigkeiten} I, 219.
\textsuperscript{79} Waldersee, April 20, 1882, \textit{Denkwürdigkeiten} I, 219.
\textsuperscript{80} Waldersee, November 26 to December 2, 1882, \textit{Denkwürdigkeiten} I, 222.
restrain ourselves most shyly.” In December, an article appeared in the prominent Kölnische Zeitung concerning Russian railroad construction and other preparations. A few days earlier, Bismarck had called on Waldersee. The Chancellor, who was suffering greatly from neuralgic pain, spoke soft at first, but then stronger as he discussed relations with Russia, and, as Waldersee wrote, “opened up such wide perspectives, that I dare not write them down.”

In his first year as Quartermaster-General, Waldersee’s focus on Germany’s eastern neighbor was nothing new, and his military concerns about Russia were not unfounded. In late April and early May of 1873, Waldersee had accompanied the newly crowned Kaiser Wilhelm I to St. Petersburg, where they attended concerts, balls, grand dinners, and parades. After returning to Germany, he recorded his impression of Russia in his journal:

‘Russia’ means another world. One can, for example, orient oneself in French conditions much faster and more easily feel at home than there. The first impression must be magnificent for anyone. Russia has 60 million inhabitants; it has produced some competent rulers, ministers, and generals and pursued high goals . . . Its leaders . . . see in tsardom the future master of Europe. The thought can certainly be very tempting. What was once the main obstacle – the vastness of territory – gradually becomes eliminated through a very thought-out railroad system, of which hardly half has been tackled, but its completion certainly is being carried out. The allied armies would have surely been unable to undertake the [1854] campaign in Crimea with the Russian railroad network that exists today. Now, it allows already great armies to quickly gather at our [border] and the Austrian border, as well as at the Black Sea. When the railroad network is finished, universal military service is implemented, and the shorter service term of a few years is in force, the numerical superiority must consequently make itself effective.

In the nineteenth century, the railroads had become a useful instrument in warfare because it allowed a state to rush its troops to a location and decide the place of battle. The Prussian railroad had been integral to achieving success during the Wars of Unification, and during the

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81 Waldersee, November 13 to 19, 1882, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 222.
82 Waldersee, December 15, 1882, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 223.
83 Waldersee, December 11, 1882, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 223.
84 Programme du Séjour de Sa Majesté Impériale l’Empereur d’Allemagne Roi de Prusse à St. Pétersbourg en 1873, GStA, Nachlass Waldersee, A. II Nr. 4.
85 Waldersee, May 13, 1873, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 169.
Crimean War, Russia’s lack of a sufficient railroad system had allowed French and British troops to amass more quickly on the Crimean Peninsula. With Russia’s vast numbers of potential recruits and its developing railroad system, Waldersee was understandably concerned, especially as the Russian Empire was asserting itself in southeastern Europe. It had defeated the Ottoman Empire in March 1878 and had given independence to a large Bulgarian state, which the other European powers feared would be a Russian satellite. Bismarck restored peace to Europe at the Congress of Berlin in the summer of 1878, but Waldersee became worried. He realized Austria’s occupation of Bosnia, allowed by the Congress of Berlin, had created a permanent problem in its relationship with Russia, and increasing anti-German sentiments in Russia, especially on the pages of its newspapers, also troubled him.\(^8^6\)

Throughout the 1870s and 1880s, German elites grew increasingly concerned about the possibility of military conflict with both France and Russia. As an ardent monarchist, Waldersee feared a successful revolution of anti-monarchist radicals in Russia on its eastern border, especially with the monarch-less Republic of France on the western border.\(^8^7\) During a trip to Paris in September 1879, he noted that there were signs that St. Petersburg was reaching out for an alliance with Paris.\(^8^8\) He was relieved, however, to read in the *Journal des débats* – which had a connection to the French Foreign Minister – an article advocating against an alliance with Russia. At a dinner, he noted the presence of a Russian Adjutant General, whose “physiognomy is unpleasant” and behavior was “fairly uncouth.”\(^8^9\)

When he arrived in Berlin in 1882, Waldersee brought his anxieties with him, as shown above, and he would continue to concern himself with foreign affairs. “In these times, politics

\(^8^6\) Waldersee, August 28 and September 15, 1879, *Denkwürdigkeiten* I, 195.
\(^8^7\) Waldersee, March 31, 1879, *Denkwürdigkeiten* I, 183.
\(^8^8\) Waldersee, September 18, 1879, *Denkwürdigkeiten* I, 196.
have occupied me a great deal,” he wrote in September 1883, “according to my firm convictions, the Russians prepare for war. I have reported this a year ago already; now my opinion is further confirmed.”\(^9^0\) Several days earlier, he had had a conversation with the Russian military plenipotentiary, Prince Dolgoruki, and wrote a lengthy summary of it for Bismarck. Waldersee spoke frankly, saying that German troop movements in the east were only “faint counter measures” compared to the considerable accumulation of Russian troops. “No sensible man could believe that we would have the inclination to go to war with Russia,” he stated, “No one in Germany could have interest in such a war, and the most hot-tempered soldiers would also not have the slightest desire for it.”\(^9^1\) Despite Dolgoruki’s attempt to refute Waldersee, the Quartermaster-General listed the intelligence he had received:

I named the accumulation of cavalry groups along our border, the full covering of ordnance and several munitions wagons of the corresponding horse-drawn batteries, the higher peacetime budget of all standing troops in Poland, the noticeably high budget of the standing reserve battalions there, finally most recently the advance of the 41\(^{st}\) Division from the Caucasus [westward] to Minsk and the 16. [Division] from Minsk to Bialystock [near the East Prussian border], and the strong increase of cavalry through the increase in the budgets of the regiments of four to six squadrons, which both measures appear to me to be significant. I then came to the construction of the railroads and the laying of a second track on the existing lines, that do not have a proven commercial need and whose purpose could alone be the quicker concentration of great masses of troops to our [border] and the Austrian [border]. Furthermore I spoke of the extensive construction of fortifications in Poland and Lithuania, of which, just like the railroads, is the unusual haste in production most conspicuous, and touched finally the secrecy with which all military measures were carried.\(^9^2\)

Although Dolgoruki wanted peace, the overall impression Waldersee gained from the conversation was that the Russian plenipotentiary was worried that the two countries were heading toward war.\(^9^3\) In October, Waldersee felt that Germany was losing its advantage by not

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\(^9^0\) Waldersee, September 30, 1883, *Denkwürdigkeiten* I, 227.
challenging Russian armaments and troop build-up in Poland, and he became worried when he heard reports that Denmark might be obliged to ally with Russia in case of war, thus threatening his already crafted plans.  

At the beginning of November 1883, after visiting the Foreign Office, he noted that Bismarck did not believe war to be imminent. Waldersee stopped by again about two weeks later, and discussed the possibility of allying with the Ottoman Empire should they reorganize their army, but the Chancellor “who operates extraordinarily carefully” did not want to make France and Russia suspicious. On November 20, the Russian Minister of War Peter Wannowski, who was in the process of returning to Russia from western Germany, was invited to the palace to have dinner with the Kaiser. Waldersee was also there and took the opportunity to have a long discussion with Wannowski, who, he later wrote, “gave, like all Russian officials, the most peaceful assurances and denied all further troop movements.” This encounter must have only furthered his distrust, and Waldersee wrote the next day, that the Russians “are apparently trying hard to make their love of peace as convincing as possible.”

Russo-German relations appeared to Waldersee to be much better in 1884. In the beginning of the year, Herbert Bismarck, the Chancellor’s son, visited the Quartermaster-General before heading to St. Petersburg to become the Secretary of the German embassy there and convinced him that his father wanted to establish a good relationship with Russia. Thanks to

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94 Waldersee, October 14 and 23, 1883, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 230.
95 Waldersee, November 2, 1883, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 230.
96 Waldersee, November 18, 1883, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 232.
97 Waldersee, November 20, 1883, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 232. A Spanish general was also invited. He had brought a letter from his king about the German Crown Prince’s visit to Spain.
98 Waldersee, November 21, 1883, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 233.
99 Waldersee, January 12, 1884, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 234. Waldersee notes that by letting Russia have Constantinople, Germany would no longer have a “bothersome (unbequeme) neighbor,” and not have to worry about a war on two fronts.
Herbert, Waldersee noted a month later, relations with Russia were improving greatly. In late February, he wrote that their friendship was now evident to the world when Grand Duke Michael of Russia arrived in Berlin with his entourage – which included Count Joseph Gurko, the Governor-General of Poland, and General Pavel Shuvalov – to celebrate the seventieth anniversary of Kaiser Wilhelm’s receiving the Russian Order of St. George in 1814 – when he was seventeen years old – for his service during the Napoleonic Wars. In May 1884, Waldersee accompanied Prince Wilhelm of Hohenzollern, the Kaiser’s grandson, on a trip to Russia to attend the coming-of-age ceremony for the future Nicholas II. The splendor of the Russian court greatly impressed the Quartermaster-General, who then believed Germany should consider getting closer to Russia than Austria. In June, he wrote in his journal that in St. Petersburg everything went so well that he did not seriously engage anyone over the Russian troop buildups on the border for fear that it would disturb the developing good mood. He even thought it would be worth making clear to Austria how much it should be thankful for Germany and that the German government could demand various things of Vienna. Later that month, Waldersee dined at Bismarck’s, where the Chancellor was “unusually chipper,” and told him that he “believed peace with Russia was secured for years to come.”

On October 10, 1884, Waldersee reflected on the “strange changes” Germany’s foreign policy had taken during the summer. Relations had improved greatly among the three eastern empires, and Bismarck was increasingly isolating France and England, who were at odds with

100 Waldersee, February 9, 1884, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 234. “One goes so far as to offer us again a part of Poland. We have, however, expressed our thanks, with which I agree. Either Russia must cede so much that an independent Poland is possible, or they keep everything.”
101 Waldersee, February 28, 1884, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 235.
102 Waldersee, May 28, 1884, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 239.
103 Waldersee, June 10, 1884, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 242.
104 Waldersee, June 20 to 31, 1884, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 242.
each other over colonial matters. Almost exactly a year later, Waldersee’s view of Bismarck and his foreign policy would change drastically. Until then, however, European eyes turned toward two crises in Sudan and Afghanistan. Although outside of Europe, these conflicts had an impact on the policymakers of Berlin and were of particular interest to Waldersee.

In Africa, the Mahdi tribe besieged British forces under the command of General Charles Gordon in Khartoum in April 1884, but a relief force under General Garnet Wolseley did not arrive until shortly after the town had fallen on the morning of January 26, 1885. That evening in Berlin, Alfred and Mary von Waldersee had dinner with the Crown Prince, his wife, and their three youngest daughters. Crown Princess Victoria, who Waldersee neither trusted nor liked, asked him many questions concerning care for the wounded in war and expressed concern about the expedition to Khartoum. In February, at a ball at the palace in Berlin, she engaged him in a conversation, speaking especially about the situation in Sudan. He told her that he believed nothing could be done before autumn, and, very saddened, she confirmed the recent news that General Gordon had been killed. Several days before, Waldersee had worried about the potentially harmful influence the Crown Princess could exert in the future. “How should the Chancellor propel foreign policy when the future empress . . . is English at heart?” Waldersee wrote, “Who should the Crown Prince, on the other hand name as Chancellor? He has no one suitable!” Waldersee was still a full supporter of Bismarck’s foreign policy.

In Asia, on the morning of March 30, 1885, Russian troops attacked an Afghan force that had refused to withdraw from its position. Later that day, Waldersee wrote, “the quiet and well-

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105 Waldersee, October 10, 1884, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 244.
106 Waldersee, January 26, 1885, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 250. “She gave me finally a questionnaire, which must anyhow result in further conversations. Whether she has other intentions, I don’t know.”
107 Waldersee, February 17, 1885, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 252.
108 Waldersee, February 11, 1885, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 251.
meaning people in Russia want to avoid a war with England.”

Despite his past concerns about Germany’s eastern neighbor, Waldersee now became more pro-Russia and anti-Britain. He believed that policymakers in London, especially Prime Minister Gladstone, were playing a dangerous game and risked not only losing their status as a great colonial power, but also internal collapse. Poor British foreign policy had, Waldersee wrote, left the island nation largely isolated, and he hoped that Germany would not find itself in a war for British interests.

On April 23, Waldersee wrote that, although flattered, he could not answer the many questions he received about how the war would proceed and what role Afghanistan would play. That evening, he attended a soirée held by Their Majesties, sat at the table of Crown Princess Victoria, and spoke at length with her. She was very anxious, Waldersee noted, and complained about “the unfaithfulness of the Russians.” Gladstone, she claimed, was “the most harmless man in the world.” Victoria was particularly saddened that the Duchess of Edinburgh, her Russian-born sister-in-law, flaunted her Russian sympathies. In early May, Waldersee’s conversations with the British military attaché, Colonel Swaine, and the Russian plenipotentiary, Prince Dolgoruki, confirmed his opinion that war was coming, a sign “of the wickedness (Schlechtigkeit) of English politics, which in every way is the most reprehensible.” Three days later, he paid a visit to the Foreign Office, where, he wrote afterward, “one believes in peace there, but I cannot still go along with that.”

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110 Waldersee, April 26, 1885, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 256-257.
111 Waldersee, April 19, 1885, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 255-256.
112 Waldersee, April 23, 1885, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 256.
113 Waldersee, May 2, 1885, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 258.
114 Waldersee, May 5, 1885, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 258-59.
On May 7, he had a long conversation with Herbert Bismarck, who told him that Russia was beginning to disarm, an act that convinced Waldersee that peace was at hand.\footnote{Waldersee, May 7, 1885, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 259.} That evening, Alfred and Mary returned to Herwarthstrasse 2 after attending a dinner at the French embassy. They told Mrs. Lee all about the grand banquet, but Waldersee’s mother-in-law was most delighted to hear that there would be no war. She had shared her son-in-law’s pessimistic view and had hoped that God would prevent a war between Britain and Russia because “it would be the spark in the tinder box to set all Europe afire.”\footnote{Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, May 7, 1885, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume B.} On May 10, Waldersee noted that the signs of peace were growing, and he had a long conversation with Dolgoruki, who said Russia had made a mistake letting itself be brought to make any concessions. The Russian prince stated furthermore that his country would not completely disarm and would continue at an even faster pace to build a railroad from Ashgabat to Merv in present-day Turkmenistan, a transport route directed toward India.\footnote{Waldersee, May 10, 1885, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 259.}

This brief episode in the history of diplomacy and imperialism was also a revealing one in the development of Waldersee’s foreign views. Given the better relationship between Germany and Russia at that time, he was sympathetic toward St. Petersburg, but he was more than ever hostile toward policymakers in London. Waldersee’s concern about British foreign policy, and especially about Britain pushing Germany to war, was fueled by his distrust of the Crown Princess, who, he believed, would put British over German interests when she would become queen. When Bismarck and the Crown Princess developed a better relationship during the summer of 1885, Waldersee predicted that the British government would work its influence...
on this alliance.\textsuperscript{118} This episode shows, more importantly, how volatile peace was in Europe and how Waldersee developed his opinions and gained his information by speaking with various people. “Certainly very skilled,” Waldersee wrote about Bismarck, “the Chancellor has known to behave himself so that no one can accuse him of warmongering. Whether one will thank us for it is another question.”\textsuperscript{119} Waldersee continued to support Bismarck, but the next international crisis occurred on the European continent and shook the Quartermaster-General’s faith in the abilities of the Iron Chancellor.

On September 6, 1885, the Principality of Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia – a semi-autonomous Ottoman province of ethnic Bulgarians created by the Congress of Berlin in 1878 – declared that they were uniting into a single entity. On October 10, Waldersee noted that the unification surprised the Great Powers and threatened to spark another European crisis, especially because it endangered the relationship between Russia and Austria. “Today, relations still remain completely unclear,” he wrote in his journal, “Bismarck wants to maintain European peace under all conditions, and I believe therefore, that he will also not become seriously disturbed (gestört).”\textsuperscript{120} The next day, he opined, “the whole world looks again to Germany and also has the confidence that the right thing will happen here.”\textsuperscript{121} Several days later, however, Waldersee jotted in his journal some thoughts he had never expressed before:

I return again always to the conviction that Europe finds itself in no normal condition, and that our position above all is very endangered. Until now, it was achieved through Bismarck’s skillfulness, always concluding the right alliances for us at the right time, but with much trouble. Should this always be possible? I see a way out for us only in a great war, in which we actually permanently paralyze an opponent, France or Russia – but how should one expect such a thing from an 88 year-old Kaiser and 70 year-old Chancellor. Yet it must also offer itself at a convenient moment. 1873 or 1874 was the right moment

\textsuperscript{118} Waldersee, September 8, 1885, \textit{Denkwürdigkeiten} I, 261.
\textsuperscript{119} Waldersee, May 7, 1885, \textit{Denkwürdigkeiten} I, 259.
\textsuperscript{120} Waldersee, October 10, 1885, \textit{Denkwürdigkeiten} I, 261.
\textsuperscript{121} Waldersee, October 11, 1885, \textit{Denkwürdigkeiten} I, 261.
for the settlement of accounts with France, when we saw that the country recovered and had thoughts of revenge, and just as in the case of Russia toward the end of the Russian-Turkish War [1877-1878], when we could first let England loose on Russia. If not through a great war, we come then out of the dilemma only with internal commotions, possibly upheavals in France or Russia. The collapse of Austria, which absolutely approaches, can also cause an impetus for great changes. We have far too many enemies: the French, Slavs, above all the Catholics, and then the entire little rabble of the dispossessed, with their supporters.\textsuperscript{122}

In this entry, Waldersee expresses his frustration with the seemingly hopeless diplomatic situation in Europe and Bismarck’s apparent inability to maintain peace and Germany’s security. As he states, the only way to break the encirclement is, in a “great war,” to defeat either France in the west or Russia in the east to such a degree that neither could pose a future threat to Germany. This is the first time Waldersee expressed the idea of war as a solution for the diplomatic predicament, but this was not a call for preventive war. The above quote also reveals his other thoughts about freeing Germany from its entanglements, from domestic problems in France and Russia – which he had observed developing for years – to Austria’s implosion, which could allow new alignments in foreign policy.\textsuperscript{123}

Despite his view of war as a diplomatic solution on October 15, 1885, Waldersee still believed that there could be a peaceful way to resolve Germany’s troubles. For the next month, there was still uncertainty over what would happen in the Balkans, and Waldersee continued to speculate and ponder different scenarios.\textsuperscript{124} The longer the crisis was unresolved, he believed, the greater the chance Russia and Austria’s relationship could deteriorate. On November 4, Waldersee spoke to Bismarck:

\textsuperscript{122} Waldersee, October 15, 1885, \textit{Denkwürdigkeiten}, 263. Röhl, \textit{Young Wilhelm}, 605. For the last part of this quote, I used the translation of Röhl’s \textit{Young Wilhelm}. In the \textit{Denkwürdigkeiten}, it reads, “und dann all das kleine [. . .] von Depossedierten mit Anhang.” Röhl, who has looked at Waldersee’s original journals, says nothing about the ellipsis.\textsuperscript{123} For example in Russia, May 13, 1873, \textit{Denkwürdigkeiten}, 169 and in France, November 3, 1882, \textit{Denkwürdigkeiten}, 222.\textsuperscript{124} Waldersee, October 17, 1885, \textit{Denkwürdigkeiten}, 264.
I was at the Foreign Office for a long time and made it understood that I did not like the prolongation of the matter, and I maintained great complications to be unavoidable. One did not want, however, to grant that I was right. I also said it was time to bring the great Eastern Question to a decision, however, [this] provoked general dismay . . . the moment is quite favorable [when] the other Europe (i.e. Britain and France) cannot achieve much against the three united imperial powers.  

On November 14, Serbia, with Austria’s tacit support, declared war on Bulgaria. The next day, Waldsee was concerned about what could transpire:

In the matter, very skilled people play along, of those, however, one knows nothing, and ours the least. Bismarck should be very annoyed with how well I can think because his last work, the Three Emperor’s League, can easily disintegrate. I have objected nothing against it, but when the rift comes, we must only take our precautions.

The crisis in the Balkans continued without any agreeable solution in sight through November and into December.

“By 1886 at the latest,” writes John Röhl, “Bismarck’s foreign policy system was in a state of permanent crisis.” Throughout 1886, while the revanchists were increasingly agitating in France against Germany, Bismarck was attempting to keep Austria and Russia from going to war over developments in Eastern Europe. In the aftermath of the Bulgarian unification crisis of 1885, the Russians, and especially Tsar Alexander III, were highly dissatisfied with Prince Alexander of Battenberg, whom they had originally selected to rule the Bulgarian state to which they had given independence. With his liberal tendencies, Prince Alexander eventually showed that he had no desire to be a puppet of St. Petersburg. Bismarck liked having the Battenberg prince, a favorite of Queen Victoria of Great Britain, on the throne because it provided a bone of

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125 Waldsee, November 4, 1885, Denkwürdigkeiten, 266. “Now, with much trouble, has a conference in Constantinople been brought together. The circumstances are most confusing. In the Treaty of San Stefano (1878), Russia demanded a Greater Bulgaria, which England energetically opposed. Now England wants a Greater Bulgaria, whereas Russia wants to leave the state, as it did not want to have it then!”

126 Waldsee, November 15, 1885, Denkwürdigkeiten, 267.

127 Röhl, Young Wilhelm, 599.
contention between Russia and Britain. The Chancellor succeeded in getting the Kaiser to reject
the proposed marriage between Prince Alexander and Princess Victoria of Hohenzollern because,
as Otto Pflanze writes, it “threatened to deprive Germany of its freedom of choice between
Russia and England and thereby endanger his whole strategy of foreign policy.”128 On August
20, 1886, a Russian-backed coup forced Prince Alexander to abdicate. Even though a
countercoup succeeded a few days later in which the Battenberg prince was reinstated, he
abdicated the Bulgarian throne again on September 7, 1886, recognizing that Russian opposition
to him would make his rule impossible. After his departure, Russia was not able to reassert its
dominance over Bulgaria, but the region still remained unstable, threatening the Three Emperor’s
League.129

At the beginning of January 1886, Waldersee wrote, “in international politics there is still
always a certain uncertainty because of the Balkan affairs.” After reflecting on and informing
himself about the situation, his solution for the Eastern Question was “to bring Turkey to Asia
and Russia and Austria to a peaceful agreement” while “such a solution is still possible.” In his
journal, he proposed letting Russia occupy Constantinople and the Dardanelles, even allowing
them to have a toehold on Asia Minor, but he did not state how this idea would become a reality.
He knew this solution would make Britain, France, and the Ottoman Empire permanent enemies
of Russia, but the new dynamics would consequently strengthen the Three Emperor’s League
and eliminate the Russian threat to Germany’s eastern border.130 At the end of the month, he

128 Otto Pflanze, Bismarck and the Development of Germany: The Period of Fortification, 1880-
129 George Kennan, The Decline of Bismarck’s European Order: Franco-Russian Relations,
Russian diplomacy,” writes Kennan, “one searches in vain for any failure more spectacular, and
more searing to the Russian sense of prestige, than this.” (202)
130 Waldersee, January 4, 1886, Denkwürdigkeiten, 270.
realized his idea was no longer possible because it became apparent to him that neither Russia nor Austria wanted to solve the Eastern Question. He noted that Russia felt slighted by Germany, but more importantly, Waldersee recognized that he was wrong in believing that Russia’s desire to occupy Constantinople would outweigh “other considerations.”\(^{131}\) By March, he realized that the opportunity to solve the Eastern Question – in order to prevent a Franco-Russian alliance – had passed.\(^{132}\)

In France, General Georges Boulanger became the Minister of War at the beginning of 1886. Known as *Général Revanche* (General Revenge), the “flamboyant Boulanger . . . and his conduct,” writes George Kennan, “had left no doubt in anyone’s mind of the depth of his commitment to both the general cause of *revanche* and to the idea of a Franco-Russian alliance.”\(^{133}\) While the German military attaché in Paris sent alarmist reports to Berlin about the French War Minister, the German ambassador reassured the Wilhelmstrasse that the French government would not allow the country to go to war with Germany.\(^{134}\) Waldersee did not believe Boulanger was a threat: “He is considered capable of the most ambitious plans, [but] I do not believe he is thinking of opting for *Revanche* in the immediate future.”\(^{135}\) Waldersee was convinced that, though France was clearly opposed to Germany, the former would not attack the latter outright because the French had “not the courage” to “strike first.”\(^{136}\) As John Röhl states,

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\(^{133}\) Kennan, *The Decline of Bismarck’s European Order*, 246.
\(^{134}\) Kennan, *The Decline of Bismarck’s European Order*, 246.
\(^{135}\) Waldersee, journal entries for May 25 and June 23, 1886, not in Meisner’s *Denkwürdigkeiten*; quoted in John Röhl, *Young Wilhelm*, 605-606. Kennan refers to Waldersee on this point with a bit of surprise, calling him the “hot-headed militarist that he was.” *The Decline of Bismarck’s European Order*, 246. Waldersee wrote that Boulanger was “undoubtedly a very enterprising, ruthless, and extremely ambitious man.” Waldersee, March 15, 1886, *Denkwürdigkeiten* I, 281.
\(^{136}\) Waldersee, journal entry for March 10, 1886, missing in Meisner’s *Denkwürdigkeiten*; quoted in Röhl, *Young Wilhelm*, 605.
Waldersee considered the threat of war with France “to be chronic rather than acute.” On October 27, 1886 the Quartermaster-General wrote:

I am of the unshakable conviction that France is making ongoing preparations for war, although without having a particular time for attack in mind. They intend to be ready so that they can immediately take advantage of any opportunity that arises, e.g. complications in the oriental question, whereby we might be at odds with Russia. They will not begin on their own, but would not hesitate to do so if Russia formed an alliance with them.

The day before, he had written that the “point of uncertainty” was Russia’s “unpredictable stance.” Two weeks before, he had written, “the decision is put on the Neva.”

In 1886, Waldersee was as usual concerned with Russia, Germany’s neighbor of questionable reliability. In March, he lamented that Russia was still strongly suspicious of Germany and, always concerned with the Russians’ mobilization capabilities, complained that “[their] preparations for war, and especially the expansion of the railways system for military purposes, have gone on unabated for years.” The thought of Germany’s unpredictable eastern neighbor allying with its antagonistic western neighbor had been lingering for years, but in 1886, it appeared to Waldersee to have the potential to become a reality. For the German Quartermaster-General, the specter of a partnership was alarming. Not only was the number of Russian troops on the western border three-fourths the size of the German army, but the

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137 Röhl, Young Wilhelm, 606.
138 Waldersee, October 27, 1886, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 299; quoted in Röhl, Young Wilhelm, 606.
139 Waldersee, journal entry for October 26, 1886; not in Meisner’s Denkwürdigkeiten, quoted in Röhl, Young Wilhelm, 609.
140 Waldersee, October 13, 1886, Denkwürdigkeiten, 299.
141 Röhl, Young Wilhelm, 606. Waldersee, March 6, 1886, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 276-77.
combined numbers of troops from France and Russia would outnumber those of Germany and Austria.  

Although ministers and government officials were important for diplomacy, Waldersee believed in the ultimate decision-making powers and influence of monarchs. When Prince Wilhelm of Prussia returned from a trip to Brest-Litovsk in September 1886, he told Waldersee that he considered Tsar Alexander III would be “a reliable man for us, as long as we make no difficulties for him in the Orient.” Waldersee wanted to believe him, but noted there were far too many people in Russia who were working for an alliance with France. “Throughout the world the idea is now widely accepted that at present our sole guarantor of peace is the person of our Kaiser,” wrote Waldersee, “when he dies, Tsar Alexander will feel less inhibited, specifically because the Crown Prince’s English sympathies are known to him.” On November 1, he wrote the following about the Tsar while assessing the European situation:

The sole factor to our credit is Tsar Alexander. By no means does he love us, but he is lazy, hates all agitation, and also has a resolute sense of justice, which tells him there is actually no sense in making war. Besides, he also has a distinct admiration for our Kaiser.

Therefore, he was surprised and dismayed when he learned on December 1 that the Tsar had had “the idiotic cheek . . . to make the French an offer of an alliance!”

Although the French government did not accept Russia’s offer of an alliance, the attempt – long-feared by Germany – showed Waldersee that Bismarck’s foreign policy of isolating

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142 Kennan, *The Decline of Bismarck’s European Order*, 247. Kennan cites the work of Michael Howard who used twelve different sources to come up with the following number. Standing ground forces in 1886: Germany & Austria – 720,000; France and Russia – 1,374,000. Potential wartime strength (including reserves): Germany & Austria – 4,300,000; France & Russia – 5,468,000.


144 Waldersee, November 1, 1886, *Denkwürdigkeiten* I, 301.

145 Röhl, *Young Wilhelm*, 611-612. Röhl does not cite this statement in his footnotes and there is no entry for December 1, 1886 in Meisner’s *Denkwürdigkeiten*. 
France and keeping Russia at bay was unsustainable. In spring 1886, he had noted that along with the “formidable figure of the Kaiser, who is revered like virtually no other sovereign before him” and Moltke’s “renowned skills in the field,” Bismarck was the last leg of the stool holding up world peace with his “superior statesmanship and energy, admired by everyone, and to which everyone bows, although not without opposition.”\(^{146}\) On October 15, 1885, Waldersee had first questioned Bismarck’s foreign policy, but on October 29, 1886, he wrote in his journal that he believed the aging Chancellor “has become uncertain in his policy . . . [and] begins to become concerned his work could collapse . . . I cannot share his concerns and have confidence in the future; certainly there will be difficult times and hard struggles.”\(^{147}\)

In autumn 1886, Waldersee began to lose his confidence in Bismarck and furthered his belief that war was the only way our of Germany’s diplomatic predicament. On October 15, 1885, he had first expressed his belief in an inevitable great war being fought at an opportune moment, but Waldersee did not explicitly advocate that Germany should launch the conflict. In May 1886, he believed that if the Ottomans and the Greeks went to war, a European war would be “hardly avoidable,” noting that Germany would have a better chance at being victorious the sooner the war comes.\(^{148}\) On November 1, 1886, however, Waldersee’s view on this future war shifted from being reactive to proactive:

I say we have the duty to take advantage of every favorable opportunity that presents itself and bring about a war with France. Militarily speaking, we are definitely at an advantage thanks to the new repeating rifle, and in other ways too. But if we do not make use of such opportunities, then politics has to provide us with better ones, although I see no prospect of this.\(^{149}\)


\(^{147}\) Waldersee, October 29, 1886, *Denkwürdigkeiten* I, 300.

\(^{148}\) Waldersee, May 1, 1886, *Denkwürdigkeiten* I, 291. Röhl notes that this entry was actually written on May 8 and printed incorrectly. Röhl, *Young Wilhelm*, 921, footnote 3.

\(^{149}\) Röhl, *Young Wilhelm*, 610-611. Waldersee, November 1, 1886, *Denkwürdigkeiten* I, 301. Röhl cites this, however, as from December 13.
This statement was preceded and caused by his view of Bismarck and the Chancellor’s foreign policy:

[It] becomes clearer to me that the Chancellor seems concerned about the future and actually does not know how it will come out. We show Russia the greatest consideration, and lately the Chancellor has repeatedly stressed that we will have nothing to fear from them for years to come . . . instead we are still, as for the past 15 years, trying in vain to bring about a reconciliation with them in the course of time. There can no longer be doubt in anyone’s mind that this has been unsuccessful, although it has gone hand in hand with the greatest favors and even support for their policies on our part. The Chancellor does not want a war under any circumstances, he fears he will risk his own reputation and hopes to postpone the matter for as long as he is in office. For the future, and in particular for his successor, that is not very nice.\footnote{Röhl, \textit{Young Wilhelm}, 610-611. Waldersee, November 1, 1886, \textit{Denkwürdigkeiten I}, 301. Röhl cites this, however, as from December 13.}

John Röhl calls this entry a typical one, but when looking at Waldersee’s statements about war and foreign policy in the 1880s, November 1, 1886 is the first time he states in his journal that he no longer has faith in Bismarck and that Germany should take a proactive approach to bringing about the inevitable European war.\footnote{Röhl, \textit{Young Wilhelm}, 610.} More than two weeks later, Waldersee stated that Germany could no longer trust Russia and should promote its independence and assert its superiority:

\begin{quote}
We are certainly strong enough to stand on our own two feet. I wish we would now state quite unequivocally that we do not fear them, and I am convinced that even today Russia and France would shy away from war. If they were to take us up on it, I would fully trust that things would be to our advantage.
\end{quote}\footnote{Röhl, \textit{Young Wilhelm}, 612. Waldersee, November 18, 1886, \textit{Denkwürdigkeiten I}, 304.}

By the end of 1886, Waldersee wrote that despite French assurances that they did not want to go to war and Russia’s “friendlier face,” “I very much hope that we do not let ourselves be led astray, and that we vigorously prepare ourselves for imminent war.”\footnote{Röhl, \textit{Young Wilhelm}, 612-613. Waldersee, December 28, 1886, \textit{Denkwürdigkeiten I}, 308.} On the eve of 1887, he began to promote a course of action: “After thoroughly weighting up all the prospects, I believe...
that the best thing would be for us to provoke a war with France; waiting until our enemies find it to be the right moment is certainly not the right approach.”

Although France was a concern for Waldersee, Austria appeared to be a highly uncertain and unstable factor in the European equation. In 1886, Waldersee conversed more often with the Chancellor’s son and Foreign Secretary Herbert von Bismarck than with the Chancellor himself. On April 17, after visiting the Kaiser and Moltke, Waldersee stopped to see Bismarck in the early afternoon. “It was the first time in a long time that I once again had a talk with him,” he noted. Unlike their past conversations, which were usually long and cordial, this one, lasting for 45 minutes, appears to have been short and terse. “I found him somewhat weak, also he complained about pains in the face,” Waldersee wrote, “in the conversation, however, he was very lively, as well as clear and certain in his expression.” Besides talking about France, Russia, and the Catholic Church, they discussed “above all our relationship to Austria and the future of this state.”

Waldersee was worried about the Austrians’ policy in the Balkans because their expansion to the southeast would bring them into conflict with Russia and drag Germany into the unavoidable mess. He believed Austria’s refusal to draw a line in the Balkans – which Russia agreed to – was “extremely short-sighted, for Austria’s domestic situation is in a complete shambles; an unsuccessful war will accelerate the decay that is now taking place gradually.” Furthermore, Waldersee was worried that Austria’s multi-national army, “which has held the empire together . . . is losing its internal cohesion and will no longer be able to stave off total collapse.” “I fear that as an ally, Austria will be almost worthless,” he concluded.

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155 Waldersee, April 9, 1886, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 289-90.
156 Röhl, Young Wilhelm, 609. Waldersee, April 18, 1886, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 290. Röhl notes that the entry is actually from April 21, 1886.
157 Röhl, Young Wilhelm, 609. Waldersee, June 2, 1886, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 294.
was not alone in this view among the political elite of Berlin, where the continuation of the Three Emperor’s League appeared untenable. At the end of 1886, he concluded, “the tension between Austria and Russia always becomes greater and will not be able to continue for long.”

On New Year’s Day 1887, Waldersee wrote in his journal: “there is a feeling throughout the world that we are on the verge of great events, that a war between us and France is unavoidable, which, by involving Austria and Russia, would inevitably turn into a world war.”

In the first half of 1887, Waldersee saw the opportunity for fixing the diplomatic quagmire through conflict on Germany’s western border; in the second half of 1887, he saw it in the east. Waldersee believed no one in France, even the *revanchists*, wanted war, and the French were preparing “because they fear that we intend to attack them in the spring.”

There was certainly reason for the French to be concerned. In January, Bismarck spoke before a packed Reichstag urging support for the early renewal of the *Septennat* – the controversial seven-year military bill – by stoking concern about a war with France. Bismarck would later state, “I could not invent Boulanger, but he happened very conveniently for me.”

After the majority in the Reichstag passed a three-year budget – against Bismarck’s wishes – the Chancellor, as Otto Pflanze states, “dealt the Reichstag opposition the hardest blow in its history”; he dissolved the Reichstag, called for new elections, and used the war issue to return a majority that supported the *Septennat*.

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158 Röhl, *Young Wilhelm*, 622-627. Herbert Bismarck lamented the “pathetic Austrians”: “How are we ever to come to any kind of reasonable agreement with this lackluster emperor and his minister, who are in part cowards, in part braggarts, in part Jesuits!” In Foreign Office, Friedrich von Holstein, who believed Russia and Germany could never be reconciled, noted, “whatever one may think of Austria at least she is useful because prevents us from having to face Russia and France alone.”


The German press kept alive the specter of war, and there was a rumor that a bill would be introduced in the Prussian Parliament appropriating 300 million marks for military spending. In February, Germany called up 72,000 reservists for a short drill in Alsace-Lorraine.\textsuperscript{163}

In this atmosphere, Waldersee naturally saw the potential for a war with France. On January 27, he stated: “The world as a whole is becoming increasingly uneasy, and people everywhere believe that war could break out any day now. But this is not the case. The leading figures in France are quite frightened and are giving very peaceful assurances.” He believed war would actually depend on whether Boulanger remained in the French government. In February he wrote that \textit{Général Revanche} was in conflict with other members of the government, who dare not dispose of him; “if that does not succeed, we then will have war in April despite the efforts of the Chancellor.”\textsuperscript{164} On February 26, Waldersee felt it was his duty to tell Bismarck that France was preparing for war. Speaking on a range of topics with the Quartermaster-General for about an hour, Bismarck “admitted that one could be prepared for everything with Boulanger, but did not believe, however, in an imminent decision.”\textsuperscript{165} On March 1, Waldersee was concerned about Boulanger and high-placed Russians plotting war on Germany.\textsuperscript{166} By the end of the month he took comfort in the renewal of the Triple Alliance – the defensive agreement between Germany, Austria, and Italy – and in Britain taking Germany’s side in certain instances, such as in Mediterranean affairs; “the French and the Russians will no doubt lack the courage to strike.” “What a shame it is,” Waldersee wrote, “but I am still hoping that Boulanger will undertake an over-hasty coup.”\textsuperscript{167} A few days later, he stated that Boulanger was losing

\textsuperscript{163} Pflanze, \textit{Bismarck and the Development of Germany}, 228-234.  
\textsuperscript{164} Waldersee, February 10, 1887, \textit{Denkwürdigkeiten} I, 314.  
\textsuperscript{165} Waldersee, February 26, 1887, \textit{Denkwürdigkeiten} I, 317.  
\textsuperscript{166} Waldersee, March 1, 1887, \textit{Denkwürdigkeiten} I, 318.  
influence and it appeared that peace would “endure for a long time to come.”

Röhl writes, with an implicit criticism, that Waldersee did not embrace this possibility for peace, but when looking at the development of Waldersee’s advocacy for war, Boulanger had the most potential among the leaders of France to spark that opportune moment that could initiate war. Given the complexity and uncertainty of French politics, Bismarck, writes Otto Pflanze, believed “Boulanger might easily become the ‘fuse’ for the explosion, perhaps without wanting to be.”

On February 21, 1887, Waldersee was concerned that Bismarck’s policy toward Austria was making Vienna mistrustful, even though “we must get used to the idea of waging war together with them.” “There is indeed still a good deal of trust in Bismarck’s skills,” he added, “but I do not see how he can extract us from the uncomfortable situation.” After the Quartermaster-General had talked to the Chancellor on February 26, Waldersee wrote the following in his journal:

We then spoke about the war itself, and he said – what for me was of the greatest worth – that we should tread at best gently in the east, just as the Russians would not wage war on us with full strength. We must urge the Austrians to use their full strength.

In March 1887, Waldersee believed the possible Boulanger-induced opportunity for war had quickly diminished – by June 1, Général Revanche would no longer be the Minister of War – and he now looked more intently to Germany’s eastern border:

In the east, a new storm seems to be brewing, and this time we will not help to divert it. The great trick here is to behave properly towards Austria. In any case, it will be a

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168 Waldersee, journal entry from March 28, 1887 not reproduced in Meisner’s Denkwürdigkeiten; quoted in Röhl, Young Wilhelm, 615.
169 Pflanze, Bismarck and the Development of Germany, 227.
170 Waldersee, diary entry for February 21, 1887 not reproduced in Meisner’s Denkwürdigkeiten; quoted from Röhl, Young Wilhelm, 615.
171 Waldersee, February 26, 1887, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 317.
considerable advantage if we do not immediately have to play the leading role when war breaks out.\textsuperscript{172}

In autumn 1887, Waldersee encouraged action in the east, and in the process annoyed Bismarck, but his advocacy of conflict had already begun to ruffle feathers earlier in the year. In January, he noted, “Because I frankly state that we should take advantage of the still-favorable prevailing conditions to trigger a war with France, I often have the reputation of being a very evil person. But it is obvious that I am right, and many acknowledge this as well.”\textsuperscript{173} “I am told I am regarded by the Chancellor, and therefore in wider circles, as the leader of the so-called War Party,” he wrote in May, “and indeed not with benevolent eyes because the Chancellor wants to avoid war completely.” “I will soon believe myself that I am a rather bad man,” he added, “What will be thrown at me next?”\textsuperscript{174} Later that month, he wrote that numerous friends were warning him about his adversaries from a “certain coterie” who saw him, as Quartermaster-General, as a thorn in their side. He knew he had opponents at the Foreign Office and even among some military men who had connections to Crown Prince Frederick, but Waldersee believed that his friends were being too pessimistic and that he was secure in his position for the time being.\textsuperscript{175} After the winter of 1887, he would be accused of more, not just within the exclusive halls of power, but in newspapers for the public to see.

\textsuperscript{172} Röhl, \textit{Young Wilhelm}, 615. Waldersee, March 29, 1887, \textit{Denkwürdigkeiten} I, 321. When unrest broke out in Bulgaria at the beginning of March, Waldersee hoped that Germany would just initially watch any entanglements that would develop between Russia and Austria. Waldersee, March 7, 1887, \textit{Denkwürdigkeiten} I, 319.

\textsuperscript{173} Waldersee, January 27, 1887, \textit{Denkwürdigkeiten} I, 311; Röhl, \textit{Young Wilhelm}, 612. He noted that the War Minister agreed with him.

\textsuperscript{174} Waldersee, May 18, 1887, \textit{Denkwürdigkeiten} I, 326.

In 1887, Tsar Alexander III decided not to renew the Three Emperor’s League, despite the urgings of his Foreign Minister, Nicholas de Giers. In May and June of 1887, Bismarck and the Russian ambassador in Berlin, Paul Shuvalov negotiated what would become known as the Reinsurance Treaty, which stipulated that if either Germany or Russia were to engage in a war with another power, the other would remain neutral unless Russia were to declare war on Austria-Hungary or Germany were to declare war on France. In the treaty’s secret protocols, Germany would leave Bulgaria to the Russians and would not interfere with their designs on the Bosphorus and Dardanelles – the Turkish-controlled straits to the Mediterranean Sea. Francesco Crispi, the new Italian prime minister who wanted his country to play a greater role in Mediterranean affairs, visited Bismarck at his estate of Friedrichsruh in October. The Chancellor maintained that Germany had no interest in Bulgaria and the straits, but encouraged Crispi to talk with Vienna and London, and together those three powers formed a “Mediterranean agreement” in which they would support the Ottoman Empire’s interests in Bulgaria and authority over the straits. Bismarck, however, warned Austria repeatedly that the Dual Alliance of 1879 was a defensive agreement that would not obligate Germany to support Vienna’s policy toward the Balkans.\textsuperscript{176} The web of alliances became tighter and the conflicting interests continued to clash. In July, Russia opposed the election of Prince Ferdinand of Saxe-Coburg-Kohary, an officer in the Austro-Hungarian army, as the new ruler of Bulgaria. Bismarck did not support the choice yet refused to get more involved on the side of St. Petersburg; however, he advised Austria to let the Russians invade Bulgaria if they wanted. “The eastern question is a game of patience

\textsuperscript{176} Pflanze, Bismarck and the Development of Germany, 250-252, 267-269.
“Geduldspiel,” Bismarck stated, “whoever can wait will win.” Alfred von Waldersee did not share the Chancellor’s opinion.

Despite the Reinsurance Treaty, Russian officials and the government-controlled press continued their anti-German agitation much to the annoyance of Bismarck, who, according to Waldersee, said of the tsar: “he is a false man (c’est un faux bonhomme).” “The mood in Russia becomes persistently worse against us,” Waldersee wrote in his journal, “there is general agreement that we are the opponent who is to be combatted first and above all things.” He was disappointed that neither side was going to bring about a fight. Unaware of the Reinsurance Treaty’s secret protocols, he lamented that Bismarck still wanted to maintain good relations with St. Petersburg and that the Chancellor had passed up chances to engage Russia in the Balkans.

On November 3, Waldersee heard the news that Tsar Alexander was going to stop in Berlin as his family travelled back to Russia from Copenhagen. He believed the visit would not be politically beneficial and doubted whether the Tsar could change the anti-German mood in his empire; “he must now already swim with the current.” Waldersee believed that the only thing to fear is that “we let ourselves be deceived through friendly words.” From reports he received on November 16, Waldersee thought that if they were accurate, Russia was calculating on war breaking out at the beginning of the next year. He concluded that the tsar, not informed of the details, must have approved the movements of Russian troops and war materials to the west and

177 Pflanze, Bismarck and the Development of Germany, 265.
178 Pflanze, Bismarck and the Development of Germany, 269. Waldersee, November 14, 1887, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 333.
179 Waldersee, October 21, 1887, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 331.
180 Waldersee, November 14, 1887, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 333.
181 Waldersee, November 3, 1887, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 331.
that, given the tsar’s unusually long absence from St. Petersburg, the ministers had to depend on themselves, ruling with “business-like anarchy.”\textsuperscript{182}

After “thorough consideration” of the news of Russian military preparations, he believed according to his “fullest conviction” that Russia would strike sometime in early 1888. “Then we are completely finished,” he wrote, “thus it is of consequence, if we decide quickly to go to war now.” If a good, strong action – i.e. immediate mobilization – would not make an impression on the tsar, “we must then proceed resolutely.” He then proceeded to predict the war: Austria feels even more threatened by the Russian preparations; things get serious; and the theater of operations will be in Poland, where a winter campaign is “no pleasure,” but rivers will be easy to cross, aiding the offensive. “The difficulty is naturally in the old age and frailty of the Kaiser,” Waldersee added. Suspecting that his wishes would not come to fruition, he believed that conditions would be “considerably worse” if Germany waited until early 1888. Waldersee spoke to his superior, Field Marshal Moltke, who agreed with him. He went then to Herbert Bismarck, who, after listening attentively, told him he wanted to discuss it with his father. At his last stop, Waldersee talked to the War Minister, who did not believe a war was near because the Kaiser would not support it. He did promise Waldersee to support railroad construction to the east.\textsuperscript{183}

Around 10:30 the next morning – November 18 – the train carrying the Russian imperial family pulled into Berlin’s Lehrter Station, just across the Spree from the Military Staff Building. Awaiting them on horseback were the Kaiser and his aides, including Alfred von Waldersee. While the Romanovs were in the German capital for the day, Waldersee was charged with being

\textsuperscript{182} Waldersee, November 16, 1887, \textit{Denkwürdigkeiten} I, 333-334. The Romanovs made a trip to Copenhagen to visit the family of the Russian Empress (Princess Dagmar of Schleswig-Holstein-Sonderburg-Glücksburg, the mother of the last Russian tsar, Nicholas II). Measles kept the family in Denmark for four months. Pflanze, \textit{Bismarck and the Development of Germany}, 270.

\textsuperscript{183} Waldersee, November 17, 1887, \textit{Denkwürdigkeiten} I, 334-335.
aide-de-camp to the Russian crown prince, the future Nicholas II (1868-1917). Waldersee described the 19 year old as very small, handsome, intelligent, and a good conversationalist, but “somewhat awkward in his manners.”\textsuperscript{184} The Kaiser gave a dinner for his Russian guests, and Bismarck and Alexander III had an hour-and-a-half long private meeting, in which, according to the Chancellor’s account, both men expressed their grievances. Notably, the Tsar stated that he had neither interest in a Franco-Russian alliance nor in warring against Germany.\textsuperscript{185}

Before the family left that night to return to St. Petersburg, the Russian crown prince presented Waldersee with the star of the Polish Order of the White Eagle. On the blue enamel ring in the middle of the eight-pointed gold star shone the gilded phrase, \textit{Pro Fide Rege et Lege} (For Faith, King, and Law). “I thought with you [that] Alfred had all the orders,” Mrs. Lee wrote to her cousin in Connecticut, “in fact he has more than he can wear, but the honor pleases him.”\textsuperscript{186} During the Tsar’s visit, the Kaiser had conferred on Paul Shuvalov, the Russian ambassador to Berlin, the Order of the Black Eagle – on the silver ring of the eight-pointed silver star shone the gilded phrase, \textit{Suum Cuique} (To each according to his merits). “A rather unusual decoration,” wrote Waldersee, because Shuvalov did not want to carry the responsibility if war broke out and planned to resign from his post.\textsuperscript{187}

In the immediate aftermath of the Tsar’s visit, tensions relaxed, and a contented Bismarck returned to Friedrichsruh. Waldersee considered peace temporary, believing Russia’s difference with Austria could result in “catastrophe,” and Germany’s chances for victory were becoming

\textsuperscript{184} Waldersee, November 18, 1887, \textit{Denkwürdigkeiten} I, 335.
\textsuperscript{185} Pflanze, \textit{Bismarck and the Development of Germany}, 270.
\textsuperscript{186} Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, November 5, 1887, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume B.
\textsuperscript{187} Waldersee, November 19, 1887, \textit{Denkwürdigkeiten} I, 335-336.
worse. On November 23, Waldersee had a long conversation with Herbert Bismarck, in which the Chancellor’s son and Foreign Secretary stated that it was possible to let Austria wage war on Russia by itself. The Quartermaster-General maintained that Germany was committed to standing with Austria if attacked, but if its territory were invaded, German troops would arrive too late and Vienna would likely soon make peace after a lost battle, leaving Germany stuck with the whole Russian army. Austria, he stated, did not want to attack Russia – an idea he called “pure nonsense” – but Vienna would act “only in a state of self-defense.” Germany, he insisted, had to prepare for conflict just like its eastern neighbors in order to be ready as soon as possible. That day, Waldersee sent the Kaiser an outline of a memorandum he would draft about the military capabilities of Russia. In it, he emphasized the same points about Austria, Russia, and the necessity for offensive action that he had argued to Herbert Bismarck. The main objective of war, he wrote, is to destroy the enemy’s means of resistance so other goals can be achieved; once the combined Austrian and German armies defeated the Russian forces in Poland, the allies’ success would quickly bring the war to an end.

From the end of November through December, Waldersee discussed the war crisis with a number of important people. Along with Moltke, he issued memorandums and made presentations about Russian preparations and a possible war to the Kaiser. The German monarch originally believed his empire could stay neutral in an Austro-Russian conflict, but grew increasingly concerned about war, stating that he wanted command of the western army in the

189 Waldersee, November 23, 1887, *Denkwürdigkeiten* I, 337.
event of a war against both France and Russia.\textsuperscript{191} The German ambassador to Austria, Prince Reuss, visited Waldersee while he was in Berlin and agreed with the Quartermaster-General that the situation was very serious, reporting that the Austrians were expecting Germany to tell them what to do. Waldersee lamented that Bismarck wanted Austria to avoid provocations. After the ambassador spoke with Bismarck and before he returned to Vienna, Waldersee paid him a visit, during which he learned that the Chancellor had instructed Reuss to advise the Austrians to do what they considered essential for their security yet communicate openly with Russia.\textsuperscript{192}

Waldersee, as he wrote, was in “very active” communication with the Foreign Office, which “is now in feverish activity.”\textsuperscript{193} In Dresden, he met with the King of Saxony, who wanted to be informed of developments and what role he would play; the king was “in particular, completely in agreement with his command in the east.”\textsuperscript{194} Another royal, the Grand Duke of Baden, visited Waldersee to express his concerns and hear the Quartermaster-General’s thoughts.\textsuperscript{195}

Waldersee’s discussions about war with important officials eventually landed him in hot water. On December 5, Waldersee visited the Austrian ambassador in Berlin, Count Emmerich Széchényi, who was displeased that Germany demanded Austria to take measures against Russia. Waldersee told him they should wait until the beginning of the new year, but quicken preparations. The ambassador asked him whether Russia was planning a winter campaign, to which the Quartermaster-General responded, “No, I fear they do not.” That evening, Herbert Bismarck visited the ambassador and told him that Austria must do something, but Széchényi

\textsuperscript{192} Waldersee, November 25 and 29, 1887, \textit{Denkwürdigkeiten}, I, 337-338.
\textsuperscript{193} Waldersee, November 26, 1887, \textit{Denkwürdigkeiten}, I, 338-339.
\textsuperscript{194} Waldersee, December 12, 1887, \textit{Denkwürdigkeiten}, I, 339-340.
\textsuperscript{195} Waldersee, December 13, 1887, \textit{Denkwürdigkeiten}, I, 342-343.
replied that Waldersee thought it would be better to do nothing.\textsuperscript{196} Two days later, shortly before going to dinner at Herbert Bismarck’s, Waldersee received a confidential letter, dictated by the Chancellor. Bismarck expressed his displeasure with him and threatened to appeal to their sovereign:

\begin{quote}
It is impossible for me, in my state of health to continue to conduct business, if I am exposed to such interference from the military side, and if alongside the official channels occur opposing influences of an authoritative nature on foreign representatives and their cabinets. Considering our friendly relationship and the need of business-like care of His Majesty the Kaiser, I would lament it if, out of necessity, I were to call on the support of His Highness against the damaging of our policy. In the interest of the country and our security I would, however, not be able to avoid this if I would have to fear the impressions, which Your Excellency’s remarks have made on the Austrian cabinet and its policy, could repeat themselves.\textsuperscript{197}
\end{quote}

After the dinner, Waldersee talked to Herbert Bismarck. Although mistrustful of Herbert, Waldersee wanted to maintain a cordial relationship with the Chancellor, who he believed wanted to do the same.\textsuperscript{198}

Not only did Bismarck confront Waldersee about his advocacy for war, but he also confronted one of Waldersee’s military attachés. On December 21, Major Adolf von Deines, the German military attaché in Vienna who maintained an active correspondence with Waldersee and shared his view on war, wrote to the Quartermaster-General that he had received a letter from the Chancellor reprimanding him for his behavior in the Austrian capital. After reviewing the attaché’s reports, Bismarck told Deines tersely that in his conversation with Emperor Franz Josef he had overstepped the boundary between political and military questions. The Chancellor stressed his uncontestable authority in foreign affairs: “The General Staff does not advise the foreign policy of His Majesty, but I do exclusively, and the honorable gentleman is not

\begin{footnotes}
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authorized without my explicit instruction to attempt to have an influence of political consequence on the political circles of Vienna and on their resolutions.”199 Deines wrote to Waldersee that he would have to be more careful when writing future reports and maintained that he never encouraged the Austrians toward war, but only self-defense.200 In the final days of 1887, Bismarck continued to remind Vienna that the alliance was strictly defensive in nature and to warn the Austrians of military interference in diplomacy:

I cannot avoid the impression that it is the aim of certain military circles in Vienna to distort our defensive alliance . . . We must both take care that the privilege of giving political advice to our monarchs does not in fact slip out of our hands and pass over to the General Staffs.201

Waldersee wrote that the Chancellor wrongly believed Austria was trying to get Germany to join them in a war of aggression; instead, he maintained, an offensive against Russia was in reality a defensive action.202

Although the Austro-Russian war scare would fizzle out in the beginning months of 1888, the war that Waldersee believed was inevitable and would need to be fought sooner rather than later never occurred. As shown in this section, throughout the 1880s Waldersee gradually came to see Bismarck’s foreign policy as untenable. In the 1870s and 1880s, Russia was clearly an unstable entity in Europe. As George Kennan argues, the Russian Empire, whose statesmanship was “so obviously misguided and self-destructive” and whose elite was blinded by “heady

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200 Adolf von Deines to Waldersee, 21 December 1887, *Aus dem Briefwechsel*, 137-138. Three days before, he had written that official statements in Russian newspapers increasingly made the Austrians recognize the “Russian danger,” something which “our pleading would have only achieved arduously.” He also reported that Franz Josef chaired military councils almost daily: “One now begins to decide to look completely at the threatening danger.” Deines to Waldersee, 18 December 1887, *Aus dem Briefwechsel*, 137.
nationalism,” had no need to pursue an expensive and aggressive foreign adventurism in southeastern Europe as it struggled to modernize. Waldersee was not just concerned about anti-German Russian nationalism. On January 29, 1887, he wrote, “We are surrounded by countries in which the prevailing conditions are unhealthy and untenable in the long term.” In Republican France, anti-German revanchism was alive and well, especially while Georges Boulanger was Minister of War. In the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Germany’s multi-national ally, Waldersee was concerned about nationalism infiltrating the emperor’s army.

To the monarchist Waldersee, Germany’s greatest asset during these difficult times was Kaiser Wilhelm I. When the German emperor became ill in March 1887, he wrote that “every such illness always points to the fact that great events could be just around the corner, for with the Kaiser’s death circumstances will change the world over, and we will be facing crises at home and abroad.” As shown above, Waldersee believed that the respect and admiration Tsar Alexander III had for the Kaiser would prevent war with Russia, and thus, as John Röhl notes, Waldersee “turned this insight on its head” by arguing that Germany should start a war with France while the Kaiser was still alive. In December 1887, Waldersee wrote that it sent a “chill up my spine” when he heard the Kaiser say that he told the Tsar, “When you want to join with France in a war against us, you are then the stronger and can destroy us; however, believe me, Europe will not tolerate that.”

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203 Kennan, The Decline of Bismarck’s European Order, 416-419.
204 Waldersee, journal entry for January 29, 1887, not reproduced in Meisner’s Denkwürdigkeiten; quoted in Röhl, Young Wilhelm, 601.
205 Waldersee, journal entry for March 27, 1887, not reproduced in Meisner’s Denkwürdigkeiten; quoted in Röhl, Young Wilhelm, 615.
206 Waldersee, journal entry for February 21, 1887, not reproduced in Meisner’s Denkwürdigkeiten; quoted in Röhl, Young Wilhelm, 614.
207 Wilhelm I, as recorded by Waldersee, December 17, 1887, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 344-345.
Calling Waldersee a warmonger – a pejorative term – belittles his genuine concerns about Germany’s security. As shown above, for years he received ominous reports of Russian railroad construction, westward troop movements, and the buildup of forces near the border. In the 1880s, there was actually fear on both sides of the border that fostered and increased the military buildups of the three eastern empires. The Russians had the persistent sense that their military capabilities were inferior to those of their western neighbors. A Russian assessment of the empire’s military preparedness in 1887 concluded that Austria could easily invade without the help of Germany. In 1883, the Russian Chief of Staff reported to Giers, the Foreign Minister, that given the dense transportation networks of Germany and Austria, “our borders are completely open.” In the early 1870s, the Ministry of War had identified eleven strategically necessary rail lines, but by 1888, only three were under construction. With the lack of railroads and the financial challenges of building new ones, the Russian military decided that if it was going to have any chance at repelling an invasion, it needed to be more prepared for action than its western neighbors. Beginning in 1880, the Russian deployment plans called for more active troops to be massed in the west (See Image 7). As William Fuller has observed, there was the danger “that Vienna and Berlin might misread the redeployment as a gesture of hostility or, still worse, as a prelude to Russian aggression.” This was certainly the case with Waldersee, who failed to see Russian war planning from the Russian perspective. While Waldersee saw their deployments as offensive, the Russian Minister of War and Foreign Minister thought that the German and Austrian governments would realize they were for defensive purposes. The influence of modernization, and especially railroads, in military planning cannot be overstated.

From 1882 to 1887 Waldersee’s view of diplomacy, and specifically of Bismarck’s foreign policy, evolved. He adhered originally to the Iron Chancellor’s system, but grew increasingly mistrustful of Russia. He believed in the ultimate authority and goodwill of monarchs, but the pressures of nationalisms and modernizing military capabilities caused him to regard the intricacies of Bismarck’s alliances and agreements as untenable and that the next war
should be fought on Germany’s terms. “A more complicated chapter of diplomacy than that dealing with the year 1887,” wrote William Langer, “could hardly be found in the history of European international relations.”

In this atmosphere, Waldersee looked at the political, military, and diplomatic situation throughout Europe, and by late 1886, he decided that the best way to maintain the future security of the German Empire was to bring about the war he considered inevitable. If one believes in the saying that “generals always fight the last war,” then Waldersee must have certainly expected that the next war would be like the Wars of German Unification – short and decisive with Germany able to dictate the conditions of peace.

Waldersee had hoped in 1885 to sacrifice southeastern Europe and the Ottoman Empire to maintain the Three Emperor’s League and German security, but by 1887, he saw that was no longer possible because he thought Russia could not be trusted. A German victory would make Russia, like France, a permanent enemy, especially if Poland was reconstituted – which Waldersee believed would be necessary.

A preventive war launched by Germany in the late 1880s would not have brought lasting peace and security to Europe. Waldersee’s greatest fault is that he urged war as a diplomatic solution when he did not fully understand the intricacies of the domestic politics of other countries. The source of his paranoia was his inability to comprehend the reality behind the rhetoric of men like Boulanger and the actions of the Russian General Staff. He looked intently at the European situation from a German perspective, but no one else’s. As much as he

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210 Waldersee, diary entry from December 13, 1886; quoted in Röhl, *Young Wilhelm*, 611. Waldersee: “Should we become entangled in a war against Russia and France at the same time, we would have to restore Poland, irrespective of all our misgivings. Yet it would be better than our complete destruction. If this operation were to succeed, we could easily defend ourselves against Russia, and we would then have a respectable empire between it and us.”
discussed international affairs with others – from the Bismarcks to the German military attachés – and gathered information – from newspapers to intelligence reports – there were still limitations to what Waldersee could know. Without knowledge of the secret protocols of the Reinsurance Treaty, for example, he could not fully comprehend why Bismarck was acting the way he did toward Austria and Russia.

Although the Chancellor found Waldersee’s advocacy of war annoying, he did not seek to get rid of the Quartermaster-General, with whom he had maintained a cordial relationship since the 1870s. Bismarck became alarmed, not by Waldersee’s challenge to his foreign policy, but by his increasing friendship with, and influence over, Prince Wilhelm of Hohenzollern, who came to share the Quartermaster-General’s views on foreign affairs and war by late 1887. Waldersee’s relationship with Bismarck had survived their differences over foreign policy during the late 1880s, but his relationship with Wilhelm would become the issue that would begin to divide the two men.

The Father Who Art in Herwarthstrasse 2

On April 8, 1885, many visitors stopped at the Military Staff Building to wish Waldersee well on his fifty-third birthday. Of all the gifts given to him, Mary’s received special attention. In honor of the Kaiser naming her husband an Adjutant General – the nearest personal post to the monarch – she gave Alfred a fine cloth, which, when placed over a horse’s saddle, sported on

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[211] Röhl, Young Wilhelm, 619. For example, On February 11, 1887, Wilhelm wrote to his friend Eulenberg, “No one knows whether there will be a war, and what the next summer will bring is still a mystery to everyone. But the best thing would be for war to start soon; waiting will only be to our disadvantage. Everyone seems to feel this. I only hope that when it does come we shall with God’s help give them a good hiding.”
each side a gilded crown on top a “W” for Wilhelm I. Prince Wilhelm the Kaiser’s 26 year-old grandson, arrived with his wife, and making his way through the salons to look at the table of gifts, he caught sight of the cloth and admired it. “Offering I suppose from the General Staff?” he asked. “Oh no, but from my life staff,” Waldersee replied as he waved toward Mary, delighting all present. The prince presented the Quartermaster-General with a photograph of himself costumed as the seventeenth-century Charles X of Sweden. Underneath his name, he wrote, “to my honored friend and military teacher, Count von Waldersee.” The educator hung the photo of his pupil on the wall in his room next to another of the prince, costumed, as Mrs. Lee explained, in “curls and [a] sort of sloughed hat in Italian fashion.”

In their analyses of the relationship between the two men, historians have tended to focus on Waldersee’s influence on Prince Wilhelm, portraying it as a sinister scheme of a politically ambitious general. According to Gordon Craig, Waldersee “sought to make his position in the General Staff one of far-reaching influence” and “worked feverishly to ingratiate himself with both the crown prince and young Prince Wilhelm.” In his biography of Wilhelm II, Lamar Cecil writes that Waldersee “was ever ready with a soothing word, a moral injunction, or a cleverly constructed insinuation, all of which were calculated to appeal to Wilhelm’s feelings and to advance [his own] position.” Princess Augusta Victoria asked Waldersee in 1886 to advise her young husband if he had to accede to the throne sooner than expected. This task,

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212 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, April 24, 1885, HH, Lee-Von Waldersee Collection, Volume B. Prince and Princess Wilhelm had recently come from the Princess’s sister’s marriage, for which the guests appeared in costume. The Prince had taken the opportunity to have himself photographed dressed like Charles X, who had also married a princess from Schleswig-Holstein.

213 Craig, The Politics of the Prussian Army, 266.

Isabel Hull opines, was one “the ambitious Waldersee was only too happy to do.” In reality, however, Waldersee did not force a personal and political relationship on Wilhelm and did not see the prince as a tool for his ambition. Instead, as historians and biographers have actually observed, there were things that naturally attracted Wilhelm to Waldersee and things that they both had in common. Hull states, “Waldersee’s outspoken bellicosity, which Wilhelm interpreted as masculinity, made him attractive to the young Prince.” Cecil writes, “[Wilhelm] discovered in the general a fellow conservative, a staunch Protestant, and a foe of all forms of vice.” Giles MacDonogh observes that Waldersee “fitted the bill” to be one of Wilhelm’s friends, who had to be “male, anti-English, anti-liberal and opposed to the crown princess. Waldersee was all four.”

All these historians have looked at the Wilhelm-Waldersee relationship in their quests to understand the future Kaiser Wilhelm II and his reign. This section will examine Waldersee’s role in the relationship and explore specifically how and why he became a friend and father figure to the young prince and what this relationship – and thus Wilhelm – meant to him. Their character traits formed the foundation of their friendship, upon which fell the building blocks of their shared experiences, those activities – like the social events described above – that provided occasions for exchanging information, gossip, opinions, and for fostering relationships. Although a diplomatic trip to Russia in 1884, an attempt to settle an affair in 1885, and an attack on the Union Club in 1885-86 were important events that brought the two men closer together,

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the persistent animosity between Prince Wilhelm and his parents created an opening that allowed Waldersee to become the father the prince never had.

The liberal views of Crown Prince Frederick and Crown Princess Victoria, the eldest child of Great Britain’s Queen Victoria, were quite different from their son’s and Waldersee’s conservative views. On a personal level, Waldersee was sympathetic toward the young prince, providing open ears and words of advice about military, political, and family matters. On a political level, Waldersee was a staunch monarchist, who sought to defend traditional Prussian kingship against what he viewed as threats, such as the Crown Prince and Crown Princess’s liberalism. It was this politically conservative attitude that eventually caused Waldersee to see and seek in Wilhelm a new hope for the future of the empire. This idea was established on December 6, 1882 in Waldersee’s journal after he had his first serious encounter with the prince:

Today, [he] came to me in order to inform himself about French fortifications, resulting in a long military and political discussion. I have now seen the prince more often and have begun to form an opinion. He has an unusually fresh vigor and does everything that he engages in with thoroughness and conscientiousness. He appears to have much of his grandfather in him. If his parents had set the goal to raise him to be a constitutional monarch, which bows obediently to the sovereignty of a parliamentary majority, they have had misfortune. The exact opposite has appeared to happen.²¹⁹

Although Waldersee developed at first a reserved optimism about the prince, over time, as events brought them closer together, he would show an increasing affinity for him.

In May 1884, Waldersee accompanied Wilhelm as a member of his entourage on a twelve-day trip to Russia to congratulate the fourteen-year-old future Nicholas II of Russia on his coming-of-age. Historian John Röhl emphasizes that this trip was a crucial event in Wilhelm’s life because “it was here that he discovered that peculiar transcendental emperor ideology which satisfied his narcissistic needs and which he stressed to such an alarming degree throughout his

²¹⁹ Waldersee, December 6, 1882, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 222-223.
His experience revealed trends that would characterize his later reign: he viewed all emperors as more than mere mortals; he initiated a secret, personal, and potentially politically dangerous (i.e. anti-British) communication with Tsar Alexander III; and he gave preference to his personal advisors over their official superiors.

In the later years of his life, Wilhelm noted that the Russian ceremony on May 18, 1884 in St. Petersburg was “a splendid sight for a soldier’s eye,” and of course this view must have then been shared at the time with his Quartermaster-General, who loved his military profession. All of the militaristic trappings, the religious symbols, the people of the court, the size of the rooms, the oaths, and the entire monarchist ceremony must have impressed the conservative Waldersee just as much as Wilhelm, as seen in his detailed description of the ceremony:

In the colossal halls stood numerous deputations of all the troops garrisoned here, together surely 2,000 men, which repeatedly made the Honneurs. Hordes of generals, high-ranking officers, court officials, senators, clergy, and naturally the entire diplomatic corps and a great number of ladies in Russian costume completely filled the enormous rooms. The procession, with the Tsar and Tsarina in front, then Prince Wilhelm with the Queen of Greece etc. went through all the rooms to the church. Here was the first ceremony of which I could only see little. At the end the successor to the throne spoke the oath with a loud voice. From there, the procession passed back through the rooms to the throne, where all flags were gathered and the soldier’s oath was taken, then back through the arranged troops to the imperial apartments, where the family and the diplomats congratulated him.

Earlier that morning, Waldersee had watched the Hohenzollern prince lay a wreath at the grave of Alexander II, who had been assassinated by anarchists just three years before. This act of monarchical solidarity against dangerous elements certainly provided a powerful symbol to

220 Röhl, Young Wilhelm, 424.
221 Kaiser Wilhelm II, Aus Meinem Leben; quoted in Röhl, Young Wilhelm, 426.
222 Waldersee, May 28, 1884, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 237; Röhl, Young Wilhelm, 426-427.
Waldsee. After the laying of the wreath and a tour of the Peter and Paul Fortress, he wrote, “Many political criminals should sit in the prisons.”

Through the 1884 trip to Russia, Waldsee became part of the entourage Wilhelm formed around himself. Upon returning to Berlin at the end of May, Waldsee noted:

To accompany Prince Wilhelm was of the highest interest for me. I have been alone with him for many hours. He has spoken with much openness about many conditions, including those in his family . . . I have been able to observe him everywhere he went in the last twelve days, so that I have been able to complete my previous judgment about him substantially. I can summarize it by saying that he justifies our best hopes for the future. He will become the right man to maintain Germany’s position of power, perhaps to expand it!

The reserved optimism Waldsee had expressed after their first serious encounter in 1882 had now become a ringing endorsement after the 1884 trip, which Waldsee saw as an important moment for Russo-German relations. Their shared experience increased their friendship, and in the future, Wilhelm knew he could turn to the Quartermaster-General for advice and assistance.

By the beginning of January 1885, Waldsee was developing a more sentimental and personal opinion of the prince:

Around 3 in the afternoon Prince Wilhelm came to me and stayed for an hour and a half. I believe, indeed, that he has placed a real trust in me. He discusses many delicate family matters, and I almost feared he is not cautious enough concerning others. In one matter that now keeps him very occupied, he assures me that I am his only confidant. I have given advice several times to confide himself fully in no one in order that he not lose his independence. He is a very peculiar young man, who already now shows a strong character and that is still the main thing. He has an open head, a fresh mind, a great lust and energy to work, and a strongly developed Prussian feeling. Perhaps he is not excessively of much heart, but I believe that this is excellent for him and his future. In his outward behavior he is friendly and pleasant.

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223 Waldsee, May 28, 1884, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 237.
224 Waldsee, May 28, 1884, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 238-239.
225 Waldsee, May 28, 1884, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 239.
226 Waldsee, January 16, 1885, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 249.
A few days later, Waldersee noted that Wilhelm arrived and stayed for about an hour. The prince said many things that the Quartermaster-General did not wish to write down and stated that he held Waldersee to be a very good friend and was counting on him for later.\footnote{Waldersee, January 21, 1885, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 250.} This is the first time the prince referred to Waldersee as a friend, and in the above journal entry from January 16, Waldersee noted that he was the prince’s only confidant in a particular matter of importance. One cannot understand what lay behind these statements through the published journal entries, which show the Wilhelm-Waldersee relationship reaching a new level for an unknown reason; however, John Röhl has put the pieces of the puzzle together and has discovered that Waldersee was helping Wilhelm settle a potentially politically and socially dangerous affair.

Prince Wilhelm had been in secret correspondence with Countess Wedel to obtain an Austrian repeating rifle that could shoot more rounds than the gun being used by the Prussian army. Not much is known about her early life, but in the 1870s, Elisabeth Bérard became the mistress of Prince Friedrich of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen, who was believed to be the father of the twins to whom she gave birth. From 1879 to 1884, Elisabeth Bérard was married to Count Hermann von Wedel, the brother of the German military attaché in Vienna, Carl. Through her contacts in Austrian court circles, the countess knew the Austrian Archduke Carl Salvator, inventor of the repeating rifle. Röhl believes that Wilhelm and Wedel met while the Prussian prince was on a hunting trip in Austria in October 1884 with Carl Salvator’s brother, Grand Duke Ferdinand IV of Tuscany. While many historians have disregarded her memoirs – titled
My Relationship with H.M. Kaiser Wilhelm II (1900) – Röhl believes that archival findings confirm the basic points of her story – one that involved Waldersee.228

On Christmas Day 1884, Wilhelm sent a note to Waldersee asking to meet him that afternoon at the Military Staff Building: “Matter of utmost importance! *periculum in Mora!*”229 By February 18, 1885, Waldersee wrote in his journal that they were meeting almost daily to discuss primarily the repeating rifle. “He is going to get a trial model of one out of Austria,” the Quartermaster-General wrote, “and he expects great things of it.”230 The next day, Wilhelm went to Potsdam, where he met Countess Wedel, who had brought the gun. On February 20, Waldersee and some other top generals watched as Wilhelm tested it.

Thereafter, the situation with Wedel began to deteriorate. At a tea with the imperial couple, Minister of War General Bronsart von Schellendorf mentioned the presence of a mistress of the Archduke, a slip of the tongue that greatly angered Wilhelm, who had hoped to keep her involvement secret. Wilhelm asked Waldersee to reprimand Bronsart severely. He also asked his friend to loan him money so he could give it to Wedel, to whom, the prince claimed, Carl Salvator gave too little money for the trip.231 This was the first time Wedel asked for money. She would blackmail Wilhelm for money and favors for several years more because she possessed letters he had handwritten to her, in which it was evident that he was in love with

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228 Röhl, *Young Wilhelm*, 490-492. Röhl covers the whole dramatic story in detail from pages 490 to 507.
229 Prince Wilhelm to Waldersee, December 25, 1884; quoted in Röhl, *Young Wilhelm*, 492. “Danger in delay”
230 Waldersee, diary entry for 18 February 1885 not included in *Denkwürdigkeiten*; quoted in Röhl, *Young Wilhelm*, 493.
231 Röhl, *Young Wilhelm*, 494-495.
Waldersee became the go-between, the main agent for getting these letters back and helping solve the affair without it becoming a public scandal. He even came up with the idea to use “W.W.W.” (Wilhelm, Waldersee, and Wedel) to sign their letters and to refer to Countess Wedel. Wilhelm felt more compelled to get the letters when he learned that she had left Carl Salvator and moved into the Charlottenburg neighborhood of Berlin. In late December 1885, Countess Wedel suffered several severe hemorrhages at her home. Believing her death was imminent, she wanted to give Wilhelm custody of her children in her will, but the prince sent Waldersee to talk her out of this idea.

Wilhelm and Waldersee were unable to obtain all of the letters the prince had written to her, and when Wilhelm became Kaiser in 1888, his private secretary took over the task of trying to retrieve them. After publishing her memoirs, which included a letter from Waldersee, Countess Wedel spent the last years of her troubled life in a Swiss insane asylum. When she was transferred to a German institution in 1905, she disappeared from the record books. Wilhelm’s handwritten letters turned up in Tehran in the 1950s. They had remained in a safe in the Persian embassy in Berlin where Wedel had been a lady of honor until 1886.

The Quartermaster-General did not apparently have much interest in the repeating rifle, but he was someone to whom Wilhelm could turn for support in this potentially devastating matter. The question remains as to why the pious Waldersee was eager and willing to help the married prince who had violated at least one of the Ten Commandments. On March 14, 1885,

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232 Röhl reprints two letters in his biography of Wilhelm II. In one from January 30, 1885, Wilhelm writes, “You wish to address me as ‘Du’! Oh, how wonderful, that makes me very glad and I am grateful to you! Yesterday we had a court ball, which was brilliant, and to which people thronged. But I thought of you constantly . . . of the many hundreds of ladies there, not one could even come close to you! My ange adorée!” Röhl, Young Wilhelm, 497.

233 Röhl, Young Wilhelm, 490-507.
after attending a soirée, Wilhelm stopped to see Waldersee before leaving for the wedding of his
sister-in-law. The latter wrote in his journal:

I have not noted down his visits recently because they were very frequent, for a time he
came to see me every day; initially he did so mainly because of a deal involving a
repeating rifle, in which he took a lively interest, and in which he desired my support; this
was then followed by a number of other matters as well. In fact, we have indeed become
much closer, and I believe that I have been able to see into his soul. He definitely has it in
him to achieve great things one day; he is clever, industrious, unbelievably active,
lively and dogged in pursuing an idea. He is hard-headed and already displays decidedly
conservative tendencies and a marked awareness of the duties to which he will later have
to discharge. I have the impression that he likes me and trusts me. On more than one
occasion he has said to me that he considers me a good friend, and that he is a loyal
friend to me. I hope I will one day be able to serve him well.234

After the 1882 and 1884 reflections on Wilhelm, this quote reveals an increased bond that arose
from the repeating rifle issue and Wedel Affair. One can see the usual themes on which
Waldersee reflects: Prince Wilhelm’s good characteristics, his proper conservative leanings, his
great potential as a future leader, and his signs of favor and friendship. These things attracted
Waldersee to Wilhelm, but there were two new and important sentiments in this quote that speak
to the heart of the maturing relationship between them. First, Waldersee’s belief that he could
now see into Wilhelm’s soul reveals how much, as Röhl insinuates, he was becoming a father
figure to the young prince, who was almost always at odds with his parents (see below). Their
friendship was transforming into a familial relationship, which would become especially evident
from Wilhelm’s increased appearances at the Waldersees’ home in the following years (see
below). Second, Waldersee’s written declaration that he hopes to serve the prince well in the
future shows the staunch monarchist’s level of commitment to a future Kaiser.

The latter sentiment is more acutely articulated in a letter from 1889 that dealt with
another potential scandal. While attending the army maneuvers in Alsace in autumn 1879,

234 Röhl, Young Wilhelm, 495; Waldersee, March 14, 1885, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 253-254.
Prince Wilhelm met and had sexual relations with Emilie Klopp, who called herself “Miss Love.” In a situation comparable to the Wedel Affair, Bismarck’s sons handled the difficult task of paying off Miss Love and retrieving the letters Wilhelm wrote to her. When Miss Love did not receive a reply to her demands in April 1889, she wrote to Count von Waldersee. He immediately wrote to Wilhelm, who was by that time Kaiser Wilhelm II:

My Most Serene, Most Mighty Kaiser! My Most Gracious Kaiser, King, and Lord! I believe it is my most humble duty to bring the following to Your Imperial and Royal Majesty’s attention: Madame Love of Strasbourg has address me with the claim that she possesses letters from Your Majesty and is probably entitled to monetary compensation. Under no circumstances would I heed this were it not for the fact that due to certain intimations I believe other persons could be drawn into Madame Love’s confidence and this would entail unpleasantness. I would hardly be showing Your Majesty due thanks for all the proofs of the All-Highest graciousness and trust bestowed on me were I to exercise cautious restraint in the manner as seems to be the case in other quarters. Should Your Majesty after my audience of Saturday not refer to the matter, I shall assume that Your All-Highest Self wishes to hear nothing more of this matter, and then it would be erased from my own memory forthwith.

Here Waldersee’s sense of loyalty and duty to Wilhelm is clear. As a staunch monarchist, Count von Waldersee believed his duty, especially as a soldier, was to defend the House of Hohenzollern against threatening forces. In the case of Wilhelm’s love affairs, he was attempting to defend the monarchy from itself.

To Waldersee, the Christian – specifically Protestant – religion provided the bedrock for the monarchy, and anything that threatened its Christian well-being was deemed a threat. Although Waldersee’s anti-Semitism will be explored below (see “Christian Philanthropy and Anti-Semitism”), it played a minor role in a greater religious struggle, which John Röhl calls “the crusade against the Union Club,” lasting from November 1885 to June 1886. The Union Club was a cosmopolitan court clique of German nobles, military officers, and rich bourgeois men, including Jews. The group became a club for gambling, and it was a powerful influence,

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235 Waldersee to Wilhelm II, 18 April 1889; quoted in Röhl, Young Wilhelm, 456.
for not only did it contain notable nobles, but it also had the official patronage of Kaiser Wilhelm. As a mistress and a wife at the German court, Countess Wedel had become very familiar with this group. Possibly out of her own desire for revenge on members of this clique, she convinced Wilhelm that some of them despised him and were betraying Germany. Her former lover, Prince Friedrich of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen, she said spied for Russia. Countess Wanda Perponcher, who came from the Moltke family and was married to the administrator of the Kaiser’s court, Wedel accused of selling classified military information to Greece. Wilhelm was motivated to crack down on the Union Club because it had also become a center for gambling. He saw this as a terrible vice that threatened the Christian well-being of the military officers that took part in it. He launched his attack on the Union Club by forbidding the officers of his Hussar Guards Regiment to associate with it.  

In this campaign, Waldersee became Wilhelm’s advisor and support. On November 21, 1885, the prince visited the Quartermaster-General to seek his advice about the Union Club, something with which Waldersee, as he noted, was happy to help:

He has namely the commendable intention to take action against gambling, which at present is very widespread and claiming numerous victims. In connection with these plans, disciplinary action is being taken against the Union Club, that hotbed of gambling. . . Prince Wilhelm is . . . quite the right man for the task, for he has the position needed to perform it well. The founders of the Club, [among others] the Duke of Ratibor, have been circumspect enough to have persuaded the Kaiser to be its patron, thus making it quite difficult to attack it. I have urgently advised the Prince to proceed with cunning, but urged him to take the matter up. He will hardly have a better chance of winning popularity in the widest circles than if he takes action against gambling, the Club of ill repute, and a certain clique which unfortunately represents to the world the refined society of Berlin.

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236 Röhl, Young Wilhelm, 507-509.
237 Waldersee 22 November, 1885, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 268; quoted from Röhl, Young Wilhelm, 509.
In the last few days of 1885, Waldersee believed Wilhelm was winning when the club’s president, the Duke of Ratibor, asked the prince to lift the ban and contended that officers never gambled there. Wilhelm did not believe this to be true, and also complained about the presence of Jews in the club, with whom, he maintained, German officers should not associate. The prince sent Ratibor’s letters to Waldersee, who believed that the club should be refashioned “on a somewhat different basis,” which, as John Röhl states, means without Jewish members. Waldersee believed the club was finished and that “Prince Wilhelm has done a great service.”

It remained to be seen, however, how Kaiser Wilhelm would react to his grandson’s crusade that was stirring up the court.

By January 1886, Kaiser Wilhelm had not mentioned the troubles in the Union Club, and Prince Wilhelm, who wanted some resolution of the matter, sought Waldersee’s advice. The Quartermaster-General was confident that the prince would succeed and there would be “a great improvement in the lifestyle and attitude of a significant part of our officer corps.” A week later, however, Waldersee realized success would not come easily. He had expected his friend and the Minister of War, General Bronsart von Schellendorf, to ask the Kaiser to withdraw his patronage of the Union Club, but the Head of the Military Cabinet, Emil von Albedyll, evidently prevented this and believed it was wrong for the prince to act on his own. Waldersee stood by Wilhelm:

I support the prince; nobody has dared take action against the Club because everyone immediately points to the fact that it enjoys the Kaiser’s patronage. The prince is not afraid . . . the Duke of Ratibor went to see the Kaiser several days ago, and naturally painted the prince in a highly unfavorable light . . . Now, however, the masterminds

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238 Waldersee, 27 December, 1885, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 269; Röhl, Young Wilhelm, 509. Röhl states in his footnote that the entry in Meisner’s Denkwürdigkeiten was “reproduced quite inaccurately.”

239 Röhl, Young Wilhelm, 510. From Waldersee’s journal entry of 10 January 1886 that was not reproduced in Meinser’s Denkwürdigkeiten.
behind the Club are quaking in their boots; they are attempting to stir up ill rumors about
the prince wherever possible, but yesterday they voted at the general meeting to propose
prohibiting gambling in the Club, partly in hope that bad elements will visit the Club less
frequently. This is already a great success which we owe to Prince Wilhelm alone, and
the Club is thus admitting that the attacks are justified . . . I spoke with Prince Wilhelm,
[who] is quite determined and will not back off a single step; I even believe that
opposition only makes him more energetic.240

Just as after the trip to Russia in 1884 and the Wedel Affair in 1885, Waldersee became in 1886
an even more ardent ally of the prince, who “possesses the qualities which we need in a future
Kaiser, and given his favorable development this portends well for the future.”241 Albedyll,
Waldersee wrote, “is also mistaken with regard to [Wilhelm’s] determination and self-
confidence.”242 When it came to the prince’s behavior, what Waldersee saw positively as
“determination and self-confidence,” Albedyll and others must have seen negatively as
stubbornness and arrogance.

On January 20, 1886, Wilhelm visited Waldersee before and after discussing the issue
with his grandfather, who apparently “was friendly and told him he had been somewhat
overhasty with his Union Club prohibition.”243 The next day, Waldersee met with Albedyll and
noted in his journal:

[Albedyll believes] that the Kaiser should have been spared this extremely unpleasant
matter, and in this he is certainly quite right; I merely have a different opinion as to the
cause of the affair: he considers Prince Wilhelm to be the instigator; I, on the other hand,
hold responsible the gentlemen who ran the club so improperly and scandalously abused
the Kaiser’s patronage.244

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240 Röhl, Young Wilhelm, 510; Waldersee, 17 January 1886, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 270-71.
243 Röhl, Young Wilhelm, 510; From Waldersee’s journal entry of 20 January 1886 that was not
reproduced in Meinser’s Denkwürdigkeiten.
244 Röhl, Young Wilhelm, 510-11; From Waldersee’s journal entry of 21 January 1886 that was
not reproduced in Meinser’s Denkwürdigkeiten.
Waldensee was attempting to defend the monarchy from itself, a duty that became more difficult as the affair continued. By throwing in his lot with the idealistic Prince Wilhelm the Crusader, Waldensee was in reality risking his relationship with the Kaiser and his standing at court. The affair, he wrote in his journal, produced “great unrest in the uppermost echelons of our society” and “has lent quite clear expression to the unhealthy conditions in the upper classes . . . It has revealed a quite appalling machinery of hate, envy, and baseness.” In February 1886, Waldensee rejoiced that the Kaiser had asked the Duke of Ratibor to investigate gambling in the club, but this was a Pyrrhic victory because the members of Berlin’s high society were becoming increasingly hostile to Wilhelm; Waldensee noted in his journal:

Among certain quarters, people are conspiring strongly against Prince Wilhelm; they are trying to rehash old gossip and invent new rumors [i.e. Miss Love and Countess Wedel]; their primary objective is to accuse him of marital infidelity. I think that the miserable pack will very much regret this one day. I have come to know the Prince closely through 2 years of active dealings with him, and I vouch for him unconditionally; his is a blissful marriage, and it is truly a joy to come to know his intimate family life.245

Röhl states, “it is difficult to understand how Waldensee could write of Wilhelm’s ‘blissful marriage’ and harmonious family life then of all times, when Elisabeth Wedel was still living in Charlottenburg.”246 Considering Waldensee’s developing view of, and relationship with, the prince, he was apparently willing to overlook Wilhelm’s sins in the interest of protecting the future Kaiser.

From the end of February through June 1886, the Kaiser stopped his grandson’s crusade. Although Wilhelm recognized that he had been too forceful, tensions continued, especially with Albedyll, against whom Wilhelm would hold a grudge for years. Waldensee attempted to calm

245 Röhl, Young Wilhelm, 511-12. Waldensee, 5 February 1886, Denkwürdigkeiten 1, 273-74. Also Waldensee’s journal entry of 4 and 15 February 1886 that was not reproduced in Meinser’s Denkwürdigkeiten.
246 Röhl, Young Wilhelm, 512.
the prince down, and, as the monarchist he was, warned him “quite definitely and in all seriousness, that there could be no challenging an All-Highest Order, least of all by him, and that neither Albedyll nor any other third party can be involved, and begged him not to make a stink about it.”

For Waldersee, the Kaiser’s firm stance on the issue ended it, and any appeal from Wilhelm or any ruckus he could cause threatened Waldersee’s ardently monarchist conviction. In June, Waldersee learned that the Kaiser was mad at Wilhelm, who wanted to discuss betting on horse races. Two days later, the Quartermaster-General wrote in his journal:

> I have tried to act as the intermediary in the above matter, and hope that I have managed to arrange things so that the Kaiser initially does nothing. I have written a very earnest letter to the prince, pointing out to him that nothing could be allowed to come between him and the Kaiser, and that he must therefore swallow his own pride here; he has many enemies who are very active; he can laugh at them as long as he has the support of Their Majesties. He thanked me by telegram and assured me that he was not planning to mention to the Kaiser anything about horse racing.

A few days later, neither the Union Club nor the horse racing issue was brought up in a conversation between the Kaiser and Prince Wilhelm. The crusade was over. In the aftermath of the affair, Waldersee may have been the biggest winner. Not only had Wilhelm’s campaign been able to register some success in its mission against the Union Club, but Waldersee was also able to maintain good relations with both the Kaiser and the prince. His support for Wilhelm increased their friendship, but it also brought him into conflict for the first time with Albedyll. Within the elite, Waldersee’s encouragement of Wilhelm made him an identifiable member of the prince’s entourage.

Wilhelm’s father, Crown Prince Frederick, did not like the budding friendship between his son and the Quartermaster General. In February 1886, amid the Union Club affair, Waldersee noted that the Crown Prince knew “very well that the prince had also negotiated a

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247 Röhl, Young Wilhelm, 512; Waldersee, 25 February 1886, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 275.
248 Röhl, Young Wilhelm, 514; Waldersee, 14 June 1886, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 295.
great deal with me on this matter; I believe that our relationship does not please him; he is incredibly suspicious and . . . jealous of his son.” Although the Crown Prince, in a rare move, originally supported his son’s campaign, Waldersee believed that “both he and the Crown Princess are very happy to see that Prince Wilhelm does not fully concur with the Kaiser on this matter, and [that he] is quite dejected because the Kaiser has not declared him to be absolutely in the right.”

The animosity between Wilhelm and his parents was a constant theme throughout the former’s early life. They found him to be immature, arrogant, and tactless, and sometimes the family conflicts spilled into public view, producing “scenes.” Wilhelm would often go behind his parents back and appeal to his grandfather, such as in 1884 when Wilhelm was able to avoid joining his father, as the latter wanted, on a trip to Spain. The Crown Princess, Victoria, was the eldest daughter of Queen Victoria of Great Britain and favored liberalism and constitutional monarchy. Outspoken and assertive, she became highly unpopular among the conservative elite in Berlin, who feared the influence she had over her husband and would have when he would become Kaiser. By 1884, fearing the dominance of the Crown Princess, members of the elite had already considered different plans to prevent Victoria from having any share of power. In these schemes, Wilhelm was key because he was next in line for the throne. As Friedrich von Holstein, a secretary in the Foreign Office wrote, “we want Prince Wilhelm; he’ll be a second Frederick the Great.” Bismarck played a direct role in the affairs of the House of Hohenzollern, and although he favored Wilhelm, he attempted to make peace with the Crown

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249 Röhl, Young Wilhelm, 511. From Waldersee’s journal entry of 15 February 1886 that is, according to Röhl, not reproduced properly in Meinser’s Denkwürdigkeiten.
250 Röhl, Young Wilhelm, 556-58. Waldersee noted on 2 February 1885 that Frederick depicted Wilhelm as immature and indecisive at a farewell dinner for a Guards regiments.
251 Friedrich von Holstein, journal entry for 12 April 1885; quoted in Röhl, Young Wilhelm, 563.
Princess in 1886. Wilhelm became popular in conservative circles, and Frederick feared that with their help, his son would seize power. As John Röhl notes, Waldersee was willing to carry out a coup d’état to “restore kingship to its rightful position” if Frederick and Victoria would threaten the traditional political system and the army’s privileged position.  

Walderssee did not actively and purposefully attempt to further the discord in the royal family – he actually lamented it – but his support and advice, which were colored by his disdain for Wilhelm’s parents, certainly did not improve the situation. The troubles in the Hohenzollern family had already begun when Waldersee had his first serious discussion with Wilhelm in December 1882, after which he noted that the Crown Prince and Princess were not having success training their son to be a constitutional monarch. To Waldersee, the traditional monarchist who did not admire Frederick, the Crown Prince’s views were simply incompatible with the Hohenzollern tradition in Prussia:

He is a very weak man, without firm opinions and most unclear in his goals. Unfortunately he is biased in extreme liberal ideas and does not want to accept that in these times a sovereign with such principles quickly digs his own grave. What an upheaval would arise in such a circumstance.

Walderssee lamented the poor relationship between Frederick and Prince Wilhelm, but saw that the son, unlike the father had a strong character, was uncompromising, and held firm views.

After a dinner at the New Palace in Potsdam on June 10, 1884, Waldersee noted that even Mary detected how poor the mood was there. Under the influence of his scheming, liberal wife, Walderssee stated, Crown Prince Frederick was upset that he had to continue waiting for the throne because the Kaiser was living a long life. “The intellectual superiority of his wife has

252 Röhl, Young Wilhelm, 565. From Waldersee’s journal entry of 9 April 1886 that was not reproduced properly in Meinser’s Denkwürdigkeiten
253 Waldersee, December 6, 1882, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 222-23.
254 Waldersee, November 25, 1883, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 233.
255 Waldersee, November 25, 1883, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 233.
become a great misfortune,” Waldersee wrote, “From a simple, brave, and honest prince of a good Prussian conviction, she has made a weak man, who does not have confidence in himself, who is no longer open and honest, who no longer thinks like a Prussian.” Waldersee and Prince Wilhelm were both concerned that the Crown Prince and Princess were not acting in the best interests of the German state and its national tradition. He noted that it pained the proud Prussian prince to see that his mother had not embraced her German home, but remained English in her way of life and her politics. Wilhelm “knew that she worked for English interests over Prussian and German ones,” thus saddening him deeply and making it difficult for him to restrain his “fiery temperament.” On Christmas Day 1884, Wilhelm visited Waldersee for a long time and brought along a number of notes about the English expedition against Khartoum. He observed that the prince took a strong position against England because it was “in large part a natural reaction against the efforts of his mother to make her children Anglomaniacs.”

The more Wilhelm became estranged from his own parents, the more he found a home at Herwarthstrasse 2 in the Military Staff Building. He often occupied a chair at the Waldersees’ dining table, sometimes without much warning. When the Quartermaster-General returned from Potsdam before Bismarck’s torchlight birthday parade on March 27, 1885, he told his wife and mother-in-law that Wilhelm would be joining them to eat and to watch the parade. Mary and Mrs. Lee worried that their dinner would not be fitting for the prince, but they were relieved when Wilhelm seemed to make himself at home and acted very naturally. “He seemed greatly to enjoy the absence of ceremony,” Mrs. Lee wrote, “and declared he was coming some evening to tea!” One evening in April 1885, the Waldersees were having dinner at their apartment when a servant told the Quartermaster-General that the prince was in his room. Waldersee immediately

256 Waldersee, June 10, 1884, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 239-40.
257 Waldersee, December 26, 1884, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 247.
went to retrieve Wilhelm, who helped himself to a seat at the table. In good spirits, he assured them that he had not come expecting to eat this time. Dressed in full uniform, he had just dined with his grandfather. He brought a bundle of documents to discuss with Waldersee and after dinner, they conversed for a long time in the latter’s room.\textsuperscript{258} For Waldersee’s birthday in 1886, Wilhelm sent his friend a bust of himself and his Trumpeter Corps, which performed in the Military Staff Building’s conservatory after the Waldersees had lunch with Prince Wilhelm and his wife, Augusta Victoria, who gave the general a gift of flowers.\textsuperscript{259} One day in March 1887, Wilhelm announced he was coming over for lunch – which the Waldersees called “second breakfast” – and Mrs. Lee wrote, “His liking for Alfred continues – he fancies coming to breakfast as he only sees the family and can talk more with Alfred.” Some time afterward, Alfred and Mary gave a dinner for Prince Wilhelm, who requested that, besides Mary, only officers be invited so, as Mrs. Lee stated, “he could talk more freely of [the] present state of affairs.”\textsuperscript{260}

In March 1887, the situation for Berlin’s political elite began to change drastically. Crown Prince Frederick had been experiencing a persistent hoarseness, and on March 16 a German throat specialist removed a small growth with an electric needle in the Crown Prince’s vocal cord. The procedure was repeated unsuccessfully as the growth kept recurring, and in May, a group of eminent German doctors diagnosed it as throat cancer and, with the consent of the Crown Princess, scheduled an operation. Bismarck had Dr. Morrell Mackenzie, a Scotsman who was experienced in laryngeal diseases, called in from Britain, and there began tense discussions over whether the risky operation was even necessary, especially when the Crown Prince’s life

\textsuperscript{258} Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, April 24, 1885, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume B.
\textsuperscript{259} Waldersee, 8 April, 1886, \textit{Denkwürdigkeiten} I, 288. Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, 11 June, 1886, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume B.
\textsuperscript{260} Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, March 11, 1887, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume B.
was at stake. With the ninety-year old Kaiser Wilhelm expected to die any day from his old age and with the Crown Prince Frederick’s health in question, the political elite looked to Prince Wilhelm. On May 21, Waldersee took note of this change in his journal:

> It is interesting to see that certain clever people have immediately changed their assessment of Prince Wilhelm; yesterday then grumbled about him, found him heartless, not prudent and I do not know what else, thus today he has a strong character and is much talked about for the future.

In 1886, expecting Frederick to assume the throne, Bismarck reached an understanding with the Crown Princess, but Waldersee did not believe it would last because, he noted, she hated both the Chancellor and her son. “The only way a reconciliation is possible,” he wrote, “is that the Chancellor would have to abandon Prince Wilhelm, but I hardly believe he will do this.”

With the increased possibility of the Crown Prince’s death in May 1887, Waldersee observed that the Chancellor “stood before a completely new constellation” and had to reattach himself to the prince. In a foreshadowing of the future relationship between Bismarck and Prince Wilhelm, Waldersee wrote, “According to my conviction, [the Bismarck-Wilhelm alliance] is not feasible. The lively and ambitious twenty-eight year old prince and the seventy-two year old Chancellor!”

In the midst of the Crown Prince’s failing health and the shifting political situation in Berlin, Waldersee was increasingly at Wilhelm’s side. Early in the morning of May 22, Wilhelm stopped at the Military Staff Building to ask Waldersee where Dr. Ernst von Bergmann lived. One of Germany’s leading surgeons, Bergmann was also the director of the Medical School of the University of Berlin and had advised an immediate operation for the Crown Prince. Wilhelm

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262 Waldersee, 21 May, 1887, *Denkwürdigkeiten I*, 327.
264 Waldersee, 23 May, 1887, *Denkwürdigkeiten I*, 327.
took Waldersee with him to the Bergmann residence, and after he concluded his private visit with the doctor, told Waldersee that Bergmann believed his father’s sickness was serious and at best he would lose his voice; at worst, “a deadly exit” (einen tödlichen Ausgang) was possible.265

On the evening of June 5, Waldersee was at the Marble Palace (Marmorpalais), the late-eighteenth-century home of Prince and Princess Wilhelm on the shore of the Holy Lake (Heiliger See) in Potsdam. Walking alone with her husband’s confidant, Augusta Victoria expressed her fear that Prince Wilhelm was still too young to become Kaiser. He assured her that on the whole, his good qualities would outshine his occasional expressions of “youthful haste.”266 In March 1888, as the crisis worsened, she would implore Waldersee to come often and “to stand at the prince’s side with advice.”267

On Monday November 5, Wilhelm arrived at the Military Staff Building around 11 o’clock. He told Waldersee that there was now new swelling further down his father’s throat and that his grandfather ordered him to find out the truth about his father’s condition at San Remo, Italy on the Mediterranean coast, where the Crown Prince was sent so the climate could aid his health. Waldersee did not believe William could help the situation and worried that if he tried to dismiss Dr. Mackenzie, he would instigate a scene with his mother that would only cause more anxiety for his father.268 On Sunday November 13, Mary and Alfred went to church where prayers were offered beseeching God to help the Crown Prince. Early the next day, Wilhelm returned to Berlin, and after speaking with the Kaiser, Count Stolberg, and Albedyll, arrived at Herwarthstrasse 2 around noon to report the latest news. “The condition of the Crown Prince is

265 Waldersee, 22 May, 1887, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 327.
266 Waldersee, 6 June, 1887, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 328.
268 Waldersee, 7 November 1888, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 331-32. Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, November 5, 1887, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume B.
hopeless,” Waldersee wrote, “He should know the full truth and await death as a hero.”

Although Wilhelm “was full of admiration for his father,” Waldersee noted, he told his confidant that his mother “has treated me as a dog.”

“Prince Wilhelm has been here three times this week,” Mrs. Lee wrote to her cousin, “He has his father’s duties to attend to, is very busy, and seems to look on Alfred as his right hand man – the liking is mutual. I think Alfred is fond of him.”

On one mid-December day in 1887, Wilhelm sent word to the Waldersees that he was coming over to join them at their midday meal. Mary decided to serve leftovers from a large dinner they had hosted the night before. “I told her he would think her lunch better than his own and was likely to come soon again!” Mrs. Lee wrote to her cousin. At one o’clock, Wilhelm arrived with an aide de camp, and they joined the Waldersees at the table. “The prince was very pleasant and seemed to feel quite at home,” Mrs. Lee wrote.

Herwarthstrasse 2 had become Prince Wilhelm’s home, and Alfred von Waldersee his sympathetic confidant, dedicated friend, loyal advisor, and, above all, father figure. The shared experiences of the trip to Russia in 1884, the Wedel Affair in 1885, the Union Club crusade in 1885-86, and the persistent troubles in the Hohenzollern family nurtured the Wilhelm-Waldersee relationship that had been planted at their first meeting in 1882; their similar worldviews and soldierly attitudes provided common roots. This relationship would continue to grow in the imperial capital where the Kaiser was quickly aging, the Crown Prince was slowly dying, and the young prince was a bright hope to some and a worrisome concern to others in the political and social elite. By 1887, Bismarck became alarmed.

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269 Waldersee, 14 November, 1887, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 332-33.
270 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, November 5, 1887, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume B.
271 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, December 20, 1887, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume B.
by Prince Wilhelm’s desire for preventive war and by the influence Waldersee had over him.

Although this development troubled the Chancellor, who struggled to maintain peace in Europe, the relationship between Waldersee and Wilhelm became a serious issue for him when, at Herwarthstrasse 2, the prince appeared to support an institution founded by the anti-Semitic Court Preacher and founder of the Christian Social Party, Adolf Stoecker.

**Christian Philanthropy and Anti-Semitism**

On February 3, 1882, while Count Alfred von Waldersee was settling into his new position and home, Adolf Stoecker, Court Preacher and founder of the Christian Social party, spoke before a gathering of his party at Berlin’s *Tonhalle*. In his speech, titled “The Jews in Public Life, a Danger for the German Empire,” Stoecker addressed the Jewish Question:

> We interpret the Jewish Question not as a religious or even a racial question; even though it is rooted in both, however, it appears in expressed form as a social-ethical one . . . We want to solve the Jewish Question not in a radical, violent way, but gradually in a quiet, peaceful one . . . We do not hate the Jews, but we hate with our whole soul their system as a corrupting influence on our German-Christian folklore. We allow the Jews to live among us, to earn their bread in an honest manner, to become prosperous and enrich themselves, we are tolerant children of the nineteenth century, but we do not let the Jews exploit and master us. (lively applause) When the Jews have only sought their existence among the peoples, lived their religious customs, and not disturbed the native population, there would be no Jewish Question. Jews do not want, however, to merely exist, they want to rule – attack our best goods, Christian religion, Church, German culture, and German nature – but not be embarrassed . . . We will continue in the struggle against the overgrowth of this Jewishness, until it is put in the corner of public life where it belongs. (lively applause and amusement)²⁷²


In the early decades of the German Empire, Adolf Stoecker was one of the founders of a new kind of anti-Semitism that was political, racial, and vehement. In 1874, the 39 year-old
pastor became one of Kaiser Wilhelm’s Court Preachers. By 1879, he had founded his own political party, and been elected to the Prussian parliament, where he proclaimed the Jews to be “leeches,” “parasites,” and “an alien drop in our blood.”

In 1881, Stoecker named his party the Christian Social Party and was elected to the Reichstag. By the late nineteenth century, industrialization had produced a large and generally impoverished industrial working class. Laborers were turning increasingly toward socialism, a movement that advocated the overthrow of capitalism and the political order. To oppose this, Stoecker sought to initiate a religious revival that would promote German Protestantism and loyalty to the monarchy. In this effort, Stoecker found a scapegoat in the Jews, who were well represented in business and left-wing parties. Although he was a popular and passionate speaker, the Christian Social Party never received a significant number of votes.

Alfred von Waldersee established an association with Adolf Stoecker in 1885 that would become controversial and make Waldersee a public figure by the end of 1887. Historians have often associated Waldersee with the anti-Semitic Court Preacher and political leader, but it is worth examining how the Stoecker-Waldersee relationship developed and what effect it had on Waldersee’s anti-Semitism. This section will examine these two issues along with the related topics of Waldersee’s anti-Catholicism, his social and religious views, and Mary’s philanthropy. As an orthodox Protestant, Prussian general, and ardent monarchist, Waldersee viewed Catholics, Socialists, and Jews as threats to the German Empire.

According to the published entries of his journals, Waldersee was an ardent anti-Catholic in the 1870s and early 1880s. He had an irrational fear of the Catholic Church’s supposed power in Germany and believed German Catholics were more loyal to Rome than Berlin. On January 9,

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1885, he believed that a “bold agitation” from Catholics was underway through a planned conversion campaign. “The ultimate goal of the Jesuit-ruled Church is naturally to smash Germany first, then Prussia. We have enemies everywhere, and the Church tries to unite them against us,” he opined in his journal.\(^\text{274}\) On October 15, 1885, he wrote that of all of Germany’s enemies, the worst were “above all Catholics.”\(^\text{275}\) Waldersee’s delusions about Catholics would be matched then surpassed by his absurd views of Jews, with whom he would replace Catholics as Germany’s greatest enemy in late 1887. Interestingly, General Walter von Loë was Catholic, but, as Waldersee wrote about his friend in 1885, “Loë is a sensible (vernünftiger) Catholic, an absolutely reliable man, and loyally devoted to the royal house.”\(^\text{276}\)

By the late 1870s, Bismarck was calling off the *Kulturkampf*, which he had begun in the 1870s to suppress the Catholic Church in Germany. This campaign had given rise to the German Center Party, the main Catholic political organization that since the 1870s had developed and gained strength as a result of Bismarck’s anti-Catholic laws. Recognizing the growing threat of the Socialist Party, Bismarck needed the Center Party’s support. Waldersee believed this party was composed of “hypocritical blackguards without a Fatherland, intent on the collapse of Germany and the destruction of Prussia.”\(^\text{277}\) He was, however, glad the *Kulturkampf* was over because he believed that Germany now had one less enemy to worry about, but he remained skeptical, regarding Catholic leaders as too fanatical.\(^\text{278}\)

With the complete end of the *Kulturkampf* in 1887, Waldersee noted that Protestant circles were concerned about the future, and he bemoaned the fact that Bismarck refused to

\(^{274}\) Waldersee, January 9, 1885, *Denkwürdigkeiten* I, 248.
\(^{275}\) Waldersee, October 15, 1885, *Denkwürdigkeiten* I, 263.
\(^{276}\) Waldersee, January 17, 1885, *Denkwürdigkeiten* I, 249.
\(^{277}\) Waldersee, December 20, 1886, not in *Denkwürdigkeiten*; quoted in Röhl, *The Kaiser and His Court*, 200-201.
promote the Protestant Church and make it independent, the only way, he believed, to create a “dam” against Catholicism. “There is worry that Bismarck might convert Prince Wilhelm to his ideas,” Waldersee wrote and then noted, “It has been a long time since I have had a serious discussion with the Prince. I now want to find an opportunity to talk to him.”\textsuperscript{279} He was glad the Kulturkampf was over for the Kaiser’s sake – because the monarch never fully supported it – but he believed that “not many years will pass before the Protestant Church is forced to take up the battle again in order to save its own skin. I only hope that Prince Wilhelm’s heart remains true to our Church and that he conducts the battle with a strong arm and a sharp mind.”\textsuperscript{280}

With his concerns for the well-being of Protestant Prussia and its monarchy, Waldersee must have found appealing Adolf Stoecker’s social and religious movement to turn the working class away from atheistic socialism. In February 1886, Waldersee noted that “the social specter begins to become dangerous.”\textsuperscript{281} The next month, he opined that working class agitation in Belgium provided a window on the present time and the future. “Currently the glow of fire shines from burning factories and palaces from Belgium over our border,” Waldersee wrote, “this should be a serious warning.” He believed that ending universal suffrage was not only “naturally a measure of enormous importance,” but also inevitable because “everywhere the masses are on the move, everything drives rebellion against authority, the negation of all religion, and the generation of hatred and envy against the wealthy.”\textsuperscript{282} He did not put much faith in

\textsuperscript{279} Röhl, \textit{Young Wilhelm}, 718; Waldersee, April 6, 1887, \textit{Denkwürdigkeiten} I, 322-323.
\textsuperscript{280} Röhl, \textit{Young Wilhelm}, 718; Waldersee, April 30, 1887, \textit{Denkwürdigkeiten} I, 324.
\textsuperscript{281} Waldersee, February 15, 1886, \textit{Denkwürdigkeiten} I, 275. “Das soziale Gespenst fängt an bedrohlich zu werden”; Röhl, \textit{The Kaiser and His Court}, 200: “the ghost of socialism is beginning to show a very earnest face.”
\textsuperscript{282} Waldersee, March 25, 1886, \textit{Denkwürdigkeiten} I, 286. Röhl cites this entry as March 27, 1886. He quotes the last statement in \textit{The Kaiser and His Court}, 200 but does not provide the context of the troubles in Belgium; also, Waldersee is concerned here about the social question and suffrage because of the collapse of the ‘spirits monopoly’ and the need for a new tax project.
“laws for bettering the material lives of the lower classes” because “men can never be satisfied with their lot on earth”; they should find peace and happiness in God and religion. His mother-in-law shared his sentiments. “I know not what the world is coming to – sects are rising – satisfied with nothing,” Mrs. Lee wrote after an anarchist shot and wounded the Kaiser on March 11, 1878, “I suppose you’ve heard of that execrable [radical sect] now rife in Russia and I’m saddened to hear communism is getting the upper hand in America, but with it we have the solace that God rules over all.” After another failed assassination attempt that June, Waldersee wrote that because the shooter said he was a Social Democrat, it was “the holy duty of all men who have influence” to take action against “malicious elements.” To Waldersee, God, king, and order were the foundation of the German Empire.

Although Stoecker’s advocacy of Protestantism and monarchism were not controversial in Berlin, his brand of racial and political anti-Semitism was – especially at court. Crown Prince Frederick and Crown Princess Victoria, who associated with liberals and Jews, were not afraid to vocalize and show their contempt for the rabid anti-Semites, such as Stoecker, who were also opposed to liberalism. In early 1880, the Crown Prince participated in a service at Berlin’s synagogue in full military uniform, and a few days later publicly condemned anti-Semitism as a “shameful blot on our time.” Before the first debate on the Jewish Question in the Prussian parliament, he and Victoria attended a concert at the synagogue in Wiesbaden “to demonstrate as clearly as we can what our convictions are.” In a private letter, the Crown Prince wrote that he and his wife “are ashamed of the Judenhetze (Jew-baiting) which has broken all bounds of

283 Waldersee, October 27, 1889, Denkwürdigkeiten II, 74-75.
284 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, May 14, 1878, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume A.
285 Waldersee, June 3, 1878, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 177.
decency in Berlin but which seems to flourish under the protection of the court clerics.”286 As John Röhl states, the Crown Prince and Princess’s public support for Jews “only fuelled the growing conviction” in reactionary and “chauvinistic” circles “that the Crown Prince and his liberal English wife were an alien, un-German force that must not be allowed to accede to throne.”287 To the monarchist and anti-liberal Stoecker – and to Waldersee – the Kaiser’s support was more important than the Crown Princes and Princess’s.

In 1880, Stoecker wrote to the Kaiser asking for his full, public backing, stating, “In the eyes of the friends of the Fatherland it is clear that in Berlin the Jewish and Christian spirit are fighting one another for domination; them or us – that is the battle cry.”288 Unlike his son and successor, Kaiser Wilhelm was an anti-Semite and tacitly supported Stoecker by neither dismissing him nor interfering with his political activities. In 1885, however, the anti-Semitic preacher became an embarrassment to the court when he was sued by a Jewish newspaper editor for libel and found guilty. At the end of July 1885, after learning that the Kaiser wanted him to resign, Stoecker wrote to his sovereign that his departure would give victory to atheist and democratic forces, which are concurrently “the enemies of Christendom and Monarchy.”289 On August 4, the Kaiser asked directly for his Court Preacher’s resignation by the end of November at the latest, but the next day Prince Wilhelm protested in a letter to his grandfather:

From all sides, from far and near, I am receiving letters with the question ‘Does the Kaiser know what is going on? Does he realize what the score is? How the Jews – and behind them the Socialists and the Progressives – are trying everything to get Stoecker sacked?’ One even says the Jews have tried to secure friends in court circles in order to work on you against Stoecker! . . . Stoecker – for all his mistakes – is the most powerful pillar, the bravest, most fearless fighter for Your Monarchy and Your Throne among the

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286 Crown Prince Frederick to Baron Ernst von Stockmar, November 18, 1880; quoted in Röhl, The Kaiser and His Court, 198.
287 Röhl, The Kaiser and His Court, 199.
288 Stoecker to Kaiser Wilhelm I, September 23, 1880; quoted in Röhl, Young Wilhelm, 407.
289 Stoecker to Kaiser Wilhelm I, July 31, 1885; quoted in Röhl, Young Wilhelm, 414.
people! . . . He has personally and alone won over 60,000 workers for you and your power from the Jewish Progressives and Social Democrats! in Berlin! . . . O dear Grosspapa, it is disgusting to observe how in our Christian-German, good Prussian land the Judenthum [Jews], twisting and corrupting everything, has the cheek to attack such men and in the most shameless, insolent way to seek their downfall.290

The Kaiser changed his mind. Stoecker wrote to his wife, “The letter from Prince Wilhelm certainly must have made an impression.”291

In The Kaiser and His Court, John Röhl stated that “it is not difficult to discern in this letter the influence of Wilhelm’s Ersatzvater (father figure) Count Waldersee,” and in his more recent work on Wilhelm II, Röhl claims that Waldersee – and Prince’s Wilhelm’s orthodox, anti-Semitic wife – would have eventually introduced the Hohenzollern prince to Stoecker’s brand of anti-Semitism.292 From 1880 to 1883, however, the prince and Court Preacher not only met, but also had private discussions on a number of occasions.293 In these encounters, Stoecker, who was then also very active in Berlin, must have certainly influenced Prince Wilhelm’s anti-Semitism. The language Wilhelm used to defend Stoecker in his letter to the Kaiser appears very much like the Court Preacher’s.

Before considering how Stoecker influenced Waldersee’s anti-Semitism, the question of how the general came to develop an association with the Court Preacher needs to be answered. According to sources, Waldersee appears to have developed a relationship with Stoecker through

290 Prince Wilhelm to Wilhelm I, August 5, 1885; quoted in Röhl, Young Wilhelm, 415.
291 Röhl, Young Wilhelm, 415.
292 Röhl, The Kaiser and His Court, 200; Röhl, Young Wilhelm, 413. “In a Berlin in which the ‘Christian-Social’ anti-Semitism promulgated by Court Preacher Stoecker was creating ever greater waves, such naive religious notions formed the seed-bed in which a poisonous mushroom could easily grow. Under the influence of his orthodox, anti-Semitic wife, as well as that of General von Waldersee, this was all too soon to happen.”
293 Röhl, Young Wilhelm, 413. Stoecker’s “own letters to his wife show that he met the Prince more frequently, and that Stoecker also had close contact with Dona [i.e. Princess Wilhelm] through Mirbach, her bigoted chamberlain.” In 1883, Stoecker wrote, “Yesterday I was at the Prince’s, again until midnight; it was enjoyable, we were alone the two of us.”
Mary’s philanthropy. The countess had been very active in charitable organizations during her time in Hannover and soon after she arrived in Berlin, the Empress gave her a tour of the Augusta Hospital and made her a member of its governing committee. On January 16, 1884, at the request of the Empress, the Kaiser sent Mary the Order of Louise in recognition for her charitable work. By the end of 1886 she was quite active in the German capital. “Mary keeps up her good work in this Berlin – though at Christmas time I thought it would be too much for her,” Mrs. Lee wrote to her cousin, “Christ said ‘the poor ye have always with you’ – Oh how true! – In spite of all effort they increase yearly.”

Mary’s desire to help the poor and needy out of her religious convictions and her connections to the royal family – she was Princess Wilhelm’s aunt through her first marriage – undoubtedly led her to Court Preacher Adolf Stoecker and his City Mission, which, Martin Kitchen states, would lead “the working class away from the Social Democrats with a bowl of soup and a Bible.” On February 5, 1885, Princess Wilhelm headed the opening of a bazaar for the City Mission, with which Mary assisted; Waldersee also attended. Two months later, on the evening of April 30, 1885, Mary had a group of thirty ladies over at Herwarthstrasse 2 to sew for the poor. A pastor and several gentlemen, who Mrs. Lee did not identify, were interested in her sewing society and also attended. After tea was served, they all sang while Mary played the harmonium. Stoecker led a prayer and then read from a bible that the Waldersees received on their wedding day. After he explained the sixteen verses he read from Chapter 26 of the Gospel of Matthew – Judas’s betrayal – the Court Preacher made, Mrs. Lee wrote, “an interesting

294 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, April 24, 1882, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume B.
295 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, January 18, 1884, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume B.
296 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, January 3, 1886, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume B.
298 Waldersee, February 5, 1885, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 251.
address,” and the group finished the service in song.²⁹⁹ Although Stoecker and Waldersee may have met at court, these two events in early 1885 must have provided opportunities for the two men to know each other better.

In May 1885, Mrs. Lee sent her cousin one of Stoecker’s mass-printed sermons so she could “know of the effort Court Preacher Stoecker makes to disseminate Christianity.” After receiving an invitation, Mary went for the first time to the Lazarus Hospital for a celebration of its anniversary. “It is a real charity – taking in ‘incurables’ – men, women, or children, which other hospitals decline to do,” Mrs. Lee wrote, “no end of ‘sisters’ are attached who devote themselves to taking care of the sick and bestowing on them all the comfort possible.” Mary took her mother along with her, but because the religious service was to be in German – “all Greek for me” – she decided to go home, where she wrote to her cousin. “Later Mary told me she found the services very interesting,” Mrs. Lee noted, “Pastor Stoecker preached the sermon – excellent and appropriate – and she was glad she went.”³⁰⁰

Beginning in 1886, some officials, which would include Waldersee, asked Prince and Princess Wilhelm to chair events to support the City Mission, but war scares and the Crown Prince’s illness caused delays.³⁰¹ On March 1, 1887, Waldersee hosted a meeting at Herwarthstrasse 2 that was chaired by Prince Wilhelm. The count noted that they had to postpone their plan until the next winter, though they wanted to stay together as a committee. They wanted to hold a Riding Festival (Reiterfest) to benefit the City Mission.³⁰² When the Waldersees lived in Hanover – and were important socialites there – they decided in the beginning of 1880 that instead of throwing their traditional, yearly ball, they would donate the

²⁹⁹ Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, April 24, 1885, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume B.
³⁰⁰ Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, May 12, 1885, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume B.
³⁰¹ Röhl, Young Wilhelm, 718.
³⁰² Waldersee, March 1, 1887, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 318.
money to the poor of Hanover, where there was much unemployment that winter. The military
officers stationed there decided to throw a Riding Festival and put Waldersee in charge of
carrying out. The festival was an elaborate affair, for which nobles traveled from Berlin to
attend. The city provided a large building that was decorated with evergreens and flags, filled
with the music of a 100-piece military band, and illuminated with electric light. For four
evenings, soldiers on foot and horseback paraded inside the building, costumed as Roman
 legionnaires, Crusaders, and troops from other eras; there was also a “hunting scene,” in which
dogs leapt over hedges. The event raised 15,000 marks for the poor.303

Certainly, the success of the 1880 Riding Festival in Hanover provided the blueprint for
the Riding Festival that Waldersee wanted to hold sometime in 1887-88 for the benefit of the
City Mission. Of course, the circumstances were now different. The festival would be held in
Berlin and would thus have to be an even more elaborate affair, but it would also aid the City
Mission, which, given Stoecker’s reputation at court and in Berlin, would undoubtedly be
controversial. Knowing that it would cause divisiveness perhaps is the reason the committee that
assembled at Herwarthstrasse 2 on March 1 decided to postpone it. Waldersee pressed forward,
however, with encouraging Wilhelm to patronize the City Mission. In April, he wrote to
William that he had spoken with Herr von Wilmowski, the Head of the Civil Cabinet about the
City Mission. “To my delight, it transpired that [he] is an enthusiastic admirer of the Mission
and its goals,” Waldersee wrote, “he was much taken with the idea that Your Royal Highness
should become its patron, and he will certainly, should Your Royal Highness enlist him as an

303 Anne Lee to Lizzie, March 1, 1880, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume A. The
Kaiser’s nephew and commander of the 10th Army Corps, Prince Albrecht of Prussia followed
the Waldensees’ lead and at his ball served only light refreshments and sent the cost of a full sit-
down dinner for poor relief. The festival’s great success encouraged Mary to lead an effort to
hold a concert for the poor, which raised 1,400 marks. Mrs. Lee noted that her daughter was
very happy and wrote, “I can say with truth she never tires in efforts for the poor.”
intermediary, speak in support of the matter to His Majesty the Kaiser and King.” After May 1887, when the Crown Prince was diagnosed with cancer, the volatile, shifting political situation in Berlin became a dangerous environment for Waldersee to pursue Wilhelm’s patronage for an institution founded by someone who was already controversial in more politically stable times. Waldersee failed to see the controversy he was about to unleash inadvertently.

On Monday November 7, 1887, Mrs. Lee wrote to her cousin about the day’s activities at Herwarthstrasse 2:

Mary’s sewing society for City Mission surrounded [the] long table in [the] dining room. Dr. Stoecker, one of the Court Preachers, read to them the report of the year. At the other end of [the] apartment is Alfred’s room. He was there alone, but soon [was] surprised by Prince Wilhelm coming in, who said he had come to lunch. We don’t have that meal as ‘second breakfast’ is often after 11. The dining room could not be had so Alfred ordered lunch got up in his room for [the] prince and himself. When that was over several gentlemen came by appointment to arrange with Alfred a fair for [the] City Mission. [The] prince stayed and assisted at this Committee. I have gone into this detail for the sake of the sequel. The prince really came to tell Alfred bad news had come from his father at San Remo – another swelling had come lower down in [the] throat.

On November 28, about forty individuals arrived at the Waldsees’ apartment in the Military Staff Building for a meeting, officially called together by Prince and Princess Wilhelm, to discuss fundraising for the City Mission. Most of the attendees were Protestant conservatives, and a number of them held high-ranking positions: Prussian Minister of the Interior Robert von Puttkamer, Prussian Minister of Ecclesiastical, Educational, and Medical Affairs Gustav von Gossler, Chief of His Majesty’s Civil Cabinet Baron Karl von Wilmowski, Acting Minister of the Royal Household Count Otto zu Stolberg-Wernigerode, and of course Prince and Princess Wilhelm and Court Preacher Adolf Stoecker. There were two representatives of the press: Pastor Heinrich Englel, editor of the Protestant, conservative Reichsbote, and Baron Wilhelm von

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304 Waldersee to Prince Wilhelm, April 12, 1887; quoted in Röhl, Young Wilhelm, 719.
305 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, November 5, 1887, HH, Von Waldsee-Lee Collection, Volume B.
Hammerstein-Schwartow, editor of the conservative *Kreuzzeitung* and a member of the Conservative Party in the Prussian parliament and Reichstag. Some important people were invited, but did not attend: Superior Court Chaplain Rudolf Kögel, Chief of His Majesty’s Military Cabinet, Emil von Albedyll, and the leader of the National Liberal Party, Johannes Miquel.\(^{306}\)

Waldsee stood up to address the gathering:

[He] pointed out that representatives of all parts of Germany and all religious and political points of view had been invited because the city of Berlin, where the shortage of churches and the need for religious work were so great, was made up of people from all parts of Germany. The City Mission, he said, represented ‘absolutely no definite political viewpoint, belonged to no political party, but its only norm is loyalty to the king and the cultivation of patriotism.’ The only effective means of combating the anarchistic, revolutionary tendencies threatening the state, he stressed, was spiritual care, which should be accompanied by material support in poverty and sickness. Only thus could a person be made to be ‘satisfied with his lot.’\(^{307}\)

Prince Wilhelm then spoke to the group:

As against the revolutionary tendencies of an anarchistic and irreligious party [the Marxist Social Democrats] the most effective protection of throne and altar must be sought in leading the irreligious masses back to Christianity and the church and thus to recognition of legal authority and love for the monarchy. The Christian-socialist idea must therefore be given greater consideration with more emphasis than previously.\(^{308}\)

After some other speeches, the group organized a committee to coordinate fundraising efforts. Later that day, Waldsee reflected in his journal on the meeting, which, he wrote, “went very well and is, I believe, of far-reaching significance, since Prince Wilhelm thereby not only took up a firm Christian standpoint, but also advocated it.”\(^{309}\)

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\(^{307}\) Nichols, *The Year of the Three Kaisers*, 33.

\(^{308}\) Nichols, *The Year of the Three Kaisers*, 33.

Waldersee and the conservative group, J. Alden Nichols states, “probably had not intended the Stoecker meeting to be a public demonstration but merely wanted quietly to establish a sort of right-wing beachhead among influential circles and with Prince Wilhelm in preparation for future developments.”\textsuperscript{310} Like the other meetings for the City Mission mentioned above, this one on November 28, 1887 appears not to have been intended to be a public political stand or an attempt for Protestant conservatives to gain control of Prince Wilhelm. Given what has been shown about Waldersee’s relationship to Wilhelm, to Stoecker, and to Mary and her philanthropy, his consistent belief in monarchy, and his growing fear of the social threat, Waldersee had the sincere intention to raise money for the City Mission, despite the institution being founded by a vocal anti-Semite. He was not looking to gain control of Prince Wilhelm because of his father’s illness; he had already been encouraging Wilhelm to take a role in the City Mission before the seriousness of the Crown Prince’s condition became known. Regardless of Waldersee’s intentions, the meeting would initiate what has become known as the Stoecker Affair.

Before discussing the significance of the Stoecker Affair, there remains the question of Stoecker’s influence on Waldersee’s anti-Semitism. As an orthodox Protestant and Prussian officer, there is little doubt Waldersee was a traditional Christian anti-Semite in the early 1880s, but according to the Denkwürdigkeiten and Röhl’s research, Waldersee made no statement about Jews before 1887. Given the available source materials, there is very little that explicitly demonstrates that Waldersee heard Stoecker’s anti-Semitic ranting and adopted the new brand of anti-Semitism before the Stoecker Affair. Until more conclusive research can be conducted, it can only be assumed that the vocally anti-Semitic Stoecker did have an effect on Waldersee’s

\textsuperscript{310} Nichols, \textit{The Year of the Three Kaisers}, 33.
anti-Semitism before late 1887. Currently, the only evidence comes from a letter Waldersee
wrote to Prince Wilhelm a week before the meeting at Herwarthstrasse 2:

All those who, under the first impression of the news from San Remo, saw themselves
seriously threatened are now starting to think more calmly and are plotting their defense. They are all the Progressives and their supporters, the entire Judenschaft, and a large
number of foreign countries. That is to say, taken together formidable foes, especially as
they are prepared to stoop to any means. In view of the colossal influence which the Jews [die Judenschaft] wield by virtue of their wealth, through which they have secured
the services of Christians in influential positions, even though they themselves are few in
number, they are by far the most dangerous of our enemies.\footnote{Waldersee to Prince Wilhelm, November 21, 1887; quoted in Röhl, \textit{Young Wilhelm}, 719. There is also a shorter quote in Röhl, \textit{The Kaiser and His Court}, 201. Waldersee also noted, \textit{“on the news that His Imperial Highness the Crown Prince was seriously ill, the French press immediately went over to attacks on Your Royal Highness.”}}

His use of the term \textit{Judenschaft}, his emphasis on the perceived disproportionate influence of
Jews, and his calling them the greatest of Germany’s enemies point toward Stoecker’s influence
on Waldersee’s anti-Semitism.

According to the \textit{Denkwürdigkeiten} and Röhl’s research, it is largely after the meeting at
Herwarthstrasse 2 began the Stoecker Affair, that Waldersee makes anti-Semitic statements in
his journal that reflect Stoecker’s influence. Two weeks after the gathering, the liberal elite and
the press saw Prince Wilhelm’s participation in the City Mission as scandalous. “These people
are all myopic,” Waldersee wrote on December 15, “The prince in no way intends to get
involved in politics; he wants to get people from a very broad spectrum of parties interested in
the City Mission and thus to take the latter out of the hands of the orthodox clique and put it on a
broader Protestant footing.” He added that Stoecker “must retreat a little into the wings.”

Waldersee believed discussing his and Prince Wilhelm’s intentions was fruitless because “too
many people are under the influence of the Jews,” yet he also then states, “there has not been any
talk of this race from the start, and yet they are the ones making a real hullabaloo and kicking up
a fuss in the domestic and foreign press.”312 The resulting attacks on Waldersee in the liberal newspapers furthered and appear to have fed his hatred of Jews (See “The Stoecker Affair”).

His belief that the Catholic Church and Jews posed serious threats to the Prusso-German monarchy was completely irrational and unfounded. Anti-Semitism, however, did not appear to play a direct role in Waldersee’s interest in the City Mission and his effort to get Prince Wilhelm involved in the institution. He was motivated by a desire to combat socialism in the interest of defending the monarchy and the socio-economic order of the empire. Mary’s philanthropy brought him into serious contact with Stoecker and this connection would lead to a controversy that would make Waldersee a public figure by the beginning of 1888.

December 1887 was the threshold of a new chapter in Waldersee’s life. His relationship with Mary was strong, and they were active and popular participants in the social life of the elite in the imperial German capital. Waldersee had become a leading voice in the General Staff and trusted greatly by its aging Chief of Staff. Amid the turmoil in the Balkans and the fear of a diplomatic dilemma in Europe, Waldersee’s advocacy for war, grounded in the foreign military threats he perceived, had annoyed Bismarck, but did not cause any true enmity between the two men. Prince Wilhelm discovered a friend and father figure in the Quartermaster-General, who found in the young Hohenzollern the hope for a promising future for the empire, grounded in its Christian and Prussian monarchist traditions. Waldersee’s attempt to get Prince Wilhelm to patronize a philanthropic institution founded by Stoecker caused the liberal and progressive political parties to become alarmed at the perceived reactionary influence over the future Kaiser, a fear heightened by Crown Prince Frederick, for whom death was imminent.

Not only in the exclusive world of the elite, but also in the general public – through the press – Waldersee became identified with Prince Wilhelm, Stoecker, ardent anti-Semitism, and reactionary conservatism by the end of 1887. His firm belief in traditional Prussian monarchism influenced his actions, and he was not able to comprehend fully the complex, fluctuating power dynamics at court and in the government. “Unfortunately he wholly lacked the ability to assess his own limitations or to see himself from the outside,” writes Walter Goerlitz, “This was a pity, for despite his charm, his very naiveté sometimes made him mildly ridiculous.”313 In the next several years, Waldersee’s star would continue to rise, but he would be confronted with the realities of a new era and a changed monarchy.

313 Goerlitz, History of the German General Staff, 105.
Part II: A Transformational Time, 1888-1891

On an average morning during late 1888, within the walls of Herwarthstrasse 2, the Waldnersees would have been going about their normal routine. After eating an egg or two, Alfred von Waldnersee, who by this time had succeeded Helmuth von Moltke as Chief of Staff, would have then gone to his office to coordinate military planning or to the palace to see Kaiser Wilhelm II to discuss political matters. After breakfasting on some citrus fruit, Mary would have gone to assist one of the charitable institutions with which she was involved. Mrs. Lee, while enjoying her daily coffee and bread, would have probably been writing to her cousin, telling her about the things she saw both inside and outside the Military Staff Building.¹ On that same given morning hundreds of miles away in Paris, a French newspaper reader would have perhaps come across the title, “Le Général Waldersee” and read an illuminating article that gave a rare glimpse into the world of the German General Staff:

We find in the New York Herald the interesting report of a visit to General Waldersee, the personal confidant of Kaiser Wilhelm and the successor of Marshal von Moltke in the management of the great German General Staff. It is in a Moorish edifice constructed of dark red stone . . . that the great General Staff is lodged. No sentry; no functionaries pace up and down before this palace that shelters the most advanced military machine that the human spirit has ever organized. A concierge takes the card of visitors and one ascends two floors to arrive at the office of the great chief, the general Count Waldersee.

The walls of the staircase and the antechamber are garnished with . . . ancient halberds, old swords from Brandenburg, there next to foreign armor, lances, and Japanese sabers. The stairs are full of the comings and goings of young officers in full uniform . . . who are coming to report. In the antechamber . . . after a few minutes of waiting, [the visitor] is found in the presence of Count Waldersee.

The successor of Marshal von Moltke is a man of average size, a little older than 50. The hair is very thick, but with the whiteness of snow. His eyes are clear and placid, but his look is of an unusual fixedness. When the Count speaks, it is slow, and each word is pronounced clearly and vigorously. The attitude of the man, the manners, the voice and the gestures, or rather the complete absence of gestures, give an impression of cold

¹ Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, June 20, 1883, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume B.
determination that nothing would disturb. The general’s office, of average size, is very simply furnished.

The Count, in full uniform, but without his sword, wears braids of gold and silver which indicate his rank of General of Cavalry, and the red bands on his trousers of an officer of the General Staff.

The long, low table where he works is covered with maps published by the department of which he is the great chief. A vast library, placed behind the armchair of the count, contains the principal works on history of the art of war and the complete reports of the Prussia General Staff on the campaigns of 1864, 1866, and 1870-71.

“The count,” says the American journalist, “points me to a seat and asks me the purpose of my visit: I respond that the newspapers have declared that he considered war as inevitable, and that in his opinion, it would be better for it to break out.”

“In one corner of the office, supported by a thin pedestal of iron, a bronze bust of Marshal von Moltke appears suspended in the air. The general contemplates for a few minutes, then, without hurry, without the slightest excitement, expresses himself thus:

“To say I desire war is absurd. I only wish one thing: that our enemies renounce completely the idea of attacking us. I know too well what war is and am convinced that it is my duty as an honest man to wish that it be used only as a last resort, as much in the interests of my Fatherland as in the interests of the entire world.”

Count Waldersee added: “I think then it is my duty, if I believe it is possible to avoid [a war], to do everything in my power to arrive at this goal. If Providence, however, imposed on us a war, I will have every hope to succeed in the task which is entrusted in me. I am familiar with Germany’s spirit of sacrifice. I know with such confidence they will march behind their young emperor. I am familiar also with our army and I am certain of its superiority. The other nations can adopt our tactical formations and our weapons, but what they cannot imitate is the moral force which is the principal element of the strength of the German army.”

This article was unique for Alfred von Waldersee. The correspondent wrote originally for the New York Herald, but the article was reprinted in a French newspaper, showing how print media was becoming a greater form of international communication. For the first time, Waldersee was questioned directly by a member of the press, and his responses were printed for an international audience to read and discuss; his clothes, looks, manners, and even the details of his office were now public knowledge. Waldersee had always been a private figure, a member of the exclusive German elite, with whom he shared opinions and socialized. In the aftermath of the meeting for

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2 Newspaper clipping number 16; GStA, Nachlass Waldersee, C. I Nr. 2. I was unable to decipher the handwritten name of the newspaper and the date. Although I believe the newspaper is the Petit Parisien, I was unable to locate this article on www.gallica.bnf.fr.
the City Mission at Herwarthstrasse 2 on November 28, 1887, however, Waldersee also became a public figure; he and his ideas were discussed not just in the salons of notables and the halls of power, but also in newspapers for the general public to read, understand, and discuss.

In the politically unpredictable and critical years of 1888-1891, when he was in his late 50s, Alfred von Waldersee encountered the challenge of continuing to be a central figure at court and in high society, the private world in which he had always inhabited, while also being dragged into the public sphere. His world was changing. In terms of politics, Wilhelm I passed away in March 1888, and Frederick III succumbed to throat cancer a few months later. Wilhelm II then acceded to the throne in June 1888, and Otto von Bismarck resigned the chancellorship in March 1890. For Waldersee personally, for the first time in his life he became a political celebrity, a recognized, leading personality in Kaiser Wilhelm II’s entourage and empire. When he officially succeeded his friend and mentor Helmuth von Moltke in August 1888, the new Chief of Staff received letters of congratulations from people he had never met; one of them even sent him a long poem. Strangers and old friends of Mary who had not communicated with her in years wrote to her, too; the author of one letter from New Jersey wanted the autographs of Waldersee, Moltke, and Bismarck. While on a visit to Dresden with Kaiser Wilhelm II, among the great crowd there to greet them, Mrs. Lee wrote, “Alfred could hear them say one to the other ‘that’s Waldersee.’” By 1892, there were even busts of Waldersee in wax museums in Hamburg and London. Waldersee’s experience with the development of his public image from 1888 to 1892 reveals how one could become a celebrity at this time – for better or worse.

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3 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, September 7, 1888, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume B.
4 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, September 12, 1889, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume C.
5 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, January 6, 1892, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume C.
During this period in the history of modern Europe – one of increasing literacy, of greater and speedier access to knowledge and information, and of expanding political participation – public opinion mattered more than ever. Bismarck had a history of privileging newspapers with government information and attempting, with the help of subordinates and supporters in the political and media elite, to utilize the press for his personal and political advantage. For example, he launched press campaigns against individuals, such as the historian Heinrich Geffcken and the British ambassador Sir Robert Morier, and for his policies, whether it was a domestic program or a foreign policy matter, the most famous of which was his Ems Dispatch that helped provoke the Franco-Prussian War.6 “The influence of Bismarck’s secret press apparatus cannot be underestimated,” writes historian Robert Keyserlingk about the liberal newspapers before 1884, but his basic conclusion still applies to the rest of Bismarck’s chancellorship: “Journalists needed good stories and information, while Bismarck needed to pass into the public mind his sort of news.”7 Kurt Koszyk observes that the chancellor’s “press policy was based accordingly on an instinctive seizing the necessity of the moment, not on a great plan.”8 Although the first part of that statement is true, Bismarck’s overall strategy was in fact to maintain power, especially by identifying himself in the press as representative of the nation. In 1875, Friedrich von Holstein called Bismarck the “sovereign of German public opinion.”9

Waldesersee’s influence on Prince (later Kaiser) Wilhelm became a threatening political issue for Bismarck by the end of 1887. In the first section, “The Stoecker Affair,” I will explain

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9 Friedrich von Holstein; quoted in, Koszyk, Deutsche Presse im 19. Jahrhundert, 305.
Waldensee’s role in this event and its importance for him. As described in Part I, on November 28, 1887, he hosted a meeting at Herwarthstrasse 2 for the City Mission. Because of Prince Wilhelm’s participation and apparent support for far-right conservatives, Bismarck would use the opportunity to begin a press campaign against Waldensee to reduce the Quartermaster-General’s influence on the young Hohenzollern. I argue that the Stoecker Affair became a watershed moment in the relationship between Bismarck and Waldensee and thrust the latter into the public spotlight. In this section, I also revisit the issue of Waldensee’s anti-Semitism.

In the aftermath of the Stoecker Affair, Waldensee continued to be an object of press speculation. In “The Coming Man?” I illustrate his public image that formed in the late nineteenth century and has persisted until today. In this section, I will argue that, contrary to the beliefs of historians since World War II, Waldensee did not aim to become chancellor. He enjoyed being a Prussian officer and saw no need to obtain a political, civilian position. Historians have recognized that Waldensee was ambitious, but his motivations were not based on a desire to expand his own power, but to defend the power of the monarch.

The manipulation of information through the press was a central feature of politics in late nineteenth-century Germany. Waldensee had connections to military writers and the editors of conservative newspapers, but questions about his relationship to the press – whether he attempted to utilize friendly newspapers like Bismarck, and if so how much – cannot be fully answered until more archival research is completed. After his removal from the General Staff, in an addendum in his journal titled, “About my alleged press bureau,” Waldensee stated bluntly, “I
never personally arranged for a political or military article in any newspaper.” Historian Helma Hink has looked, however, at Waldersee’s correspondence and discovered that the Chief of Staff not only knew his adjutant Major Zahn was actively engaged with the media, but he kept Waldersee informed of his doings. Evidently, Zahn took it upon himself to pen positive articles about his chief for the conservative Kreuzzeitung and arranged to leak military information to other newspapers, including those that were organs for the chancellor. Therefore, we can assume for now that Waldersee, as he stated, did not personally try to influence public opinion, but he was aware of Zahn’s efforts, which were perhaps done more in the interests of the General Staff than just of Waldersee. Nevertheless, because the Bismarck-inspired image of Waldersee that persists today is essentially the same one that circulated on the streets of Germany, I will only discuss that depiction of him.

Newspaper reports about Alfred von Waldersee typically included at least a mention of Mary, and eventually, the press – especially American newspapers – became fascinated with the American wife of such an important figure in Germany. They started to speculate about her role in the society and politics of Berlin, and in the process, produced a distorted image of a pious woman who simply wanted to pursue her religious and philanthropic interests. In the third section, “The American Egeria?” I show how and why Mary was misrepresented in the press as a

11 Helma Hink, Bismarcks Pressepolitik in der bulgarischen Krise und der Zusammenbruch seiner Regierungspresse, 1885-1890, (Las Vegas: Peter Lang, 1977), 139-146. Waldersee, February 23, 1891, Denkwürdigkeiten II, 191. Also see Walter Goerlitz, History of the German General Staff, 1657-1945, trans. Brian Battershaw, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1985), 109. Without citing evidence, Goerlitz states that the editor of the conservative Kreuzzeitung, Freiherr von Hammerstein owed Waldersee with friendly coverage because with the help of Mary’s money, he donated 100,000 marks to Kreuzzeitung.
political intriguer who helped her husband’s career and was one of Bismarck’s greatest opponents. I argue that she had no interests in politics, but remained devoted to her philanthropic work.

In the fourth section, I return specifically to Alfred von Waldersee. After Bismarck’s dismissal in March 1890, which Waldersee helped facilitate, Wilhelm II started to show signs that he was growing tired of his Chief of Staff’s political activities. In the last section, “The Monarchist and the Changing Monarchy,” I illustrate the Waldersees’ last years in the German capital, through Waldersee’s dismissal in late January 1891. I argue that he mistakenly believed that Wilhelm II would reign like his grandfather, Wilhelm I. When the grandson failed to live up to expectations, Waldersee’s belief in the young monarch – and thus the monarchy itself – was shaken. Through the 1880s, Waldersee fought to maintain the power of the monarchy, but he did not anticipate that Prince Wilhelm would assert his own dominant and erratic authority over imperial policymaking, which did not live up to the ideal of a good ruler, i.e. Wilhelm I.

Throughout this chapter of Waldersee’s life and time in Berlin, mass media would play an important role in shaping the public image of Waldersee, who was slow to confront the realities of a changing, modernizing world. He had always been a private figure who inhabited the exclusive world of the elite, but beginning in late 1887, the press would spread rumors that he was unable to contain. One incident neatly demonstrates Waldersee’s difficulty in managing the osmosis between his private and public lives during this transformational time. In September 1889, he paid a visit to his brother, the military governor of Hanover, and while looking at the framed pictures on the wall, Waldersee was surprised to spot one that looked familiar. One day during the previous winter, Wilhelm II, Augusta Victoria, and Waldersee returned to the Military Staff Building after a promenade in the Tiergarten. At the request of a General Staff
photographer, Waldersee allowed a picture to be taken of them in the courtyard. The original hung in his room, but, Mrs. Lee wrote, “how a copy got to [the] Province of Hanover, we don’t know.”¹² In 1887, an event in the Military Staff Building would escape the private world of the elite and become a public issue, dragging Waldersee along with it and into the limelight.


¹² Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, September 12, 1889, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume C. “Alfred stood at the side talking,” Mrs. Lee wrote, “his favorite Badger Dog (Dachshund) [named] Tanker near him also the Raven – which Alfred will keep and I always call ‘that black thing.’ Alfred follows my example!”
The Stoecker Affair

After the fundraising meeting for the City Mission at Herwarthstrasse 2 on November 28, 1887, a political firestorm erupted. On the morning of December 30, 1887, the lead article of the liberal Viennese _Neue Freie Presse_ stated:

The impression of that curious conventicle continues to be deep and lasting, which a month ago took place at the home of Count von Waldersee in Berlin. One has again seen Court Preacher Stoecker suddenly reemerge on the scene, in which he has remained hidden for some time, and he appeared in such high society. One has heard the melody of the merger of all conservative elements against anarchy with one voice, which is certain to speak a decisive word about the fate of Germany in the future.\(^{13}\)

Although Waldersee had intended that the gathering not be political, as demonstrated in Part I, Prince Wilhelm’s association with, and apparent support for, the anti-Semitic founder of the Christian Social Party, Adolf Stoecker, caused alarm among the elite and the press. Beginning in December 1887 and largely ending in February 1888, what became known as the Stoecker Affair was more than just a controversy about the prince’s presence at an apparently right-wing meeting, but a larger debate among the political parties and the politicized press about the future of the German government. With Wilhelm I expected to die any day and Crown Prince Frederick suffering from throat cancer in San Remo, Italy, the prospect that Prince Wilhelm could accede to the German throne sooner than expected was a distinct possibility. Given the climate of political uncertainty in Berlin, the young Hohenzollern’s involvement with Stoecker’s City Mission fueled the fear of liberals and progressives that Prince Wilhelm would favor the anti-Semitic and ultra-conservative parties during his imminent rule.

In this section, I will focus on Waldersee’s role in the affair and revisit the issue of his anti-Semitism. Because the City Mission meeting took place at Herwarthstrasse 2, Waldersee’s

\(^{13}\) _Neue Freie Presse_, December 30, 1887, GStA, Nachlass Waldersee, C. I Nr. I.
name would become associated with Stoecker, the Conservative Party, and the ultra-conservative *Kreuzzeitung* and its founder Baron von Hammerstein. The controversy thrust him into the public spotlight. At the same time that the Stoecker Affair was taking place, Waldersee was arguing for preventive war as shown in Part I. On December 17, 1887, Prince Wilhelm attended an audience with the Kaiser, in which Waldersee, Moltke, the War Minister, and the Chief of the Military Cabinet made their case for a war with Russia.\(^{14}\) J. Alden Nichols notes that the Quartermaster-General’s relationship with, and influence on, Prince Wilhelm and his advocacy of a foreign policy that contradicted the chancellor’s, “even more than the Stoecker Affair, [was what] provoked Bismarck the most.”\(^{15}\) This statement is true, but it was the affair itself that gave the chancellor a chance to reduce Waldersee’s influence on Prince Wilhelm. In this effort, he had the help of the liberal press, who were just as concerned about Waldersee, Stoecker, and the far-right’s influence over the future monarch. The liberal *Frankfurter Zeitung* neatly summarized their fear: “Worried patriots believe that the future of our Reich depends basically on the question whether a fanatical cleric and an equally pious as well as warlike general have already laid their hands upon one of the next heirs to the throne.”\(^{16}\)

In Part I, I also showed how Waldersee, though an anti-Semite, was motivated to support the work of Stoecker’s City Mission because he believed it would be a useful means for the monarchy to fight against socialism. Ironically, the press attacks on him from the liberal and left-leaning newspapers, which were largely owned and edited by Jews, caused him to express

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\(^{16}\) *Frankfurter Zeitung*, January 17, 1888; quoted in Nichols, *The Year of the Three Kaisers*, 72.
his anti-Semitism in his journal more often in the aftermath of the City Mission meeting.\footnote{As Nichols writes, “Jews at the time were mostly associated with Liberals since the Liberals had been responsible for their recent grant of full citizenship in 1869. Many emancipated Jews were active in the liberal press, and the great liberal newspapers, the Frankfurter Zeitung, Berliner Tageblatt, National Zeitung, and the Viennese Neue Freie Presse, were Jewish owned and edited.” Nichols, The Year of the Three Kaisers, 36. Waldersee called the Neue Freie Presse and the Pester Lloyd, “Jewish papers (Judenblätter) par excellence.” Waldersee, March 27, 1888, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 380.} In March 1890, he wrote that Jews were “mostly fellows with no homeland, who have no interest in anything but making money, and who – wonder of wonders – mostly support the Progressives, and often even vote for Socialists at elections.”\footnote{Waldersee, journal entry for March 5, 1890 not reproduced in Meisner’s Denkwürdigkeiten; quoted in John Röhl, Wilhelm II: The Kaiser’s Personal Monarchy, 1888-1890, trans. Sheila de Bellaigue, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 296.} In summer 1889, Waldersee, then Chief of Staff, would come to detest Bismarck’s banker – “the Jew” – Gerson Bleichröder, whom he accused of supporting the Russian military through financial transactions and hurting Austria’s credit.\footnote{Waldersee, addendum written in 1892 (Denkwürdigkeiten II, 55-56) and journal entry for April 15, 1889 not reproduced in Meisner’s Denkwürdigkeiten; both quoted in Röhl, Wilhelm II, 210.} In his book about Bismarck and Bleichröder, Fritz Stern states that Waldersee used “ferocious anti-Semitism” in his criticisms of the two men.\footnote{Fritz Stern, Gold and Iron: Bismarck, Bleichröder, and the Building of the German Empire, (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 449.} Despite the anti-Semitic nature of Waldersee’s descriptions of Bleichröder – and Jews in general when it came to the Russian loan controversy – the Chief of Staff’s overriding concern was foreign policy, as illustrated in Part I, not Judaism; he feared hordes of Russian troops more than a handful of successful Jewish bankers.

In December 1887, when the Stoecker Affair commenced, there were people at court who were concerned about Wilhelm’s apparent support of Adolf Stoecker and his politics. Waldersee noted that Prince Wilhelm’s own court marshal, Eduard von Liebenau, “put himself on the
enemy side.”

In a letter to the sick Crown Prince, Liebenau stated that the day before the meeting, he had spoken to Waldersee about its significance for the prince, and the Quartermaster-General “was at first surprised and then crestfallen. I had the feeling then that he was embarrassed by the fact that he was party to the matter and I believe this even more so now.”

“Waldersee and his comrades,” the prince’s court marshal continued, “had not realized the impact their actions would have until the storm broke in the press over the meeting in question.” Waldersee may have regretted the political predicament he put himself and the prince in, but discussion of the affair in the press would only confirm his fear and disgust of the people whom he felt were the princes’ enemies. The meeting, he wrote at the beginning of December, was “answered by a cry of indignation from the extreme-progressive papers that are completely under Jewish influence, the same naturally from the Social Democratic papers, but also the Germania [the newspaper of the Catholic Center Party]. I believe that these attacks just help the cause.”

On December 23, 1887, Waldersee wrote that “careful inquiries” showed the alarm in the press came from Jews, who as supporters of the Crown Prince, “have the feeling that Prince Wilhelm is their enemy.” Frederick’s illness, he added, “has coincided with the matter of

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21 Waldersee, December 2 and 3, and 15, 1887, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 339, 343.
22 Liebenau to Crown Prince, December 20, 1887; quoted in John Röhl, Young Wilhelm: The Kaiser’s Early Life, 1859-1888, trans. Jeremy Gaines and Rebecca Wallach, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 723. “All I can do, if only to facilitate [Wilhelm’s] backing down, is to draw his attention to the general opinion in the form of newspaper cuttings. For some time now, I have been reading solely on the Prince’s behalf 7-8 of the major dailies of the most diverse political color, both German and foreign, and no sensible article on his social-political debut is kept from him. Incidentally, I believe that it is starting to dawn on the Prince, too, that he has made a political error.”
the City Mission, and the \textit{Judenschaft} is agitated in the extreme. Its attacks are aimed much less at Stoecker than at the Prince.”

Mrs. Lee seconded her son-in-law’s opinion. Before the prince left Herwarthstrasse 2 after a dinner one evening in January 1888, Mrs. Lee shook his hand and told him that she was glad he took an interest in the City Mission, “especially by his moral courage in acknowledging it, [and] that God would reward him and it mattered not what man said.” As she explained to her cousin, Prince Wilhelm’s participation in the City Mission “gave umbrage to some Jews and unbelievers.” In April 1888, Mrs. Lee hoped that her cousin would not think poorly of Wilhelm because “as you know, all the world over the Jews have money, which is a power in the press . . . [they] do all they can to disparage Prince Wilhelm. They dislike him because he stands so firm on Christian faith, hence they know he will be no friend to them.”

On December 21, 1887, while Prince Wilhelm was writing a letter to Bismarck about the affair, Waldersee arrived. The Quartermaster-General did not dictate the wording, but he “did at least provide [Wilhelm] with the key notions and helped set the tone,” argues John Röhl. In the document, the prince contended that Stoecker fought for the monarchy and Christianity and that he was not going to be involved directly in the City Mission’s work. Prince Wilhelm also reaffirmed that he did not want his interest in the institution to have a political overtone, but, he noted, “I am thoroughly convinced that unifying these elements for the purpose mentioned is a worthy aim and the most effective means of combating social democracy and anarchism in the long term.” The prince did not finish without saying a word about the newspapers. “I hope I have thus dispelled the suspicion, artificially nurtured by the deliberate distortions of the press,

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25 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, January 18, 1888, HH, Von Waldereer-Lee Collection, Volume B.
26 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, March 23, 1888, HH, Von Waldereer-Lee Collection, Volume B.
27 Röhl, \textit{Young Wilhelm}, 725.
that the initiative was connected specifically with Stoecker.”28 On Christmas Day 1887, Waldensee had paid a visit to Prince and Princess Wilhelm, who were both angered by the press, “which indeed conducts itself shamelessly,” Waldensee wrote. He also noted the Prince was determined to “stay firm against the chancellor.”29 On January 6, 1888, Bismarck wrote an eight-page reply, in which he emphasized that the monarchy needed to stay above parties and warned that Protestant preachers were just as theocratic as Catholic priests.30 Tens days later, Waldensee stated that he understood the purpose of the letter:

The tenor of [the letter] is to advise the Prince to withdraw from such bad company and to drop such evil counselors and to remain like Frederick the Great above the parties . . . The Chancellor fears that the Prince has fallen into the hands of those who might drive a wedge between the Prince and him or his son and is attempting to redress the situation. He is initially trying to achieve this by flattering him and then admonishing him . . . If the Chancellor does not give a little ground now, then I believe a permanent rift with Prince Wilhelm to be probable and imagine that the Chancellor is quite willingly causing this break. He has got himself into a rut with his policies and would gladly find a way to extricate himself with a good excuse. Should the Prince become Kaiser, then Bismarck will immediately declare that he cannot stand at the side of someone who wishes to adopt such an extreme denominational stance and will resign amid great hurrahs and cries of approval from the entire liberal and Jewish pack. At present, the Chancellor evidently still hopes to overwhelm the Prince and to shackle him to his and his son’s side, but I think he is miscalculating the situation badly.31

Just as Waldensee had supported Prince Wilhelm through the Union Club affair, he would once again stand with the young Hohenzollern. This time, however, he would become a clear opponent and target of Bismarck. The ambitious young Prince and his confidant Waldensee posed too great a threat to the policies that the chancellor had forged.

Otto von Bismarck decided that he had to maintain his and Herbert’s influence over Wilhelm, even if that meant attacking Waldensee in the press and at court. When the affair

28 Prince Wilhelm to Bismarck, December 21, 1887; quoted in Röhl, Young Wilhelm, 725-726.
29 Waldensee, December 25, 1887, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 347.
30 Bismarck to Prince Wilhelm, January 6, 1888; quoted in Röhl, Young Wilhelm, 730-732
erupted, he commented that the general was politically incompetent, and Herbert Bismarck wrote that he was “really and truly annoyed with Waldersee, who, together with his wife, stirred up the whole thing, instead of concentrating on his General Staff.” On January 17, 1888, Prince Wilhelm dined at Herwarthstrasse 2. He had spoken about the City Mission affair with the Kaiser, who was obviously perturbed by his grandson’s endeavor. Wilhelm I also told the Prince that he had become strongly influenced by Mary von Waldersee, “who goes somewhat far in religious matters.” Her absence from court had caused some suspicion, but Waldersee maintained that she had been away for the past couple of years because she wanted to stay with her mother who had health problems. “It saddens me whenever the Kaiser believes such lies,” he wrote, noting the “despicable way” in which the monarch is influenced and resolving to correct the untruth for the Kaiser. The next day, January 18, members of the Free Conservative and National Liberal parties attended a meeting, at which the chamberlain for Princess Augusta Victoria – both strong supporters of the City Mission – explained the situation about this institution, as Waldersee noted:

While [the Bismarcks] had told the Prince unequivocally that they had no part in the articles printed in the Norddeutsche and the Post, indeed had done nothing in the whole affair to counter the intentions of the Prince, several of the gentlemen present stated that they had proof that the Chancellor had whipped up opposition to the Prince in other newspapers, such as the Hamburger Korrespondent. These revelations are very sad, but are no longer to be denied. Some of the gentlemen were quite horrified by the Chancellor’s fork tongue.

32 Count Radolinski; quoted in Röhl, Young Wilhelm, 728-729. Herbert Bismarck to Rantzau, January 6, 1888; quoted in Röhl, Young Wilhelm, 729.
33 Waldersee, January 17, 1888, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 352.
A few days later, he complained in his journal of the “unheard of fact that the Imperial Chancellor and his son – they are one and the same firm, after all – have dared to attack the future Kaiser in the press, cannot unfortunately be undone.”

On February 2, Waldersee noted that he stood well with Prince Wilhelm and that from what he heard through “slimy gossip,” the Bismarcks were most likely developing a “war” against him. On February 14, the *Deutsches Tageblatt* published an article insinuating the presence of a War Party working against the Chancellor. “Hardly is the City Mission conflict over than a new ones threatens,” he wrote. In February 1888, Bismarck’s campaign against Waldersee – and the dissemination of rumors that would surround him until today – had begun (see “The Coming Man?” below). On February 29, Waldersee had a conversation with Count Maximilian von Berchem, the Undersecretary of State, who admitted that Bismarck had quite a lot of resentment against Waldersee because of the Stoecker Affair, but that was now over. Waldersee’s relationship with Prince Wilhelm, however, was “the main reason for hostilities.”

After a meeting for the City Mission in the hall of the Prussian House of Lords on May 28, 1888, Waldersee wrote that the controversy was coming to an end. By February 1889, however, he noted that the “hunt against Stoecker” was once again underway. “[He] has without question many weaknesses,” wrote Waldersee, “but he remains always a fearless fighter in the best cause, he fights for the Christian faith and for the kingdom against the approaching heavy thunderclouds.” Wilhelm, now king and emperor, was facing agitation from the

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35 WALDERSEE, JOURNAL ENTRY FOR JANUARY 26, 1888 NOT REPRODUCED IN MEISNER’S *DENKWÜRDIGKEITEN*; QUOTED IN RÖHL, *YOUNG WILHELM*, 735.
36 WALDERSEE, FEBRUARY 2, 1888, *DENKWÜRDIGKEITEN I*, 357.
Wilhelmstrasse to deal with the anti-Semitic court preacher and politician, but Waldersee told him that “Stoecker’s fall would mean a triumph for the Jewish and progressive circles” and that he spoke in the Kaiser’s interests more than Stoecker’s. He also heard that the Bismarcks watched him “with the highest mistrust.” Although they wanted Waldersee to join with them, the Bismarcks were “uncomfortable” because he would not do it, and, as he noted, “I have a good position with the Kaiser.”41 Despite Waldersee’s attempts to convince the monarch not to give in, Wilhelm II believed that the conflict between the preacher’s position at court and his political agitation was causing too much trouble, and on April 25, 1889, Stoecker was forced to give up politics in exchange for being able to keep his prominent position as a Court Preacher.42 “I am happy about this settlement for the Kaiser’s sake,” wrote Waldersee.

Stoecker did not refrain permanently from politics, however, and after falling out of the Kaiser’s favor, he submitted his resignation on November 4, 1890. “The Kaiser will take note of the wholehearted applause of the Jews, Social Democrats, and Liberals of all shades which he will receive for this!” Waldersee wrote.43 On November 23, he continued to lament the situation:

> The saddest thing about it, as ever, is that the Kaiser allows himself to be so easily influenced; in this case – naturally without suspecting it – he gave in to Jewish pressure; he is in the process of undermining the foundations on which he stands, by paralyzing one of his best resources at a time when as he himself has often said the forces of insurrection are at work. If Stoecker were not such a dangerous enemy of revolution he would certainly not be attracting so much hostility.44

42 Waldersee, March 18 and April 25, 1889, *Denkwürdigkeiten* II, 45-46, 49.
43 Waldersee, journal entry for November 4, 1890, not reproduced in Meisner’s *Denkwürdigkeiten*; quoted in Röhl, *Wilhelm II*, 402.
44 Waldersee, journal entry for November 23, 1890, not reproduced in Meisner’s *Denkwurdigkeiten*; quoted in Röhl, *Wilhelm II*, 402-403.
Mary von Waldersee continued to be involved with the City Mission and Stoecker at least through May 1889. The Stoecker Affair had opened the door for Bismarck to begin his campaign at court and in the press against Waldersee’s influence on Prince Wilhelm. This crucial moment in the relationship between Wilhelm and Bismarck had caused Waldersee to rally further to the side of Wilhelm and initiate his own full break with Otto von Bismarck, which would culminate in his advocacy of the Iron Chancellor’s dismissal in March 1890. The Stoecker Affair brought Waldersee into the public eye and initiated his confrontation with the clash of his private world and the public. This first episode in a new, transformative chapter of his life had begun with a meeting for the City Mission at Herwarthstrasse 2, a charity with which his wife had been involved. On May 9, 1889, in all the rooms of Herwarthstrasse 2 – except Waldersee’s – Mary held her annual tea for the women of the Magdalene Society. Adolf Stoecker was there to address them.

The Coming Man?

Beginning in 1907, Maximilian Harden, the pro-Bismarck founder of the journal, Die Zukunft, gained much notoriety when he publicly accused Wilhelm II’s friend Prince Philip zu Eulenburg and other members of the Kaiser’s entourage of homosexuality, initiating a series of libel trials that developed into one of the German Empire’s greatest scandals. In 1888, he had begun his career in journalism as a writer and theater critic for the liberal Berliner Tageblatt, and

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45 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, May 27, 1889, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume C.  
46 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, May 9, 1889, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume C.
he soon thereafter became a political supporter of Bismarck. On July 15, 1889, amid an uproar about Waldersee in the press, the *Berliner Tageblatt* published a short “patriotic play,” written by Harden, titled, “Der Frictionarins.” In this satirical, humorous, and weird story, the General Staff Colonel – “a dashing gentlemen in his prime” – bursts into a room in Berlin and asks Germania – “a medieval lady” – why she is reading “the obsolete pages of doctoral questions” from the Foreign Office’s mouthpiece. “How old-fashioned!” he exclaims, and when Germania tries proudly to defend the author, the General Staff Colonel retorts, “Ridiculous! He searches for relaxation in rural seclusion!” “And you want to become his successor?! With this naiveté?” Germania asks impertinently. “You cannot flutter your bushy eyelashes at him,” she states, “Become old and live well, mein Herr! I require no other stream because my drinking water flows from proven state leadership.” After Germania calls him a warmonger and questions him about his understanding of the military theorist Carl von Clausewitz (1780-1831), the General Staff Colonel fumes:

Don’t tell me about Clausewitz! That is the old school. We are we. Was Clausewitz bold? I am. I will arrange for you a small springtime war – perfect! Are you familiar with my motto? “To East and West the storm hits; in the interior rules Hammerstein [the editor of the conservative *Kreuzzeitung*]!” Therefore, give me your hand, my dear, and come with me to my red castle!

Germania, breaking her hand free from his grasp, declares, “He said you were ever the villain, and I believe Him. He has put me in the saddle.” “And I will teach you to ride, Madame!” the

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General Staff Colonel thunders, eventually proclaiming, “I am war, I am youth, I am marvelous! Follow me with God for king and Fatherland!”

In creating this character of the General Staff Colonel, Harden clearly intended to parody Waldersee, who had become Chief of Staff in August 1888 and who continued to be a friend and advisor to Wilhelm II. The caricature above reveals in a humorous way the public image of Waldersee; he is presented here as a warmongering adversary of Bismarck who wanted to become chancellor. In this section, I will show how and why Waldersee was depicted in the press and his reaction to his public image, one that would persist until today. In Part I, I illustrated the development of his view on preventive war and argued that his advocacy of war was not irrational. In this section, I will argue that he did not aspire to become chancellor because he had nothing to gain by obtaining the position. Although ambitious and interested in politics, Waldersee sought to defend the authority of the monarch against any force that threatened it, including Otto von Bismarck.

“Hardly is the City Mission conflict over with than a new one threatens,” Waldersee wrote on February 14, 1888. That day, the Deutsches Tageblatt published an article that claimed a War Party was intriguing against Bismarck and his foreign policy. The paper also accused military men of interfering in politics and charged a “spiritus rector” with disseminating “war scare” articles that emphasized Russian troop movements. With the exception of the conservative Kreuzzeitung, the other German newspapers did not take the report seriously. The Kölnische Zeitung called the existence of a War Party a “strange idea” that not even foreign

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48 “Der Frictionarians” by Maximilian Harden, Berliner Tageblatt, July 15, 1889, GStA, Nachlass Waldersee, C. I Nr. 3.
49 Nichols, The Year of the Three Kaisers, 144. The Kreuzzeitung called the article, “the most monstrous ever perpetuated by a German paper in this difficult, sad time,” and did not like that the article insinuated that Germans needed to get behind a united domestic policy, i.e. Bismarck’s.
newspapers had proposed, and it criticized the *Deutsches Tageblatt* for making a fuss about “war scare” articles when there was a general anxiety among the press and political elite about Russian troops near the border.⁵⁰ Waldersee knew the piece was directed against him and intended for Prince Wilhelm’s eyes. “The affair would be laughable,” he stated, “if I were not convinced that the attack comes from the Wilhelmstrasse.”⁵¹ Waldersee was annoyed that someone would use anonymity in the press to attack him, and although the author’s identity never became known, he remained convinced the article originated from “the House of Bismarck and its Mamelukes.” He also noted that liberals now targeted him, fearing that he would remain a confidant of Wilhelm II and “we would then make war together.”⁵²

In February 1888, Wilhelm, then still a prince, sent Bismarck the article from the *Deutsches Tageblatt*. Believing it to be a “pathetic Russian effort,” he told Herbert Bismarck on February 19 that no German could write such a thing. After hearing of this, Waldersee hoped this “salutary lesson” would not be lost on the chancellor’s clique.⁵³ The next day, the German military attaché stationed in Paris, Ernst von Hoiningen, better known as Huene, had dinner with Bismarck. While the two men conversed in the chancellor’s workroom, the Foreign Office’s press director suddenly appeared and delivered the *Deutsches Tageblatt* article, claiming that it must have come from a Russian source. Stating the article would then naturally upset the General Staff, Bismarck asked the attaché if the staff had heard anything about it. “No, nothing,” he replied. The whole thing was an “arranged comedy,” Huene later told Waldersee, who readily

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agreed. If the press director’s appearance was arranged, the chancellor was clearly attempting to throw Waldersee off the scent. A connection between the Bismarcks and the *Deutsches Tageblatt* article is plausible, for, as J. Alden Nichols states, the paper had recently undergone a reorganization which involved a variety of members of Bismarck’s new political coalition and which the father and son “appear to have sponsored and pushed.”

Waldersee wrote on March 6, 1888 – a few days before Wilhelm I’s death – that the press attacks on him were now becoming more direct. For the first time, the rumor that Waldersee could be reassigned to command an army corps spread in the German press, including the *Deutsches Tageblatt*, which Waldersee recognized as “for some time the Foreign Office’s mouthpiece.” That day, the *Bohemia* of Prague stated that his replacement would be a favorite of Crown Prince Frederick, given Waldersee’s “ominous political influence on Prince Wilhelm.” The Quartermaster-General did not believe the chancellor had a direct hand in the report, but did not doubt it contained Bismarck’s views. Without the protection of his late friend and sovereign, Waldersee grew concerned about his future and spoke to Moltke and Wilhelm, knowing that the chancellor, jealous of his relationship with the new Crown Prince, wanted him out of Berlin, as evidenced through the articles about his possible replacement.

Mary Hoppin, Mrs. Lee’s cousin in Connecticut, heard Waldersee might be sent to the Rhineland. Blaming the false reports on Jewish influence in the press, Mrs. Lee wrote that she had received several inquiries about her son-in-law’s possible transfer from people who “had read it as a fact

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57 *Bohemia*, March 6, 1888, GStA, Nachlass Waldersee, C. I Nr. 2.  
in newspaper.”  

The new monarch, Kaiser Frederick III, however, did want to get Waldersee away from Berlin in order to sever his relationship with Crown Prince Wilhelm, a rapport, which, Moltke told his deputy, “is evidently your crime.”

On May 10, 1888, Ascension Day, Waldersee paid a visit to the Crown Prince. “The chancellor has the fixed idea that [he] wants war and is in the hands of the so-called War Party,” Waldersee wrote afterwards in his journal, “yesterday, I had already received confidential reports about this with the warning that I was naturally regarded as the evil advisor.” With Wilhelm’s accession to the German throne, for the first time, Waldersee’s friendship with the Kaiser gave reason to speculate that he could be a possible successor of Otto von Bismarck. On the morning of June 22, 1888, the left-liberal Berliner Börsen-Courier reported that “recently, Quartermaster-General of the Army, Count von Waldersee has been named many times as the one man who would be well-qualified and, in the end, also willing to become Imperial Chancellor in place of Prince Bismarck.” Whether he actually had such thoughts, the paper’s editors acknowledged that they did not know. That day, Waldersee complained about the “democratic” and foreign press and how they portrayed him, but he believed that these newspapers were attempting to bring the chancellor into conflict with Wilhelm II.

After this incident, the Bismarcks, through Herbert, made peace with Waldersee in the interest of the new Kaiser, but Waldersee acknowledged that he would now be cautious because “my trust is shaken too much.” He would continue to find it difficult to trust the chancellor in

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60 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, March 23, 1888, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume B.
61 Waldersee, April 6 and 10, 1888, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 384-387.
62 Waldersee, Mary 10, 1888, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 395-399.
63 Berliner Börsen-Courier, June 22, 1888, GStA, Nachlass Waldersee, C. I Nr. 2.
64 Waldersee, June 22, 1888, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 405-406
the future. In August 1888, Waldersee officially succeeded Moltke as Chief of Staff. On September 21, 1888, the L’Éclair made him the “Man of the Day,” stating that if Waldersee would become chancellor, it would be the first time that position would be filled by someone who is both a political and a military power; “What will be will be,” added the French newspaper. Bismarck continued, however, to hold tightly to the chancellorship, and the ambitious young Kaiser embraced the power of his throne. Uncertainty reigned.

By December 1888, the rumor and potential of Waldersee’s becoming chancellor intrigued Baroness Althea Salvador (née Kimpson). Born into an affluent American family, she was brought by her mother to Europe, where she met her future husband, a Spanish nobleman. Tall, thin, and blonde, she spoke several languages and entertained the social and political elite of Paris in the salons of her home on the ritzy Avenue du Bois de Boulogne. The Baroness’ background was similar to Mary von Waldersee’s, but while the latter became a philanthropist, the former became a journalist. Salvador was essentially the embodiment of the increasing information exchange through mass media between the public and the exclusive elite. In 1891, The Morning Call of San Francisco called her “one of the most charming and graphic writers of the day.” On December 10, 1888, after stopping in Berlin during a trip through Germany,

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65 Waldersee was suspicious whether Bismarck, in attempting to calm Tsar Alexander III, used his name as an example and excuse of the Kaiser listening to other people. “It is truly sad, that I am so mistrustful, but the Kaiser has deserved anything different.” Waldersee, October 13, 1889, Denkwürdigkeiten II, 70-71. A couple of months later, Waldersee attended a “parliamentarian soirée” at the chancellor’s, where Bismarck “received me with great warmth, but I do not trust him.” Waldersee, December 4, 1889, Denkwürdigkeiten II, 81.

66 September 21, 1888, L’Éclair, GStA, Nachlass Waldersee, C. I Nr. 2.

Baroness Salvador submitted an article to the New York World titled, “Waldersee may succeed the aged German Chancellor.” She interviewed one unnamed diplomat who stated the following:

Waldersee succeeds Von Moltke, and I believe that some day, when Bismarck shall be superannuated, Waldersee will be not only chief of the army but the chief of political affairs in Germany . . . You ask if Count von Waldersee is a favorite? I cannot answer, but his rising fortune occupies the German mind, and although his star only rose yesterday, at present it shines modestly, yet like electricity, it is more remarkable from the length of its rays than from the intensity of light.

Another anonymous diplomat the Baroness questioned also spoke about Waldersee:

Before Von Moltke’s resignation we heard of him only as one hears of hundreds of German officers. Of course he is the son of a general, and has been in service nearly forty years. He has great capacity, and many times has displayed his zeal, [and] his talent . . .

The Baroness gained the following impression:

From what I heard in official circles in Berlin there is no doubt about the jealousy existing between Count von Waldersee and Herbert von Bismarck. The old Chancellor must die and Herbert thinks he must be the successor of his father, and now Gen. von Waldersee appears already successor of von Moltke and the possible successor of Prince von Bismarck. . . .

Given that Baroness Salvador does not name her sources and that she was writing for the New York World – one of the leaders in yellow journalism – the validity of her article is questionable. Nonetheless, it is yet another that furthered the image of Waldersee as a future chancellor.

According to Waldersee’s published journal entries and archival sources, from June 1888 through January 1889, newspapers only sporadically mentioned the Chief of Staff as a conservative opponent of Bismarck or a possible chancellor. It was also during this period when the correspondent from the New York Herald visited Waldersee at the Military Staff Building

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68 New York World, date of publication unknown, but article submitted on December 10, 1888, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume 5.
and questioned him about his views on war. At the beginning of February 1889, however, Waldersee faced a great wave of media attention. Upon discovering his name in an article about a post-Bismarck chancellorship in the *Hamburger Nachrichten*, a recognized pawn of the chancellor, Waldersee became concerned. He had no doubt that the piece came from Bismarck, who, he claimed, had for some time been having him closely watched in order to obtain material to use against him. “My candidacy for the post of Imperial Chancellor is now discussed in all possible domestic and foreign newspapers, in which I am portrayed as the main opponent of the Chancellor,” he wrote the next day, “a few Berlin newspapers try to throw dirt at me.” A Russian newspaper, in discussing the position of the chancellor, mentioned that the Emperor and Empress visited Herwarthstrasse 2 every morning. The paper then asked its readers what the meaning of this “known secret” could be. Waldersee was convinced there was now a “hunt” against him. He believed the reprinting of the *Hamburger Nachrichten* article in the *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, another pro-Bismarck paper, was proof that the chancellor not only produced the article, but had also intended for the Kaiser to come across it.

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70 Waldersee, February 8, 1889, *Denkwürdigkeiten* II, 35-36. Waldersee also made this claim on January 15, 1890, when he received a visit from a commanding general, who had already visited Bismarck. The general reported that the chancellor said, “It is somewhat new to us that the Chief of the General Staff involves himself with youth associations.” Waldersee believed Bismarck must have been referring to the opening of the Young Men’s Christian Association. “One sees how I am observed, and how one would like to collect material against me.” Waldersee, January 15, 1890, *Denkwürdigkeiten* II, 93-94. On November 20, 1889, the Waldersees attended the opening of the Young Men’s Christian Association, at which the Empress was also present. Waldersee noted that in barely one and a half years they had raised 130,000 marks for the institution, with which Mary was an active member during her time in Berlin. Waldersee, November 21, 1889, *Denkwürdigkeiten* II, 79. Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, March 9, 1888, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume B. Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, March 1, 1891, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume C.

71 Waldersee, February 9, 1889, *Denkwürdigkeiten* II, 36.
detested the chancellor’s ability to work public opinion through his press, “which is dishonest above all other terms,” but especially Bismarck’s manipulation of information either to influence or to attack the Kaiser.\textsuperscript{72}

After hearing about the *Hamburger Nachrichten* article, Wilhelm, Waldsee recorded, immediately told Herbert Bismarck that he should have made sure that no more press attacks on Waldsee would see the light of day. The Chief of Staff was quite delighted when he heard about this development and expected the Bismarck family would now become uneasy; they must have sensed that the Kaiser suspected them of producing the article.\textsuperscript{73} Waldsee’s prediction seems to have been well-founded, for the next day, February 14, the chancellor quickly responded to the Chief of Staff’s request for a visit to have a frank conversation. That afternoon, Bismarck explained that he had never held anything against Waldsee and that he never believed the Chief of Staff wanted to make his position more difficult. He also stated that through their long acquaintance, and especially in the interests of the person of the Kaiser, any animosity between them was to be ruled out. Bismarck finished by thanking Waldsee for seeking a dialogue and assuring him that if differences were to arise in the future, he should request a meeting again. Although Waldsee still had his disagreements with Bismarck, he left satisfied by the warm tone of the conversation. That evening the *Kölnische Zeitung* reported that the two men had met for over an hour. Waldsee was glad that the public and the Kaiser could see that he maintained an amicable relationship with Bismarck.\textsuperscript{74}

\textsuperscript{72} Waldsee March 3, 1889, *Denkwürdigkeiten* II, 44-45. On January 2, 1890, Waldsee complained in his journal that Bismarck was only showing the Kaiser reports that were supportive of his foreign policy. “From clippings of foreign newspaper, nothing is allowed to be presented to the Kaiser that, for example, gives information about the true mood in Russia.” Waldsee, January 2, 1890, *Denkwürdigkeiten* II, 85-86.

\textsuperscript{73} Waldsee, February 13, 1889, *Denkwürdigkeiten* II, 37.

\textsuperscript{74} Waldsee, February 14, 1889, *Denkwürdigkeiten* II, 37-38.
Despite this reconciliation, newspapers continued to discuss the Chief of Staff as a possible future chancellor; in Waldersee’s view, they wanted to annoy Bismarck into getting rid of him.\textsuperscript{75} Not specifically naming the Chief of Staff, on February 11, the \textit{Kleine Journal} hoped that the next chancellor would not come from an extreme party and would not damage the dynasty that Bismarck had strengthened. “The German people,” stated this paper, “want no chancellor who could return the empire to the barbarity and misery of the Thirty Years War.”\textsuperscript{76}

The liberal \textit{Frankfurter Zeitung} was more direct, stating:

It is necessary to spread the belief that whenever Bismarck goes, Waldersee will come naturally as a founder of an arch-reactionary era, to which there is no other means of prevention than to convince the proper authority that the will of the Nation is embodied in Bismarck’s \textit{Politik}.\textsuperscript{77}

Noting that the Kaiser had recently attended a dinner at Bismarck’s house and that the Chief of Staff had shown no signs of political ambitions, the \textit{Münchener Fremdenblatt} questioned the recent “Waldersee Anxiety” of the governmental papers. This Bavarian paper mocked the pro-Bismarck press for their “almost comical anxiety of ‘the coming man’” every time the Kaiser showed some favor towards Waldersee, whose name “deprives them of peace and makes them nervous.”\textsuperscript{78} The anti-Waldersee \textit{Frankfurter Zeitung} and the neutral \textit{Münchener Fremdenblatt} had different opinions about a possible Waldersee chancellorship, but both papers at this time admitted that they did not know if the Chief of Staff desired or felt qualified for the highest political post.\textsuperscript{79} At the end of February, the press was beginning to quiet down, but once again

\textsuperscript{75} Waldersee, February 19, 1889, \textit{Denkwürdigkeiten} II, 38.
\textsuperscript{76} \textit{Kleine Journal}, February 11, 1889, GStA, Nachlass Waldersee, C. I Nr. 3.
\textsuperscript{77} \textit{Frankfurter Zeitung}, February 26, 1889, GStA, Nachlass Waldersee, C. I Nr. 3.
\textsuperscript{78} \textit{Münchener Fremdenblatt}, March 3, 1889, GStA, C.I.Nr.3
\textsuperscript{79} \textit{Frankfurter Zeitung}, February 26, 1889, GStA, C.I.Nr.3; \textit{Münchener Fremdenblatt}, March 3, 1889, GStA, C.I.Nr.3
Waldnersee believed Bismarck was the source of the gossip. On Sunday, March 3, 1889, the front-page headline of the Breslauer Gerichts-Zeitung asked, “Who is the future chancellor?” This Silesian newspaper presented its readers with the sketched portraits of two mustached faces beneath the simple, yet engaging question. On the left was Count Waldnersee in a medal-adorned military tunic; on the right was Count Herbert Bismarck in a civilian coat. Not only had the question been debated in the press for several weeks, the paper noted, but public opinion had also been swaying between the two men. A year later, neither Alfred von Waldersee, Herbert Bismarck, nor Otto von Bismarck would have the title of Imperial Chancellor.

A number of historians writing in the decades after the Second World War – such as Gordon Craig, Walter Goerlitz, Edward Crankshaw, Martin Kitchen, Otto Pflanze, J. Alden Nichols, Gerhard Ritter, Lamar Cecil, and Fritz Stern – have stated or strongly presumed that Alfred von Waldersee actively aspired to the chancellorship. None of these historians, however, have sufficiently described why he would want to be chancellor. Waldersee gives some explanations in his journal. On February 9, 1889, the day after the first article mentioning him as a possible chancellor appeared, he wrote the following:

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80 Waldnersee, February 28, 1889, Denkwürdigkeiten II, 40.
81 Breslauer Gerichts-Zeitung, March 3, 1889, GStA, C.I Nr.3
When the chancellor imagines I have the inclination to become his successor, he is mistaken tremendously. Right now, I wish that he continue holding his office and that he sees for himself how poorly he has operated recently. I consider anyone who wants to accept the succession to be very bold (verwegen). When one or another successor has broken his neck, perhaps there is room for discussion (liesse sich vielleicht darüber reden).  

Ten days later, he complained bitterly in his journal about the Bismarckian press, who “must now explain that I always keep myself away from politics and only want to be a military man. This is quite right to me, and I state as often as possible that I have no ambition to become chancellor.” He believed the chancellor “evoked my image . . . to dispose of me.” On February 24, in a private letter to his friend and military attaché in Warsaw, Waldersee reported the positive meeting with the chancellor on the 14th and noted, “The fear that I would like to become Imperial Chancellor is completely unfounded. I very much like my position and want nothing more than to complete it satisfactorily. I maintain each who wants to assume the inheritance of the chancellor to be a thoughtless man.” In November 1889, he wrote that people say he must become chancellor because Bismarck was quickly losing power, Herbert Bismarck was unsuitable, there was a lack of good choices, and he was a confidant of the Kaiser. “I hope strongly,” he stated, “that I always, that is as long as my strength is sufficient, can remain in my position.”

In February 1890, when it appeared that Bismarck would soon be forced to resign, Waldersee restated his “old resolution” of not wanting to succeed the chancellor, writing, “I would be a fool if I wanted to have ideas of becoming chancellor [Kanzlerideen].” If Bismarck’s

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83 Waldersee, February 9, 1889, Denkwürdigkeiten II, 36-37.
84 Waldersee, February 19, 1889, Denkwürdigkeiten II, 39. By politics, he must have meant domestic and not foreign politics.
86 Waldersee, November 13, 1889, Denkwürdigkeiten II, 76-77.
replacement became a disaster, he added, then he would possibly be open to discussing it.\footnote{Waldersee, February 14, 1890, \textit{Denkwürdigkeiten} II, 101-102.}

After Waldersee’s death in 1904, a reader of the \textit{Münchner Allgemeine Zeitung} recounted that in the last years of Bismarck’s chancellorship, during a General Staff trip, the then Chief of Staff spent a couple of days in Augsburg, Bavaria. The mayor asked him bluntly if the rumors of his becoming chancellor were true, to which Waldersee reportedly replied, “Whoever becomes the successor of a dead Bismarck is not to be envied; however, to become the successor of a living Bismarck, do not consider me to be so stupid.”\footnote{\textit{Münchner Allgemeine Zeitung}; quoted in the \textit{Neue Hamburger Zeitung}, March 11, 1904, GStA, Nachlass Waldersee, D. Nr. 3. Waldersee seems to have formed a friendly relationship with the mayor, von Fischer, who was invited to a dinner at Herwarthstrasse 2. Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, December 14, 1889, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume C.} In March 1890, two days before Wilhelm II accepted Bismarck’s resignation, Waldersee wrote in his journal his most straightforward explanation about his position in the chancellor question:

> I am now being approached often about the chancellor succession. My viewpoint is absolutely clear. Right now, I do not believe that the Kaiser will offer the position to me, but I do not wish to obtain it. I have a high position of responsibility that is satisfying and occupies me greatly. Why exchange it for a much more difficult one, which is associated with continuous agitation and great disappointments. The vanity of becoming chancellor does not really affect me. My excellent relationship with the Kaiser would also very likely suffer because it is not at all easy to get along with him. Should he directly order me to become chancellor, I would thus interpret the matter like a true soldier and do what is commanded of me.\footnote{Waldersee, March 16, 1890, \textit{Denkwürdigkeiten} II, 116-117.}

For Waldersee, there was simply nothing to gain personally by becoming chancellor. On July 5, 1888, even before he officially became Chief of Staff, he had written, “things go as well for me as they do for few mortals; perhaps I stand at the zenith of my life.”\footnote{Waldersee, July 5, 1888, \textit{Denkwürdigkeiten} I, 410-411} Among all the positive developments he had going for him, the greatest was his strong relationship with the Kaiser, who
“thinks a great deal of me, likes to hear my opinion on many things, and in fact has friendly feelings towards me.”^91 If Waldersee wanted influence, he did not need the chancellorship.

As many historians recognize, Waldersee was ambitious, but his motivation was not to gain power for himself through the chancellorship, but to preserve the independence of the military and its commander, the Kaiser, against the intrusions of civil government. With Bismarck’s support in 1883, he worked with the Chief of the Military Cabinet to reduce the powers of the War Ministry in Germany's military establishment because, if not, “we would undoubtedly come to French conditions, in which the minister commands the army.”^92 In 1882, with Bismarck’s blessing, Waldersee met unofficially with the chief of Austria’s General Staff, Friedrich von Beck. The German Quartermaster-General wanted the staffs to use military attachés instead of the embassies to communicate with one another because, notes Beck’s biographer Scott Lackey, there was an “overriding concern for military secrecy since presumably contacts might eventually include the exchange of deployment plans.”^93 Throughout the 1880s, Waldersee pushed for the independence of Germany’s military attachés so that they would not have to show their reports to the civilian heads at the empire’s embassies. Isabel Hull has interpreted Waldersee’s use of the attachés as a way to build up his own political power, especially against Bismarck and the civilian authorities. She also states, “Waldersee probably did not intend this step to benefit Wilhelm so much as to weaken Bismarck.”^94 Although the attachés were used as a means to undermine the chancellor’s own manipulation of information,

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^91 This sentence is quoted directly from Röhl, *Wilhelm II*, 173-174 and is not printed in Waldersee’s entry for July 5, 1888, *Denkwürdigkeiten* I, 410-411.
Waldersee did want their reports to strengthen the monarch’s hand. In January 1889, Waldersee asked the Kaiser to allow the attachés to be directly under the sovereign’s authority, not the chancellor’s, especially since a number of attachés were the Kaiser’s Flügeladjutanten, his personal aides-de-camp. The Chief of Staff argued that insightful, independent military men were better informants than civilian diplomats who would be biased towards the chancellor’s policies. More importantly, he believed the Kaiser needed to hear different views. Bismarck reacted accordingly. “The chancellor in his suspicious manner fabricates now a whole structure of fantasies,” Waldersee wrote on December 26, 1889, “He believes I maintain an organized political bureau, in which the correspondence with all the military attachés plays a leading role.”

In Bismarck’s attempt to maintain power, Waldersee became a target after the Stoecker Affair, and with Wilhelm’s accession to the throne, he became a hostile partisan against the chancellor because he wanted to defend royal prerogative. “Count Waldersee himself, represented the ancient Prussian nobles’ traditions of an absolute monarchy and a Hohenzollern’s unlimited power – traditions which were all at war with this Bismarck usurpation of authority,” wrote a correspondent for The New York Times in 1890. In December 1888, Waldersee wrote that he heard the chancellor, residing at Friedrichsruh, had said, “I must soon go to Berlin because I must see the Kaiser often. Actually, it is necessary that I speak to him twice a week.”

By having to stay in Berlin and communicate with Wilhelm in person, not in writing, Bismarck

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96 Waldersee, March 2, 1889, Denkwürdigkeiten II, 42.
97 Waldersee, December 26, 1889, Denkwürdigkeiten II, 83-84.
admitted he “no longer constrains (zwinge) the Kaiser,” Waldersee opined. 99 “The chancellor wants to rule everything,” he wrote at the beginning of 1890, “but no longer has the strength to do it.” 100 Along with Friedrich von Holstein in the Foreign Office and the Kaiser’s friend and diplomat Philip Eulenburg, Waldersee sought to have Bismarck’s allies at court and in government removed, and, though he agitated against the chancellor, he did not play a leading role in getting him to resign. 101 Given the press campaign against him, Waldersee did not just have a political animosity toward Bismarck, but a personal one. “I have not the least desire ever to have any dealings with him again,” he wrote on March 2, 1890, “he has acted despicably towards me too often and I want no more to do with him. The only question, now that he is in decline, is whether I should forgive him everything or call him to account for it.” 102 On March 15, 1890, the “great clash,” as Waldersee termed it, between the Kaiser and Bismarck occurred, and the latter would be forced to submit his resignation. 103 The Wilhelmine era had begun.

Throughout his time in Berlin, Waldersee did not need to be chancellor to gain access to the Kaiser. In the late 1880s, the Wilhelm-Waldersee relationship remained strong and the two men would often discuss politics while strolling through the Tiergarten or spending time together in one of the royal palaces. 104 On his birthday in 1889, Wilhelm said he wanted Waldersee to be able to advise him on matters that are outside a purely military realm: domestic and international

100 Waldersee, January 18, 1890, Denkwürdigkeiten II, 94-95. In February 1889 he wrote, “The ministers are completely his creatures. He commands in the State Ministry and suffers no dissent. All the diplomats report only what they believe he wants to hear.” Waldersee, February 28, 1889, Denkwürdigkeiten II, 40-41.
104 Just two examples of many. Waldersee, April 22 and December 23, 1889, Denkwürdigkeiten II, 49, 83.
affairs. Noting that Bismarck looked upon him as a rival, he wrote, “I have the awareness to not be equal to such tasks, and was thankful to be able to remain in my real profession.”

There was no need for a Prussian officer, friend, and courtier of the Kaiser to seek a political, civilian office. A desire for the chancellorship was not Waldersee’s motivation for agitating against Bismarck. He sought to protect and promote the power of the monarch and his military. On July 22, 1892, a correspondent for The New York Herald arrived at the Hotel Titlis in Switzerland, where Waldersee was vacationing with Mary. Not happy about the visit from a member of the press, he nonetheless answered the journalist’s questions about his rumored political dealings and aspirations:

I am . . . not a politician . . . Once and for all, I beg you not to believe the absurdities which malicious people seem to be publishing about me. I am contented with my military calling (‘Ich finde volle Befriedigung in meinem Beruf als Soldat’ were the Count’s exact words) and have no higher ambition than to do credit to the post with which my sovereign has entrusted me.

Waldersee never became “the coming man” that liberals and progressives feared in the late nineteenth century, and he was clearly not aiming to become chancellor as historians have stated or assumed in the late twentieth century.

The American Egeria?

On January 21, 1889, an unidentified person wrote to the editor of the New York Tribune asking about the identity of the American wife of Count Alfred von Waldersee and the extent of her political influence in Germany, if she had any. The editor replied that she was the former

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105 Waldersee, January 27, 1889, Denkwürdigkeiten II, 33-34.
106 The New York Herald, July 24, 1892, GStA, Nachlass Waldersee, C. I Nr. 6. Waldersee noted the visit in his journal, stating that he had said nothing that he had not been telling others. Waldersee, addendum for July 21, 1892, Denkwürdigkeiten II, 252.
Mary Esther Lee of New York, who “undoubtedly has had great political influence in Germany, especially over the present Emperor while he was yet Prince Wilhelm. By some she is represented as an ambitious political intriguer; by others as a humble-minded Christian philanthropist.”¹⁰⁷ “In truth, she was both,” wrote amateur historian and Mary’s distant relative Alson Smith in his 1962 book, *A View of the Spree: The extraordinary career of the American grocer’s daughter who became a ‘sanctified Pompadour’ to Germany’s last Kaiser.*¹⁰⁸ Smith presents a far-fetched account of the Waldersees, claiming Mary was an ambitious and powerful political intriguer in imperial Berlin who had an intimate relationship with Kaiser Wilhelm II. After mentioning this book, John Röhl writes, “We shall not waste further time on this unproved and implausible story.”¹⁰⁹ I will not either, but Smith’s fallacies were based largely on – apart from his imagination – newspaper articles, which had mischaracterized Mary von Waldersee, too.

The press, when dealing with Alfred von Waldersee, was certainly a political tool, but Mary – unintentionally – provided interesting material for the newspaper industry during the early stages of yellow journalism. As demonstrated in Part I, Mary was a devoted, pious wife whose interests and activities were philanthropic, not political. In 1885, her charitable work had brought her husband into contact with Adolf Stoecker, an association that would begin press speculation about the Count’s role in politics. Consequently, American newspapers became intrigued by the American-born Countess von Waldersee and her possible power and influence in the German capital. In looking at the issue of Mary in the late nineteenth-century press, we can see how the old, private circles of the elite became merged with the world of the general,

¹⁰⁹ Röhl, *Young Wilhelm*, 490.
increasingly literate public. What members of the upper class did or said in private – for
example, Prince Wilhelm’s visits to the Waldersees and the Stoecker meetings at
Herwarthstrasse 2 – became material for public gossip and affected the way someone was seen in
society-at-large and in history.

Newspapers did not begin talking about Mary until the beginning of the reign of the
cancer-stricken Frederick III in March 1888. Everyone knew that after his imminent death the
next Kaiser would be his son Wilhelm, to whom Alfred von Waldersee was a close friend and
advisor. The development of the idea that Mary was an ambitious political intriguer and the
fascination with her were founded on four basic facts that were shown in Part I. First, Alfred and
Mary von Waldersee were friends with Wilhelm and Augusta Victoria. Second, Mary had an
especially close relationship to Crown Princess Augusta Victoria, to whom she was a great aunt
through her first marriage to the Prince de Noer and with whom she assisted the City Mission.
Third, Mary was an American, a nationality that was neither traditional nor common among the
German elite. Lastly, Alfred von Waldersee became identified as a member of the young
Hohenzollern’s entourage and as a strong political supporter of the conservatives. Journalists
connected these facts and produced articles such as the following, which was printed in The
Daily Graphic of New York on March 27, 1888 and titled “An American Mme. de Maintenon”:

It is possible, nay, it is too probable, that Emperor Fritz has not long to live. . . .
. . . Countess Waldersee has been for years the chief enemy in Berlin society of
the present Empress [Victoria]. . . . [Prince von Noer] died in six months and left her very
rich and titled. That marriage makes her, however, aunt of the present Crown Princess, a
rather stupid party. The Countess is the most consummate female politician in Berlin on
the Conservative side. Her salon has been the center of court and Junker hostility to the
present Empress. . . .

There is one thing of interest to us in all these intrigues, and that is the fact that
the Countess Waldersee is a New Yorker, having been Mary Esther Lee, daughter of
David Lee, formerly a well-known banker of this city. She is a very able and brilliant
woman of forty-eight years and has long been a most important figure in Prussian social
daily. It is worth noticing that the most conspicuous American women who have married
abroad into prominent political and State families are most closely identified with ultra conservative affairs and politics. This marked in the case of Lady Randolph Churchill, for example, and still more so in that of the Countess Waldersee. Other instances might be named.

The author ended then with a misogynistic note:

In the Berlin case it will be well for Germany if the Lady’s influence shall be speedily neutralized. It represents all that is most offensive, bigoted, and domineering in Prussian life and German policy. It is said that when “Greek meets Greek, then comes the tug of war.” Substitute woman for Greek and we have the Berlin situation.110

This article reveals the overarching image of Mary that would persist for years: an ambitious political intriguer who operated out of the salons of her home and used her relationship with Wilhelm and Augusta Victoria for political ends. On March 25, 1888, an article in the New York Daily Tribune – titled “The Empress’s American Rival” – stated that although Mary’s relationship with Augusta Victoria was a source of influence over Crown Prince Wilhelm, “the real secret of her power in society and politics is inherent energy of character directed by ambition.” The article, calling the Waldersees Wilhelm’s “confidential advisors,” claimed that Mary fueled the Crown Prince’s “prejudices against the English circle in Berlin and also against the Hebrew element; and it was from her salon that he drove recently to Dr. Stoecker’s mission.” The correspondent predicted that “the American, Mary Lea [sic], is destined . . . to be the power behind the throne when the present ill-fated reign comes to an end, and Prince Wilhelm succeeds to the Imperial title . . .”111 “Her salon is the most popular in Berlin, as far as high officials are concerned,” stated the New Haven Union in January 1890, “She is the pride of the American colony, and the only woman in Germany of whom it can be said that she is the friend of the

Emperor in the highest and most intellectual sense.”

In August 1890, a correspondent for the *New York Times* wrote that the relationship between Mary and Augusta Victoria brought Alfred and Wilhelm closer together, “the results of which have been tremendous in Germany.” He also stated that Mary, “with the privilege of an American,” was able to unite the otherwise antagonistic elements of German politics in her home, which became “the center of the rising opposition to the Bismarcks.”

Not only did the press portray Mary as an opponent of Empress Victoria – the wife of Frederick III – but they also gave her the role as Otto von Bismarck’s political opponent. One paper, after discussing all the meetings at the Waldereeses’ home, stated that although Herbert Bismarck was being prepared to become chancellor, “the wise ones say that all the plannings and plottings have been in vain, for the Countess Waldese, the fair American, has held a winning hand, and before her influence at court that of the once powerful Bismarck is as nothing.”

Not only was she powerful enough to challenge Bismarck, but also to bring her husband success, according to the *New Haven Union* in January 1890: “Unquestionably much of Count Waldese’s success has been due to his brilliant and highly accomplished wife. He is the coming man in Germany, as she is the leading lady in Berlin.”

Newspaper sometimes described her appearance and manners. The *New Haven Union* article also noted that Mary’s “hair is snow-white, but she has all the vivacity and sprightliness of a lady of middle age [and] is a fine conversationalist.”

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112 *New Haven Union*, January 19, 1890, HH, Von Waldensee-Lee Collection, Volume 5.
114 Unidentifiable newspaper, “Bismarck’s American Foe,” HH, Von Waldensee-Lee Collection, Volume 5. The dates for this volume are April 27, 1888 to May 14, 1890.
115 *New Haven Union*, January 19, 1890, HH, Von Waldensee-Lee Collection, Volume 5.
116 *New Haven Union*, January 19, 1890, HH, Von Waldensee-Lee Collection, Volume 5.
Queen of the German Court [Interview in Atlanta Constitution],” the correspondent stated the following:

... [The Countess] is now the first lady at the German Court... She lives like a Queen in the palace adjoining Van Moltke’s [sic]. Though everything about her is royal, she herself follows the most severe simplicity. From her fine forehead her soft silver hair is brushed smoothly back. Her complexion is as fresh as a girl’s; her face, with its beautifully chiseled features, is full of expression, and her figure and carriage are regal. At home she wears dark cashmeres of finest quality, but made absolutely without trimming, while the neck and sleeves have plain linen collars and cuffs. Yet with all this simplicity hers is the most magnetic presence I have known.117

The articles I have mentioned or reproduced in this section have generally had factual errors: printing “Lea” instead of Lee, stating Mary was Augusta Victoria’s cousin, and reporting her age and the year she married incorrectly. They – and even the errors made in them – show, however, what the American newspapers really wanted to report: her connection to the Prussian royal family and high politics, her American background, the goings-on at her home, the way she looked, and, most importantly, what influence the daughter of a New York grocer could have in the capital of the powerful German Empire.

In comparison to the American press, European newspapers did not mention or discuss Mary as often. The Times of London mentioned that she was American and the widow of the Prince von Noer once in 1882 and once in 1888; in 1890 Waldersee was reportedly going to Italy for vacation, especially for the health of “his wife.”118 The French press occasionally promoted the idea of Mary’s political influence. On September 21, 1888, L’Éclair noted that the “salons of Madame de Waldersee” were opened to Adolf Stoecker, “champion of anti-Semitism and advocate of Christian Socialism” and that she “is a superior woman (supérieure femme) and, one

117 Unidentifiable newspaper, “The Queen of the German Court [Interview in Atlanta Constitution],” HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume 5.
says, the political Egeria of her husband,” who “put the successor of Moltke” in great position of influence.\textsuperscript{119} The reference to Mary as Egeria – a nymph who in Roman mythology was a counselor to the second king of Rome – appears to be unique to French newspapers. In June 1888, the German \textit{Kölnische Zeitung} had reported that “another Frenchman” had mentioned “the Egeria of the new Kaiser of Germany” in a newspaper article and believed that he must have been referring to Count von Waldersee, “of whose mysterious influence – of course! – a whole novel is then produced with the most malicious childishness.”\textsuperscript{120} German newspapers rarely discussed or mentioned Mary. In July 1888, the \textit{Neue Bayerische Landeszeitung} of Würzburg, in a feature about Alfred von Waldersee, stated that Mary was an intimate friend of Empress Augusta Victoria and that both of them “work diligently for the relief of poverty and misery and are active members of the Berlin City Mission.” The paper claims also that the meeting at the Waldersee’s home for the City Mission was “reason enough” for the liberal press “to splash both high ladies with their very nasty slobber.”\textsuperscript{121} From the newspaper articles for the period 1888-1891 available in the Waldersee Papers (Nachlass Waldersee) at the \textit{Geheimes Staatsarchiv} in Berlin and at Harvard University’s Houghton Library in Cambridge, the image of Mary as an influential political heavyweight in Berlin was largely a phenomenon in the American press, but two pieces of evidence from Waldersee and Mrs. Lee shown below reveal that this portrayal may have been more widespread in the German and British press than the archived newspaper clippings show.

\textsuperscript{119} September 21, 1888, \textit{L’Éclair}, GStA, Nachlass Waldersee, C. I Nr. 2.
\textsuperscript{121} \textit{Unterhaltungs-Beilage zur Neuen Bayerischen Landeszeitung}, July 21, 1888, HH, Von Waldarsee-Lee Collection, Volume 12.
How American newspapers acquired information on Mary – at least enough to speculate about her – is not entirely clear. Correspondents may have read about Alfred von Waldersee in German newspapers and drawn their conclusions about Mary from his reported influence, but they most likely talked to members of the Berlin elite who would have probably been personally familiar – for better or worse – with the Waldereees. Baroness Althea Salvador, for example, noted in her article that she had talked to diplomats and people in “official circles.”

Mary’s mother, Mrs. Lee, now and then reminded her cousin, Mary Hoppin, not to spread what she was reporting from the very salons in which Mary was believed to be exerting political influence:

“Be careful dear Mary not to let what I say get into print – it is meant only for you”; “It would be better dear Mary to consider what I say of the ‘powers that be’ as confidential – there is so much printing about – I should regret that any of my sayings should come back to Berlin.”

It would be difficult – perhaps impossible – to argue and prove that the information Mrs. Lee was sending to her friends and relatives in the United States somehow fueled the gossip about Mary in American newspapers.

Mrs. Lee did not desire that what she wrote be circulated. She rarely exaggerated or purposefully bragged about her experiences. On March 30, 1888, Mrs. Lee turned 85 years old – and she would live for another eleven years – and she was finding it increasingly difficult to

122 New York World, date of publication unknown, but article submitted on December 10, 1888, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection. Volume 5.
123 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, July 20, 1888 and May 18, 1888, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume B. In an interesting contrast, on April 1, 1888, Mrs. Lee complained about Jews who “have money – which is a power in the press – no doubt they send their papers to countrymen in America and thus a false opinion should be formed in our Country of the Crown Prince – who in reality has noble qualities.” She urged her cousin to “counteract such wrong reports – for we feel desirous a favorable opinion should be formed in our Country of the Crown Prince – because he really deserves it.” Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, March 23, 1888, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume B.
write and see.\textsuperscript{124} She never learned enough German to feel comfortable at large gatherings, and on January 23, 1888, she wrote to her cousin that she could no longer hear. Since then, people communicated with her by writing what they wanted to say in a little notebook.\textsuperscript{125} As she became older, Mrs. Lee felt increasingly isolated in a world to which she had not adapted as easily as her daughters. Writing letters to Cousin Mary in Connecticut provided a continued connection to her homeland and her past; this decades-long activity allowed Mrs. Lee to share her experiences with someone who would not just be able to understand her language, but also care enough about her to write back until her death in 1899.

During the late 1880s, Mary did not actively combat the gossip about her in the press. She did, however, clarify one issue for Mrs. Hoppin. On August 31, 1888, while on the annual vacation to Lautenbach, her sister’s estate in southwest Germany, Mary added a postscript to her mother’s letter “to answer the question, which you say, is now, so often mooted – how my sisters and myself met our husbands.” After describing their engagements, Mary wrote, “now dear cousin, you see how we have been led, step by step, to make our homes in Europe – and not, as some might think, did my mother bring us abroad, with such an object!”\textsuperscript{126} Mary did have at least one defender. On March 26, 1888, a Mr. Charles Porter submitted a letter to the editor of The Tribune in response to an article it printed about Mary titled, “An American Princess”:

The writer [of the article] quite intentionally does injustice in some respects to one of the most noble characters that have conferred honor upon the American name abroad, a woman utterly incapable of any of the arts or motives attributed to her, who brings to her

\textsuperscript{124} Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, March 8, 1888, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume B.
\textsuperscript{125} Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, January 18, 1888, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume B.
\textsuperscript{126} Mary von Waldersee to Mary Hoppin, August 31, 1888, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume B. She then added, “It seems strange to be so transplanted – but we can work for the Lord here, as well as there and perhaps here it is more needed.”
high position a humble Christian heart, devotes her means and influence to doing good, and must be deeply pained, even at being made conspicuous.\textsuperscript{127}

Porter, from Schnectady in central New York State, may have most likely been an old friend or relation to the Lee family because he provided a short, truthful biography of Mary, in which he emphasized how she met the Prince de Noer and Count von Waldsee.

The articles about the daughter of a New York grocer playing a leading role in the politics of the great German Empire may have fascinated readers, especially in the United States, but they were annoying to the residents of Herwarthstrasse 2. At the beginning of June 1888, Mrs. Lee complained to her cousin, stating that reports of Mary’s influence were “utterly false” and were designed to “break the beautiful friendship between Prince and Princess Wilhelm and Mary and Alfred.”\textsuperscript{128} Towards the end of the month, Waldsee grumbled in his journal about the “[German] democratic press,” which reported that his wife had an unlimited influence on both the Kaiser and his wife and “more of that kind of rubbish.” “The foreign press naturally joins in,” he added.\textsuperscript{129}

These articles did, however, provide comedic material. At the end of March 1888, a British newspaper called Mary the commander-in-chief of the Crown Princess’s household. “To me it seemed the hope was to cool off the friendship I’ve spoken of,” Mrs. Lee wrote, “You will be pleased to hear it has had the contrary effect.” After the article appeared, Wilhelm and Augusta Victoria invited the Waldsees over to dinner, where the Crown Prince “laughingly announced – Countess Waldsee is our commander-in-chief!” From that point on, whenever

\textsuperscript{128} Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, May 18, 1888, HH, Von Waldsee-Lee Collection, Volume B.
\textsuperscript{129} Waldsee, June 22, 1888, \textit{Denkwürdigkeiten} I, 405.
Waldersee left Wilhelm, the latter would say, ‘remember me to ‘Commander-in-Chief’!’

Almost a year later, in March 1889 – after much press discussion about whether Herbert Bismarck or Waldersee would be chancellor – Otto von Bismarck’s son escorted Mary to her seat at a dinner table to the left of then Kaiser Wilhelm II. He asked her if she was still “Commander-in-Chief” and explained to Herbert that the papers had stated that Mary was “the most dangerous woman at the Prussian Court.” During the winter of 1890-91, Wilhelm turned to a duke at a dinner and said, “you see when Waldersee wants sourkrout [sic] he has to come to me for he can’t get it at home – for Countess W. is commander-in-chief.” “A good laugh was the result,” Mrs. Lee wrote, “[the] Emperor has never forgotten and often makes a laugh by it.”

Wilhelm might not have been the best comedian in the room, but his persistent joking about Mary’s reported political influence reveals that even though he liked the Countess, she was not a political figure. In July 1888, Mary received a long letter from Paris pleading that she use her influence on the Kaiser to promote peace. The next day, she joined her husband in Potsdam where he had to present a report to Kaiser. At dinner, Mary showed the letter to Wilhelm and Augusta Victoria, and it “amused them very much and caused a general laugh.” Mrs. Lee also wrote that a count “laughingly told” Waldersee how he had read in French papers that Mary was the go-between for the Kaiser and Bismarck, and he wanted to know whether the Countess supported war or peace. “These nothings go the round of papers,” Mrs. Lee lamented, “it is a marvel why? for Mary never interfered in affairs of state. Well it answers to laugh about!”

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130 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, May 18, 1888, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume B.  
131 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, March 8, 1889, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume C.  
132 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, December 19, 1890, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume C.  
133 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, July 20, 1888, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume B.
Laugh they did, and Mary continued about her philanthropic and religious pursuits. One evening in early December 1888, Alfred and Mary had to leave a dinner they were giving for the chiefs of the departments of the General Staff because Their Majesties requested that they join them for tea. There, Mary lobbied Wilhelm for more worship space for soldiers, and although the Kaiser agreed with her, he stated that he did not have the funds for it.\textsuperscript{134} This request shows the extent of her sway over Wilhelm II. From what has been revealed and analyzed about Mary, her relationship to her husband, and their relationship to Wilhelm and Augusta Victoria in this section and in Part I, it is clear that Mary did not seek to engage in and influence politics. From 1888 to 1891, the international press found a juicy story and printed it in their newspapers. Mary especially captivated the American press, for as the title of an 1898 article in the \textit{New York Herald} neatly states, “There is Romance in the Idea of an American Woman Influencing a European Palace.”\textsuperscript{135}

The typical image of Mary that was published during the late 1880s would reappear in American newspapers in the late 1890s, during the height of yellow journalism. After Waldersee became the commander of the allied forces during the Boxer Rebellion in 1900-01, Alfred and Mary would become a hot topic in the international press even more than they were in the late 1880s. At the request of the editor of \textit{Harper’s Bazar} in 1903, Mary von Waldersee agreed to tell her story. She was appreciative, but, the editor wrote, she “good-naturedly pointed out the extraordinary inaccuracies and misrepresentations in most of the articles about her published in the American press.” Mary began her article – “The Story of My Life” – by stating why she agreed to write it:

\textsuperscript{134} Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, December 16, 1888, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume B.
\textsuperscript{135} \textit{New York Herald}, Sunday, July 3, 1898, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume 12.
[Because] the people of my native country have evinced for many years a kind interest in my life – an interest which has led different newspaper editors in America to publish extraordinary and at the same time foolish stories about me and my influence in the political affairs of my adopted country, Germany . . .

“Regarding politics, they are quite out of my sphere, and I have made it a rule to leave them alone,” she wrote about halfway through the article, “It has always seemed to me that selfish aims dominated political parties and there was little in them for the glory of humanity.”

Throughout her life, Mary found fulfillment in her life’s devotion to God and to the poor and downtrodden, not in a quest for political influence. After her death on July 4, 1914, the title of one obituary stated, “Woman Feared by Bismarck Laid to Rest at Hanover.” Her soul had departed from this earth, but she could not escape her public image that had been formed in 1888 and has largely continued until today.

The Monarchist and the Changing Monarchy

On the afternoon of March 8, 1888, Mary von Waldersee went to a Bible reading at the Young Men’s Christian Association, where she asked the pastor to pray for the 90 year-old Kaiser, who had recently become ill. That day, Prince Wilhelm called on Alfred von Waldersee, who, missing dinner at Herwarthstrasse 2, did not return from the royal palace in Berlin until after midnight. The Quartermaster-General was then summoned again – this time with Helmuth von Moltke – around four in the morning of March 9. “After daylight Alfred sent word to Mary the dear Emperor still lived, but his death was expected at any moment,” Mrs. Lee wrote, “but

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137 Unidentifiable newspaper, July 8, 1914 is the date of the article. HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume 8.
alas, it was not God’s will.”

About 8:30 that morning, Waldersee witnessed Wilhelm I – his friend and king – take his final breath. Everyone present kneeled as a preacher said a prayer. “To experience a more solemn moment is not possible,” he later wrote, “Never will it be forgotten!” After the wheelchair-bound Empress had herself rolled away, Prince Wilhelm, with tears rolling down his cheeks, stood next to his grandfather while members of the Hohenzollern family filed past and kissed their patriarch’s hand. The prince motioned for the others in the room to approach, and Waldersee kneeled down “to press a last kiss on the cooling hand.”

Shortly thereafter, he went home briefly to tell Mary that the Kaiser had passed away peacefully. At two o’clock that afternoon, as Mrs. Lee was writing to her cousin, Waldersee remained at the palace; the flags on the Military Staff Building flew at half-mast. Later on that evening, Waldersee obtained permission for his family – not just Mary and Mrs. Lee, but also his sister and niece who were visiting – to come to the palace. They were escorted to the bedroom of the deceased Kaiser, whose expression, Mrs. Lee noted, “was of perfect peace, seeming as though in quiet sleep.” That night, Waldersee and another aide were the Guard of Honor to the body.

On Sunday morning, March 11, a religious service was held in the Kaiser’s bedroom, and that night, his body was brought to the cathedral in a ceremonial funeral procession. The day’s events were solemn, and for Waldersee, his mother-in-law wrote, “a complete religious

138 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, March 9, 1888, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume B.
139 Waldersee, March 10, 1888, _Denkwürdigkeiten_ I, 366-370.
140 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, March 9, 1888, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume B. Mrs. Lee began her letter by stating, “All Berlin is in sorrow – but not their beloved Emperor. He is with his Savior and in happiness forever.”
141 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, March 23, 1888, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume B. “It was my first visit to the palace and before leaving Alfred took us through several of the large salons,” Mrs. Lee wrote, “Magnificence everywhere – as I glanced around I could only think alas, alas! – how less than nothing is all this in the face of death!”
worship.”142 As her son-in-law himself wrote, “The 8th and 9th of March were for me a continuous religious service with peaceful, marvelous, and uplifting impressions.”143 At least once a day, he formed part of the Guard of Honor that stood by the body of the Emperor for a two-hour shift. His brother – an admiral – and sister-in-law came from Potsdam and dined at Herwarthstrasse 2 after paying their respects at the cathedral. Admiral Waldersee reported that his brother stood at the head of the coffin holding the imperial ensign, not a muscle in his face moving.144 Alfred’s soldierly honor and sense of duty to his friend and sovereign must have overcome his grief, for soon after the death, Mrs. Lee notes, “he was very much overcome by the loss and wept like a child.”145 On March 10, Waldersee found time to reflect upon the occasion in his journal:

I have lost much, infinitely much. A gracious master, who gave to me and my family countless signs of goodwill, with which I was familiar in my youth, I experienced the great times of 1866 and 1870-71, I was from 1870-76 Flügeladjutant and from 1880 until today General à la suite and Adjutant General, and with which in the past years I had so many official and personal connections, that everything could only lead me to love and respect him. Deep sorrow will come over the entire nation. The whole world knows that one of the greatest figures in history has finished his earthly career. We stand with this blow before a new time. May God protect the Fatherland!146

Historians who have written about Waldersee have generally focused on his relationship to Wilhelm II and the Wilhelmine era, but he was first and foremost a member of Wilhelm I’s entourage and needs to be understood through his experience in the first Kaiser’s reign.

142 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, March 23, 1888, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume B.
143 Waldersee, March 10, 1888, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 366-370.
144 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, March 23, 1888, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume B. “We wanted to go to [cathedral] and feared the crush. Police were in strong force mounted and on foot. Alfred said they would keep clear space for carriage and he would meet us at door so we went and Alfred took us safely to gallery where we could see below . . . All near the body were required and looked so exactly like statues it was hard to believe them living men.”
145 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, March 23, 1888, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume B. “Alfred was very fond of his sovereign who had always been a good and true friend for him.”
146 Waldersee, March 10, 1888, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 366-370.
Waldersee was 28 years old when Wilhelm became King of Prussia in 1861, and his career would take off over the next 27 years. Consequently, by 1888, the second half of his life – the half in which he was a mature and politically-conscious man – was spent during the era of Wilhelm I, under whom the monarchy defeated Prussian liberalism and created the German Empire. By contrast, Waldersee would live for 16 years of Wilhelm II’s reign, but remain a figure whose Weltanschauung – and especially his conception of the Prusso-German monarchy – had been formed and established during the reign of Wilhelm I. Before leaving for the front in July 1870, Queen Augusta told the king’s aides to “watch over him not as a superior, but instead, as one is concerned for a father.”¹⁴⁷ For Waldersee, whose own father died in 1873, Wilhelm I was not a father figure as Waldersee was for a young Wilhelm II. Instead, he was a friendly, respectable, paternalistic monarch, whose material and immaterial gifts – most notably ranks and duties – Waldersee wrote, “could only lead me to love and respect him.”¹⁴⁸

As shown in Part I, the Kaiser’s grandson became attached to Waldersee and gave him marks of favor, which the general reciprocated through loyalty. Waldersee saw in the future Wilhelm II a great, talented monarch who would not have his father’s tendencies toward constitutionalism and who would become “the right man to maintain Germany’s position of power, perhaps to expand it!”¹⁴⁹ In this section, I illustrate the Waldersees’ last couple of years in Berlin and argue that Alfred von Waldersee erroneously believed Wilhelm II could and would follow in the footsteps of his grandfather. In his campaign to defend the monarchy against its enemies both foreign and domestic, Waldersee failed to comprehend the inherent danger in the system he advocated: a sovereign has a personality and will of his own, which can actually

¹⁴⁷ Waldersee, August 2, 1870, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 86.
¹⁴⁸ Waldersee, March 10, 1888, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 366-370.
¹⁴⁹ Waldersee, May 28, 1884, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 238-239.
become a danger to the monarchy he, Waldersee, sought to defend. In his reaction against the potentially dangerous rule of Frederick III, who had liberal, constitutional tendencies, Waldersee put all of his hopes in the man who would become Germany’s last Kaiser. Instead of decreasing monarchical power as his father would have done or using it in a responsible way with his government like his grandfather did, Wilhelm II would assert his own control over policymaking. In his attempts to establish his own personal rule in the early years of his reign, Wilhelm, who had looked to Waldersee’s friendship and advice throughout the 1880s, reassigned his father figure to the command of an army corps away from Berlin in early 1891. This act amounted to a demotion, especially for a man who was rumored to be a possible candidate for the chancellorship, and shook Waldersee’s faith in Wilhelm II, and thus the monarchy itself.

On February 9, 1888, the cancer-stricken Crown Prince Frederick had an operation on his throat, and the next day, Waldersee noted that it was generally believed the successor to the crown only had a few months to live. The uncertainty of the Crown Prince’s health caused instability at court and in high society. “The worst turmoil is unavoidable,” Waldersee wrote, “[he] cannot reign, but under the pressure of his passionate wife there will still be enough havoc.” By the beginning of March, Waldersee complained in his journal that people who were once intriguing against Prince Wilhelm were now trying to gain favor with him because his reign seemed closer than ever. Through the sickness of Frederick III and then the death of Wilhelm I, Prince Wilhelm sought out the advice and friendship of his father figure, Waldersee. On March 7, 1888, he returned to Berlin from seeing his actual father in San Remo, where he had been at odds with his mother. That evening, he called on Waldersee, and at the palace,
where the Kaiser lay weak and dying, the prince took the general aside into another room. “He was very excited and moved,” Waldersee wrote about their conversation, “All kinds of things are now going through his head!” On March 16, Waldersee walked with the deceased sovereign’s military entourage in the funeral procession. Leading the other princes, Crown Prince Wilhelm followed directly behind the hearse. His “dignified, strong, and noble manner” made a deep impression on all who saw him, Waldersee later wrote.

The reign of Frederick III would not last long; in fact, it would last 99 days. Waldersee was sure that if the new Kaiser were healthy, he would be removed from his position on the General Staff, but he knew – it was common knowledge – that Frederick’s reign would be short. Although the Kaiser wanted to form his own military entourage, he did not know with whom he would replace the members of his father’s, and so the Chief of the Military Cabinet, General von Albedyll, persuaded him to keep the current group. Even if he and Empress Victoria had a program to institute, J. Alden Nichols observes, Frederick’s ill health would have made it difficult to overcome powerful people and competing interests in Berlin, and his absence from the imperial capital kept him ignorant of the changing political situation, though he never was really politically astute. As in earlier years, Waldersee was greatly concerned about the

154 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, March 23, 1888, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume B. “Mourning is quite general and court mourning very deep,” Mrs. Lee wrote, “all belonging must wear under hat a firm point of double English crape – coming low on forehead and long veil of same crape. I never before saw any so crimped. Now I don’t belong to Court – but being with Mary she wants me to wear the same – so I do – “point” and all. Mary had to put her servants in black – 3 months deep Court mourning.”
power of the assertive, English-born Empress Victoria over her husband and their liberal, progressive, and Jewish supporters. He complained that the liberals quietly tried to make the most out of the situation: “They indulge in assurances of loyalty and hunt for orders, promotions, and noble titles . . . People, who until now were believed to be committed republicans, now act as if they were the actual pillars of the kingdom.” Incensed by an article he believed came from Bismarck’s government, Waldersee wrote, that “were the Kaiser Frederick a man, he would chase away Bismarck and rule himself. He will not do this; instead, he will bow, and with that, the kingdom takes a great step back.”

At 11:15 on the morning of June 15, 1888, Frederick III passed away peacefully at the New Palace (Neues Palais) in Potsdam. In grief, Empress Victoria wrote to her mother, Queen Victoria of Great Britain, several days later:

I disappear with [Frederick], my task was with him, for him, for his dear people. It is buried in the grave where he will be buried today. My voice will be silent forever! . . . We had a mission. We felt and we knew it – We were Papa’s & your children! We were faithful to what we believed and knew to be right. We loved Germany. We wished to see her strong and great not only with the sword, but in all that was righteous in culture, in progress, and in liberty.

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158 Waldersee, March 28 and 29, April 6, May 4, and June 5, 1888, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 380-81, 384-386, 394, 402. As a devout Protestant and monarchist who believed in the Christian, Prussian monarchy, when he complained about Jewish influence in these entries, he coupled it with the influence of the left-liberal Progressive Party. For example, on April 6, “Ausnahme von fortschrittlichen und jüdischen Kreisen”; on May 4, “von den fortschrittlichen und jüdischen Anhängern”; and on June 5, “die fortschrittliche-jüdische Clique.”

159 Waldersee, May 29, 1888, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 401.

160 Waldersee, April 6, 1888, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 386. “The Empress now rules the country,” Waldersee lamented, but he added that if the Kaiser were healthy, i.e. effective, his wife would still lead him, causing an even greater misfortune for the empire. “How wonderfully everything is turning out,” he concluded, because “everywhere one looks hopefully to the Crown Prince.”

161 Empress Victoria, also known as Empress Frederick; quoted in Nichols, The Year of the Three Kaisers, 337.
If Waldersee had seen this letter, it would only have confirmed his fears of the Emperor and Empress, but upon hearing of Frederick’s death, Waldersee travelled to the Marble Palace (Marblepalais) in Potsdam to see the new Kaiser, Wilhelm II. The next day, Waldersee wrote, “it was a peculiar feeling to stand now before the young Kaiser,” who told him, “You have always maintained loyalty to me, now continue to help me.” After the Kaiser issued his proclamations “To the Army and Navy” and “To My People,” Waldersee observed that everywhere there was the feeling that the country had “overcome a difficult illness” and looked forward to a happier time. “The uncertainty, the mistrust, and the dissatisfaction pressed terribly on all souls,” he wrote, “The gentlemen of the Progressives and the Jewish supporters have definitely been hit hard.”

At the end of June 1888, the Kaiser ordered the Quartermaster-General to announce his accession personally to Emperor Franz Josef of Austria-Hungary, who, immediately upon hearing of the selection, sent the new German emperor a telegram of thanks. Waldersee’s strong support for the German-Austrian alliance – as shown during the 1887 war scare – was no secret in Austrian political circles and the public. On June 27, 1888, the day after the Habsburg monarch received Wilhelm II’s envoy, the liberal Neue Freie Presse of Vienna stated that the choice of Waldersee for the mission “must be regarded as further proof of Germany’s loyalty to the alliance and, as it were, the sanction of the military part of the German-Austrian alliance agreement through the new Kaiser.”

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162 Waldersee, June 16, 1888, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 404-405. To this Waldersee wrote, “I shall truly not lack in my good will [and] may the dear God give me the strength and reason to always advice the right thing.”
163 Waldersee, June 19, 1888, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 405.
164 Waldersee, June 22 and 23, 1888, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 405.
165 Neue Freie Presse, Wednesday, June 27, 1888, morning edition, GStA, Nachlass Waldersee, C. I Nr. 2.
Reflecting on his life on July 5, 1888, Waldersee felt he had reason not just to be thankful, but also be a little boastful: his enemies had been neutralized; he held a high military position; the General Staff had great confidence in him; he was a prominent, respected member of society; and he had “the happiest home life possible.” The leading reason for his cheerfulness, however, was his relationship to Wilhelm II: “I stand in high favor with the Kaiser, which the whole world knows, and which is why a number of people run after me. The Kaiser thinks a great deal of me, likes to hear my opinion on many things, and in fact has friendly feelings towards me.”

“In short,” he stated, “things go as well for me as they do for few mortals; perhaps I stand at the zenith of my life.” There was, however, another positive development in Waldersee’s immediate future. In August 1888, he became the Chief of Staff, when the almost 88 year-old Helmuth von Moltke finally submitted his resignation. The news did not surprise Waldersee, but he reflected on the Kaiser’s faith in him and on the importance of his new position not only for the future of Germany, but also for Europe and the world if war should break out.

He received the Kaiser’s letter about his appointment on August 10, while vacationing with his wife at Gastein, a spa town in Austria. Mary sent the good news to her mother at her sister’s summer home in southwest Germany:

I rejoice with Alfred at his nomination to this high and responsible post and doubly so that Moltke was not obliged to retire – or to be taken away [from his apartment in the Military Staff Building] to make room for his successor! How good the dear Lord is and how my heart goes up in praise and thanksgiving to the great Giver of all our many mercies! I pray also that his special spirit of wisdom and grace may rest on Alfred and ever guide and bless his endeavors to fulfill faithfully his duties to his Country and his Sovereign!

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166 The second sentence of this quote is quoted directly from Röhl, Wilhelm II, 173-174 and is not printed in Waldersee’s entry for July 5, 1888, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 410-411.
167 Waldersee, July 5, 1888, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 410-411.
168 Waldersee, August 10, 1888, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 414-415.
169 Mary von Waldersee; quoted in Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, September 13, 1888, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume B.
After transcribing this quotation for her cousin, Mrs. Lee, who was also glad Moltke would still be around, added, “The Lord has made the Emperor a firm and personal friend to Alfred.”

Certainly the naming of Waldersee as Chief of Staff was a positive sign of the Kaiser’s continued faith in, favor for, and friendship with his father figure. The future of the Wilhelm-Waldersee relationship appeared bright and promising.

On August 28, 1888, after a dinner for the king of Denmark who was visiting Berlin, Waldersee was about to go home after a long day of ceremonies, for which he had to change his uniform five times. The Kaiser stated, however, that he had taken tea so often at Herwarthstrasse 2 that he wished for Waldersee to stay and have tea with him; he did not return to the Military Staff Building until later that evening. “[Alfred] was so fully occupied [that day], he said it was impossible for him to write to Mary – a very unusual occurrence,” wrote Mrs. Lee to her cousin, “if face to face I could tell you the demands of the different hours from 7 a.m. . . . We thank the Lord his health bears it.”

Although his relationship with Wilhelm II remained strong during the first years of the young Hohenzollern’s reign, Waldersee had to keep up with an active young Kaiser, with whom he socialized in many of the same ways he did with Wilhelm I. The two often had tea while discussing the latest in domestic and international affairs. At a hunt in late November 1889, the Kaiser allowed Waldersee and the Duke of Schleswig-Holstein to wear the same hunting uniform as himself. Although recognizing the clothes themselves as meaningless, Waldersee believed the privilege of wearing them showed the Kaiser’s “friendly attitude” toward

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170 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, September 13, 1888, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume B. Alfred and Mary had been at Lautenbach from July 13 to July 27, when they left for Gastein. Josie had urged her mother to stay with her and she did. Josie would then stay for a month with her sister and mother in Berlin before going to her winter home in Stuttgart.

171 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, August 23, 1888, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume B.

172 Walderssee, November 11 and 13, 1888, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 17-19.
him, and when he returned home “all aglow” from the hunt, he told Mary and Mrs. Lee about this new symbol of friendship. Just as in the years before his accession, Wilhelm still stopped by the Military Staff Building often to see Waldersee. By four o’clock on the afternoon of New Year’s Day 1889, Alfred and Mary von Waldersee believed they had received all the guests they would that day at Herwarthstrasse 2 and decided to pay some visits of their own. Shortly after they left, the Kaiser and the Empress with two of her sisters arrived. “The disappointment was mutual,” Mrs. Lee stated about the Waldersees and Hohenzollerns missing each other. During the winter of 1888-89, Wilhelm arrived early every morning and went for a walk in the Tiergarten with Waldersee “for [the] sake of exercise,” wrote Mrs. Lee, and dressed in civilian clothes to “not be recorded in a newspaper.” Of course, these moments together provided another informal opportunity to discuss politics. On one February morning, the two ended their promenade with a visit to the chancellor.

Wilhelm II loved military life, and especially its pageantry. In September 1888, there were two military parades in Berlin, and after each there was a parade dinner. Back in April, Waldersee rode with then Crown Prince Wilhelm at the head of battalion from the Tempelhof Field to the Unter den Linden Boulevard in the middle of the capital. The Quartermaster-

173 Waldersee, November 24, 1889, Denkwürdigkeiten II, 79. Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, November 29, 1889, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume C. Waldersee shot 23 deer and 25 boars. “Alfred showed us what Emperor gave him for a hunt,” Mrs. Lee wrote, “a long case with different knives and strong rings on each side to attach it to belt . . . then the clasp for belt of same hard metal – cleverly carved on each side [a] wreath of laurel round plain center which had W and Imperial Crown above – so next hunt Alfred is to wear it.” On his trip to Norway, the Kaiser sketched and painted for Mary a ship passing through a sunset. “I also want you to know dear Mary that my Mary thinks as I do – that all this royal favor is of the Lord – thus door of vanity is kept shut.”

174 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, January 13, 1889, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume C.

175 Waldersee, January 9, 1889 and February 26, 1889, Denkwürdigkeiten II, 29 & 40. On February 2, 1889, the Emperor and Empress arrived at Herwarthstrasse 2 amid a snowstorm. Waldersee, February 2, 1889, Denkwürdigkeiten II, 35.

176 Waldersee, September 1 and October 9, 1888, Denkwürdigkeiten II, 2-4.
General believed the prince’s behavior was “completely correct,” in that he was polite, acted soldierly, and looked at no one in the crowd that had gathered.\textsuperscript{177} A year later, in September 1889, Waldersee was in Hanover for the traditional army maneuvers. Kaiser Wilhelm arrived and watched a military review, in which Waldersee led the regiment of cavalry that he had commanded in Hanover in the early 1870s. As this unit filed past, the Kaiser called Waldersee over and announced, to the delight of the regiment’s officers, that he was making himself chief of the regiment. When Waldersee’s cavalry passed again – this time with the horses trotting – the Kaiser mounted, put himself at the head of the parading troops, and led them with Waldersee right behind him.\textsuperscript{178} On May 22, 1890, the Waldersees travelled to the studio of Hans W. Schmidt, an artist who had been commissioned to create a painting for the royal palace in Berlin. In the foreground stood a life-size depiction of the Kaiser, and just behind him were Waldersee and another general; all were on horseback. Mrs. Lee, noticing the many soldiers in the background, commented that the scene looked like a review. The next day, at the “great annual review,” the Kaiser led the troops with Waldersee right behind him. “Thus I need not tell you Alfred holds his place as favorite,” wrote Mrs. Lee to her cousin.\textsuperscript{179} After the parade in Hanover in September 1889, Mrs. Lee stated, “It does appear to me that Alfred has reached the top round

\textsuperscript{177} Waldersee, April 24, 1888, \textit{Denkwürdigkeiten} I, 392.

\textsuperscript{178} Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, September 12, 1889, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume C.

\textsuperscript{179} Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, May 23, 1890, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume C. About the painting, Mrs. Lee stated, “The likeness of Alfred is perfect – wish I could say as much for the Emperor but it is not like him at all – no wonder for his Majesty didn’t sit once and Artist had to draw on his own imagination.” Although the original painting was possibly destroyed during the bombing of the Berlin City Palace during the Second World War, a paper copy is at Harvard University’s Houghton Library, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume 12.
of the ladder – he bears it bravely. I think it is all the Lord’s doing for some wide purpose. I pray that He will direct him in all his duties.”  

Although Waldersee continued to maintain his friendship with Wilhelm upon the latter’s accession, he began to have serious differences with, and concerns about, the assertive young Kaiser’s plans, passions, and politics. In military affairs, the Kaiser is “incredibly active, but somewhat too much,” wrote Waldersee, soon after becoming Chief of the General Staff. Following a military parade, he accompanied the Kaiser to the latter’s room in the palace, where they had a discussion about military and political issues. Wilhelm still had “illusions about the power of cavalry,” lamented Waldersee, “[and] he is not familiar with war, and our most recent history of war is in no area as falsified than in the deeds of the cavalry.” The Kaiser was an enthusiastic proponent of expanding the Germany navy, which he hoped would become “the equal sister-force of the army.” Like other Prussian generals, Waldersee disapproved of the Kaiser’s maritime passion and maintained it was “only one part of our armed forces, and by no means the most important, though certainly the most costly.” In foreign affairs, Waldersee, who believed Russia could not be trusted, did not like that the Kaiser, under the influence of the Bismarcks, tended to favor a pro-Russian and anti-Austrian policy. Despite the internal problems in the Habsburg empire and its military, Waldersee reasoned, “we need allies . . . and I do not know on whom we can count if not on Austria; certainly not on Italy.”

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180 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, September 12, 1889, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume C. Mrs. Lee added, “Mary feels as I do – so no vanity is enlisted.”
181 Waldersee, August 26, 1888, Denkwürdigkeiten II, 1.
182 Waldersee, September 1, 1888, Denkwürdigkeiten II, 2.
183 Wilhelm II; quoted in Röhl, Wilhelm II, 154-155.
184 Waldersee to Holstein, July 26, 1888; quoted in Röhl, Wilhelm II, 155. See also Waldersee, October 9, 1888, Denkwürdigkeiten II, 4.
185 Waldersee, November 1 and 3, 1888, Denkwürdigkeiten II, 13-14; quoted in Röhl, Wilhelm II, 147.
Kaiser’s enthusiasm for colonies, Waldersee argued that “our African colonies could never amount to anything . . . the days of colonies are altogether over. My only wish now is that we should avoid becoming more deeply embroiled.”186 Given his concerns about fighting Russia and France in what he perceived to be an inevitable war, he did not want Germany’s colonialism to cause trouble with Great Britain and the United States.187 In domestic affairs, Waldersee was concerned about the Kaiser’s desire to appeal to the Reichstag and the working class. On March 27, 1889, Wilhelm attended a “so-called parliamentarian dinner” at the chancellor’s, which, Waldersee wrote, “people in conservative and other circles find alarming as a way to bring the monarch in association with the Parliament.”188 Although in late January 1890, Waldersee believed Wilhelm would be the victor in his disagreement with Bismarck over how to solve the Social Question (Arbeiterfrage), he admitted in his journal on February 3, “I cannot deny that the Kaiser’s plans . . . begin to make me apprehensive.”189

On March 9, 1889, the first anniversary of Wilhelm I’s death, Alfred von Waldersee – with Mary – and other aides-de-camp of the former Kaiser, went to their old master’s tomb to lay wreaths. “I have no doubt the present emperor has already been there,” wrote Mrs. Lee, “he venerates the memory of his grandfather.”190 Although Mrs. Lee was correct about Wilhelm II’s admiration for Wilhelm I, the former certainly did not reign like the latter. Despite all the diverse differences Waldersee had with the new Kaiser, the Chief of Staff’s overarching and most significant anxiety was that Wilhelm II was not living up to the standards of a good ruler that Wilhelm I set. In the early months of the young Kaiser’s reign, Waldersee wrote that many

186 Waldersee, journal entry for January 25, 1889, not printed in Meisner’s Denkwürdigkeiten; quoted in Röhl, Wilhelm II, 149.
188 Waldersee, March 27, 1889, Denkwürdigkeiten II, 47.
189 Waldersee, January 27 and February 3, 1890, Denkwürdigkeiten II, 97-100.
190 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, March 8, 1889, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume C.
in the German political elite found the monarch to be inaccessible, procrastinating, frivolous, and distracted by his travels. To bring more stability to government, Waldersee turned to precedent:

If the Kaiser wishes to conduct business like his grandfather – and that is what he would like – first the week and then the day must be precisely planned; without a firm plan it certainly cannot be done.\textsuperscript{191}

Against complaints about Wilhelm II, including his own, Waldersee usually noted in his journal the Kaiser’s good qualities. To the above quotation, Waldersee added, “[he] has a quick understanding, an excellent memory, and makes swift decisions. That makes up for lost time.”\textsuperscript{192}

Two days later, he expressed a new concern about Wilhelm’s inexperience and vanity:

The great successes which the young lord has achieved in his short reign, and the fact that he is cheered wherever he goes, and . . . all destructive elements already fear him . . . could give him false impressions of his own worth. The danger definitely exists that he considers himself more important than he is and that he is becoming less open to good advice. But the successes will not continue in the same way and there will inevitably be setbacks. He is rising too quickly.\textsuperscript{193}

By the end of 1889, the honeymoon period of the Kaiser’s reign was over. Waldersee noted that there had been a decline in the sovereign’s popularity, which “soared to the heights far too quickly and a fall is therefore natural and not at all harmful.” Experiencing and overcoming a serious and difficult challenge was the only way, Waldersee believed, that the Kaiser could become a better monarch. As he wrote in November 1889, “[The Kaiser] must go through hard in times in order to reach the heights to which he is entitled by virtue of his talents and his many excellent qualities.”\textsuperscript{194}

The complaints about Wilhelm’s ruling style continued; chiefs of different bureaucratic agencies – except for Waldersee and the Minister of War – complained

that even if they were able to get an audience with the Kaiser, they did not receive the time and attention they felt they deserved.\textsuperscript{195}

At the beginning of 1890 – about a year and a half into Wilhelm II’s reign – Waldersee wrote again that the Kaiser needed to stop being distracted by his traveling and establish more “regularity” and “thoroughness” in his conduct:

I too wish that he would concentrate a little more. He shows plenty of interest in the matters which I bring before him, and no doubt likewise in military affairs in general, most particularly naval affairs. But his audiences on civil business cannot be very thorough; although he hears more from the Foreign Office (i.e. the Bismarcks), he hears very little indeed from the other ministries. I think, however, that all this will sort itself out. This year [1890] will bring many a serious internal problem in the country, and consequently the necessity of paying more attention to these matters; I hope that 1890 will prove a serious but excellent school for the Kaiser.”\textsuperscript{196}

In reality, the years 1890 and 1891 would be a school for the monarchist. John Röhl argues, “Waldersee failed to see that his own intimate relationship with Wilhelm was inconsistent with the well-regulated, responsible conduct of affairs of state.”\textsuperscript{197} Shown, for example, in the above quotation, however, Waldersee understood that there was a line between the personal and the political. The German emperor held ultimate authority in the empire and used that power as he saw fit, including balancing the personal and political aspects of his relationships with others. If Waldersee can be accused of failing to see anything, it was that Wilhelm II neither was nor would be like his grandfather. Alfred von Waldersee was a monarchist à la Wilhelm I, his ideal model of a good ruler; Wilhelm II wanted to – and would – be his own man and create his own path. He should have realized this fact when the Kaiser started tactlessly removing members of his grandfather’s court and administration, but Wilhelm II’s inability to separate the personal and the political would clearly become evident from late 1890 to early 1891, when Waldersee would

\textsuperscript{197} Röhl, \textit{Wilhelm II}, 117.
fall from his good graces and be removed from his prestigious social and military position in Berlin.\textsuperscript{198}

In his biography of Wilhelm II, John Röhl has written a detailed analysis of the events leading up to, and including, Waldersee’s dismissal because, as he writes, “[it] was undoubtedly one of the most significant decisions taken by Kaiser Wilhelm II in the early part of his reign.”\textsuperscript{199}

Waldersee’s agitation against Bismarck on behalf of the Kaiser in 1889 apparently began to bother Wilhelm. According to Prince Henry of Prussia, Wilhelm’s brother, and the Flügeladjutant Colonel von Lippe, in April 1889 the Kaiser showed signs that he was becoming annoyed by the Chief of Staff and, according to Lippe, complained that Waldersee was “interfering in everything” and “stirring up trouble.”\textsuperscript{200} In December, Wilhelm reportedly called Waldersee half-jokingly a “poisoner,” and that same month, Waldersee grew concerned that the Kaiser sided with the Bismarcks over the issue of civilian and military control of the railways administration, writing, “I am very worried about his giving way like this.”\textsuperscript{201} Röhl states that the reason for Wilhelm’s growing “disillusionment” with Waldersee is unclear; however, he also

\textsuperscript{198} In July 1888, Wilhelm II abruptly dismissed the elderly Adjutants General Count von Lehndorff and Prince Radziwill, who had served with Waldersee as aides for Wilhelm I since 1870 and had been promoted together to Adjutants General on their sovereign’s birthday in 1885. To the shock of high society and Waldersee, the Kaiser rudely demanded the resignation of the esteemed Count Otto zu Stolberg-Wernigerode, even though he wanted to resign his position as the Minister of the Royal Household. In 1885, then Prince Wilhelm had tagged along with the Waldersees to the Household Ministry on the Wilhelmstrasse, where they had been invited to watch Bismarck’s torchlight birthday parade. The removals of these men were expected, but controversial because they were done quick and tactlessly. In March 1890, Waldersee played a direct role in encouraging the Kaiser to liberate himself from the greatest man in Wilhelm I’s administration, Otto von Bismarck, largely because of their political differences. Röhl, Wilhelm II, 160-162.

\textsuperscript{199} Röhl, Wilhelm II, 410-411.

\textsuperscript{200} Röhl, Wilhelm II, 411.

\textsuperscript{201} Röhl, Wilhelm II, 225-226. Waldersee, journal entry for December 11, 1889, not reproduced in Meisner’s Denkwürdigkeiten.
notes that in 1889 Waldersee’s role “was almost that of a rival chancellor.” If the Kaiser did not want one, powerful chancellor, he certainly would not have desired a second, unofficial one, especially as he stacked his court, military, and government with people who would not challenge him.

After Bismarck’s dismissal, the Kaiser began to speak about, and to, Waldersee with a condescending tone. Noting that “sharp-eyed observers noticed Waldersee’s star was on the wane soon after Bismarck’s dismissal,” Röhl calls the Bismarck crisis the “decisive break” in the Wilhelm-Waldersee relationship. Upon returning from a walk with the Chief of Staff, the Kaiser criticized Waldersee in front of the subordinates on the General Staff. After leaving the Military Staff Building, Wilhelm told an adjutant, “I don’t understand [Waldersee]; he’s my Chief of [the] General Staff, and ought not to worry his head about things which don’t concern him.” Evidently, the Kaiser had forgotten that on his birthday in 1889, he had made Waldersee a life member of the Prussian House of Lords and stated that he wanted the general to be familiar with developments outside military affairs in case he was occasionally called upon to be an advisor on domestic and foreign politics. At that time, Waldersee had already been vocal with the Kaiser about his political opinions in private, and he must have taken these words in early 1889 as consent to continue his interests in affairs outside the purely military sphere.

At court and in Wilhelm’s entourage, Waldersee’s active involvement in politics would come back to haunt him – as it had in the 1880s with the Stoecker Affair, preventive war, and his loyalty to Prince Wilhelm. The Kaiser told his friend Eulenburg that politics was the realm of

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202 Röhl, Wilhelm II, 225.
203 Röhl, Wilhelm II, 411.
204 Kiderlen-Wächter to Holstein, July 19 and September 21, 1890; quoted in Röhl, Wilhelm II, 411.
205 Waldersee, January 27, 1889, Denkwürdigkeiten II, 33-34.
the Kaiser and not the Chief of Staff, and stated that Waldersee was “an intriguer pure and simple and wishes to become chancellor, although I told him I shall never appoint him.”

Eulenburg later wrote that Wilhelm detests “the way [Waldersee] has exploited his close relationship with [His Majesty] for his own purposes” and maintains “the correct view that people should work for him and not for themselves.”

If the Kaiser actually expressed these opinions, his exaggeration of Waldersee’s influence and motivations must have certainly been the result of Eulenburg, who, writes Lamar Cecil, “was anxious to get rid of a dangerous rival, for he wanted Wilhelm entirely to himself.”

Wald see began to feel the Kaiser’s growing antipathy towards him. On June 8, 1890, he wrote that the Kaiser had never had any “problems on official [!] business until now [!] . . . in spite of his great amiability I thought I detected an underlying mood of gravity.” In autumn 1890, the Kaiser floated the idea of giving Waldersee an important military position in southern Germany, and when Bismarck’s successor, Leo von Caprivi and Wilhelm, himself, approached Waldersee on the subject, the general produced adequate reasons as to why the move would not be a good idea.

Caprivi told him candidly that “there was simply no room for him” in Berlin. “He is beginning to feel sure of himself in military matters, and does not want to appear dependent on me,” Waldersee wrote in his journal, “He fails to recognize that he

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206 Eulenberg to Holstein, August 1, 1890; quoted in Röhl, Wilhelm II, 412.
207 Cecil, Wilhelm II, 187.
208 Röhl, Wilhelm II, 412. “The double qualification of this remark,” notes Röhl, “makes it clear that he had sense a deterioration in his relationship with Wilhelm.” Waldersee, journal entry from June 7, 1890, not reproduced in Meisner’s Denkwürdigkeiten.
209 Röhl, Wilhelm II, 414-415. To the offer of the inspectorship of two Bavarian army corps, he argued that he could not subordinate Prince Leopold of Bavaria to himself. To the command of the Württemberg army corps in Stuttgart, he insisted that as a Prussian and as someone denounced in the Catholic newspapers, his appointment would not be welcomed. Waldersee did not like the court there, either.
210 Kiderlen-Wächter to Holstein, September 21, 1890; quoted in Röhl, Wilhelm II, 415.

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nothing but a dilettante in the military sphere.” 211 The Chief of Staff had become alarmed at the Kaiser’s harsh conduct toward his generals and grew concerned when he discovered that corps commanders did not report to the Kaiser when they arrived in the capital. Drawing an obvious distinction with Wilhelm I, he asked rhetorically in his journal, “Would it have been conceivable two years ago for a commanding general to come to Berlin and not to wish above all else to see the Kaiser?” 212 The monarchist was coming to the realization that the monarchy was changing.

In his journal, Waldersee said harsh things about the Kaiser’s abilities and conduct as a military commander: “Extremely inadequate leadership, immature ideas, inexperience combined with a very self-confident manner. Playing to the gallery, in other words – a mere game, and no seriousness!” 213 On September 19, 1890, during the army’s maneuvers in Silesia, the Kaiser took command of an army corps, which, unknown to him, would most likely fail according to the plans Waldersee crafted. Receiving many thanks for letting the Kaiser face failure for once, Waldersee replied that he was only doing his duty, but he knew he would have to pay dearly for it. After Wilhelm’s inevitable defeat, the Chief of Staff had to provide an assessment of the military exercises. In the presence of Prussian officers and generals, the Emperor of Austria, the King and Crown Prince of Saxony, and the Crown Prince of Bavaria, he tactfully critiqued the Kaiser for his poor performance. Despite his best intentions, Waldersee stepped into an

212 Röhl, Wilhelm II, 412-413. Waldersee, October 4, 1890, Denkwürdigkeiten II, 153.
213 Waldersee, journal entry from September 11, 1890, not reproduced in Meisner’s Denkwürdigkeiten II; quoted in Röhl, Wilhelm II, 416. “As soon as [Wilhelm] entered the fray . . . everything became very artificial; indeed one would not hesitate to call it a childish game . . . In my opinion he has a certain grasp of parade-ground exercises, but not of the actual command of troops; of course he has no war experience at all and he refuses to believe that the cavalry has only limited usefulness in battle. He is extraordinarily restless and rushes about; he is usually right up at the front, interfering in the generals’ command, issuing innumerable, often contradictory orders and paying scant attention to his advisers. Added to this he is extremely vain: he always wants to win and takes it very badly when the judges’ decision goes against him.” Röhl, Wilhelm II, 416. Waldersee, September 21, Denkwürdigkeiten II, 145-147.
unavoidable trap: his sense of duty and responsibility for the army’s efficiency was incompatible with Wilhelm’s vanity and sense of entitlement. Although the German royalty present assured Waldersee afterward that he spoke well and diplomatically, “the Kaiser . . . is said to have looked rather surprised and then very serious,” he wrote. Wilhelm agreed with the Chief of Staff, but then he “began trying to make excuses for himself,” which were “very weak” and unsatisfactory. That evening, Waldersee learned that the Kaiser was very angry and blamed him for his mistakes.\(^{214}\) To the Chief of Staff, the monarch was at a crossroad:

> If he bears me a grudge because of his poor command of troops he shows that he lacks greatness of spirit and deserves to be treated as a little man. But if he has allowed himself to reflect calmly and to examine himself a little, he cannot but be grateful to me and tell himself that I acted without fear and did my duty. Then one could say: there is nobility in him after all.\(^{215}\)

Wilhelm II was a different character than Wilhelm I, and Waldersee expected he would be removed from Berlin in the spring (1891).\(^{216}\) His departure from Herwarthstrasse 2 would actually come sooner than he thought. “Waldersée’s star is really sinking now,” wrote one of the Kaiser’s aides, “Who would have thought that the catastrophe would come so soon?”\(^{217}\) Certainly the man who had been Wilhelm’s reliable friend, confidant, and father figure during the turbulent 1880s did not.

Through the rest of 1890, Waldersee saw the writing on the wall. The Kaiser had a change of heart and sided with Caprivi’s order, against Waldersee’s wishes, that the military attachés should be forbidden from including politics in their reports, which would also have to be

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\(^{215}\) Röhl, *Wilhelm II*, 417. Waldersee, journal entry from October 8, 1890, not reproduced in Meisner, *Denkwürdigkeiten*.

\(^{216}\) Röhl, *Wilhelm II*, 418. Waldersee, diary entry from October 16, 1890, not reproduced in Meisner’s *Denkwürdigkeiten*.

\(^{217}\) Carl Wedel; quoted in Röhl, *Wilhelm II*, 418.
subject to the civilian heads of the German embassies. Wilhelm continued to opine to his inner circle that he detested Waldersee’s intrigues and believed that the Chief of Staff wanted to become chancellor. Waldersee believed the Kaiser was “struggling with himself inwardly” and “his vanity makes him feel uncomfortable with me.” During this time, although the Waldersees continued to have an active social life, Mrs. Lee’s letters to her cousin lack interesting anecdotes about the Kaiser and Waldersee or special marks of royal favor as she used to report. There were, however, a couple of signs of cordial contact. On December 18, the Kaiser arrived at Herwarthstrasse 2 to deliver the news of the premature birth of his sixth son, Prince Joachim, on the previous day; the Waldersees then went to the palace to visit the Empress. Waldersee also notes this visit in his journal, but his conversation with Wilhelm focused on family matters and not politics. Throughout the 1880s, Wilhelm had been a frequent and often unexpected guest at the Waldersees’ home, but this visit was probably the last. Two days later, the Chief of Staff had an audience with the Kaiser, to whom he spoke about military matters, and noted that he felt a “certain coldness” from Wilhelm, despite Wilhelm’s outward friendliness. On the evening of December 21, Waldersee picked up his Bible and opening it, came across Psalm 118, which certainly resonated with him: “The Lord is with me, I shall not be afraid. What can men do to me? . . . It is good to trust in the Lord and not in men . . . and not in princes.”

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218 Röhl, *Wilhelm II*, 418-419. Waldersee, journal entry from January 2, 1891, not reproduced in Meisner’s *Denkwürdigkeiten*.
219 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, December 19, 1890, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume C.
220 Waldersee, December 18, 1890, *Denkwürdigkeiten II*, 167. The Kaiser stated, however, that his mother, Empress Frederick, warned her son “that his autocratic manner would lead to misfortune.” Waldersee had no specific comment on this.
221 Waldersee, December 20, 1890, *Denkwürdigkeiten II*, 168-169.
222 Waldersee, December 21, 1890, *Denkwürdigkeiten II*, 169.
For Christmas 1890, the Kaiser gave his Chief of Staff a pair of glass and gilt decanters with stork necks. “In my opinion more to look at than to use,” noted Mrs. Lee.\textsuperscript{223} In another letter, however, she mentions that the Kaiser sent him a “large and superbly bound book.”\textsuperscript{224} Although Waldersee wrote that Wilhelm gave generously, as symbols of affection and favor, both of these gifts must have paled in comparison to the statue of an infidel fighting a Saracen or the bronze pillar with scientific instruments that Wilhelm I had given Waldersee in Christmases past.\textsuperscript{225} On January 22, 1891, Waldersee was with the Kaiser for a military dinner in Hanover. There was evidently nothing special to report, so Mrs. Lee took the opportunity in her letter to mention another dinner, in which the Kaiser said to a duke, “you see when Waldersee wants sourkrout (sic) he has to come to me for he can’t get it at home – for Countess [Waldersee] is Commander-in-Chief.”\textsuperscript{226} Although this joke was based on press speculation about Mary’s influence in politics, as already stated above, one can sense that the Kaiser was also subtly asserting his own power over Waldersee in front of other notable guests. As shown in Part I, social events such as dinners were important events that connected the members of the social and political elite. On January 15 and 16, Waldersee noted – and others in the military noticed – that he was no longer invited to dinners given for the Kaiser, who had control of the guest list before

\textsuperscript{223} Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, December 28, 1890, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume C. Mrs. Lee also reports that Waldersee attended a hunt held by the Duke of Saxe-Altenburg, and although she mentions the Kaiser was invited, it is unclear whether he attended. If he did, Waldersee evidently did not have anything to report about his presence there.

\textsuperscript{224} Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, December 19, 1890, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume C. The quoted material was written on January 22, 1890.

\textsuperscript{225} Waldersee, December 25, 1890, \textit{Denkwürdigkeiten} II, 170-171.

\textsuperscript{226} Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, December 19, 1890, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume C. The quoted material was written on January 22, 1890.
invitations were sent. “It appears to me to point toward a crisis,” he wrote, “well, as God wills.”

On January 24, in his usual audience with the monarch, the Chief of Staff had a heated argument with an uncompromising Wilhelm about the proper timing for planned Austrian and German military maneuvers in September. Noting that the Kaiser did not want the maneuvers to affect his hunting plans, Waldersee wrote, “Stags, in other words pleasure, take first place! And such great interests are harmed by this desire to pursue pleasure.” That evening the Kaiser asked the Chief of Staff to return some very personal papers. On January 27, the Kaiser’s thirty-second birthday, Wilhelm presented Waldersee with the Cross of the Grand Commander of the Order of Hohenzollern and told the Chief of Staff that, to make him happy, he wanted to give him command of an army corps. While dining with his officers – including his future replacement Count Alfred von Schlieffen – Waldersee stated that he wanted to retire because “I believe I shall be doing a service to the army and to the Kaiser himself if I act firmly and show him that there are still people who do not simply submit to his will without further ado.” The next day, the Kaiser refused to accept his resignation and, amid several excuses for sending Waldersee to Altona just north of Hamburg, he stated, “the chief of the General Staff is to be no more than a kind of amanuensis for me, and for that reason I need a younger man.” Waldersee felt, and so did many others, that his assessment at the Silesia maneuvers caused this development, which, as the Chief of Staff noted, Caprivi exploited. In the early 1880s, Waldersee had helped take power away from the War Ministry and, in the interests of the monarchy, made the Kaiser’s General Staff and Military Cabinet more powerful. Now, the

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228 Röhl, Wilhelm II, 419-420. Waldersee, diary entry for January 25, 1891 and a note that were not reproduced in Meisner’s Denkwürdigkeiten.
Kaiser was taking more power for himself. Waldersee foresaw a bleak future: “The Kaiser wants to be his own Chief of General Staff! God protect the Fatherland!”

On January 31, Waldersee and the Kaiser had a quarrel, that, as Röhl states, “in many ways resembled the violent argument between the latter and Bismarck on March 15, 1890.”

After giving his report to the Kaiser with his military rivals – Chief of the Military Cabinet General Wilhelm von Hahnke and Flügeladjutant Count Carl von Wedel – in attendance, the Kaiser allowed the Chief of Staff to speak to him alone. Waldersee argued for the autonomy of the position of the Chief of Staff as a powerful means for the monarch to use against the War Ministry and the Chancellor, both of whom he accused of trying to erode military independence. He spoke frankly, naming the people who had been working against him and telling the monarch that his subordinates had not been honest with him. Waldersee felt obliged to say that since the accession, “the ideal relationship between the war lord and the officer corps which he had inherited no longer existed,” and he reminded the Kaiser that he “depended entirely on the support of the army.” Wilhelm pleaded with Waldersee to take the command in Altona: “with the most tender gestures, he took my hand and said, ‘You will accept, won’t you? Your Kaiser begs you,’” Waldersee recorded in his journal, “but I remained adamant and I thank God that he gave me the strength to do so.”

After this meeting, Eulenburg noted that the Kaiser had been shaken and was “in a more serious mood than he had ever seen him in before,” but several days later, when Wedel returned to Berlin after a few days absence, the Kaiser complained about Waldersee, who “revealed

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231 Röhl, Wilhelm II, 422.
himself in his true colors and showed what a great man he thinks he is.”

Just as the Kaiser failed to reflect earnestly and rationally about the assessment on the Silesian maneuvers as Waldersee had hoped, he also did not think dispassionately about the current issue of the Chief of Staff’s removal. In his journal, Waldersee complained that he was being sent away to protect the Kaiser’s reputation and called the monarch “cowardly” and a “weak man,” who “has allowed himself to be systematically manipulated against me without even noticing, much less having any sense how unworthy this is.” In the end, Waldersee accepted the command of the 9th Army Corps in Altona.

An officer on the General Staff, Alfred von Schlieffen, unsuccessfully attempted to discuss the Waldersee situation with Caprivi, who stated, “It is now too late because the news has reached the press.” The chancellor himself provided the information to the Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung, Waldersee, contended. Newspaper speculation immediately began about Waldersee’s removal from the General Staff. On January 30, the Kölnische Zeitung felt it was sufficient to remind its readers simply of the “foolish rumors” that had been spread about Waldersee before. As to current speculation about the general’s position, the paper cautioned, that “for the military spirit of our army, the mentioning of such rumors in serious political papers cannot be of much use.” The newspapers were unsure of the exact reason for his resignation as Chief of Staff. A cable from Berlin printed in the New York World, reported, that “it would be fruitless to seek the real reasons for the resignation, as the strictest secrecy is always observed

234 Röhl, Wilhelm II, 423. Waldersee, journal entry from February 2 and 6, 1891, not reproduced in Meisner’s Denkwürdigkeiten.
235 Waldersee, January 31, 1891, Denkwürdigkeiten II, 182.
236 Kölnische Zeitung, January 30, 1891, GStA, Nachlass Waldersee, C. I Nr. 5.
here in military matters.” The correspondent also stated that the resignation was “another instance of the Emperor’s fondness for startling surprises” and “has no political significance.”\textsuperscript{237}

Political and personal connections, however, were the source of the gossip. Papers pointed to disagreements between Caprivi and Waldersee and between the Kaiser and Waldersee, Mary, and Stoecker.\textsuperscript{238} The \textit{Neue Freie Presse}, noting that the immediate reason was unknown, made the rare assertion that the resignation may have had something to do with the maneuvers in Silesia, and brought up the maneuvers a few days later in detail, noting the “sharp critique.”\textsuperscript{239}

An article from the \textit{New York Associated Press}, pointing out that Waldersee was at the Stoecker-associated Young Men’s Christian Association, stated, that his “unflinching adhesion to the set of ex-Court Chaplain Stoecker has . . . irritated the imperial temper more than any military.”\textsuperscript{240}

The conservative, evangelical \textit{Reichsbote} criticized the “\textit{judoliber}al press” for its “unbelievable spitefulness” in handling story and “their old hatred against the Christian Waldersee.” This paper was especially incensed at the “Reform-Jewish” \textit{Volkszeitung} for saying that the religious campaign taken up by then Prince Wilhelm began with such “splendor and noise” in Waldersee’s apartment and achieved “an extremely pathetic end.”\textsuperscript{241} The \textit{Pester Lloyd} mentioned Mary von Waldersee’s familial connection to the Kaiser and called her a “very enthusiastic supporter of Stoecker.”\textsuperscript{242} One American newspaper reported that Mary, “the heroine of a whole chapter of tortuous Berlin Court intrigue,” was angry about the move to Altona because “the influence she

\textsuperscript{238} GStA, Nachlass Waldersee, C. I Nr. 5, “Zeitungsausschnitte, 1891” and HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume 6: May 23, 1890 to October 25, 1892.
\textsuperscript{239} \textit{Neue Freie Presse}, January 31, 1891, GStA, Nachlass Waldersee, C. I Nr. 5.
\textsuperscript{241} \textit{Reichsbote}, February 1, 1891 and \textit{Volkszeitung}, January 30, 1891, GStA, Nachlass Waldersee, C. I Nr. 5.
\textsuperscript{242} \textit{Pester Lloyd}, February 1, 1891, GStA, Nachlass Waldersee, C. I Nr. 5.
wielded was eminently distasteful to the Emperor, who brooks no rival near the throne.”

On February 3, 1891, the conservative Kreuzzeitung printed the Kaiser’s order to Waldersee, which included more style than substance, put a positive spin on the transfer to Altona, and praised the general for his service, talent, zeal, and sense of duty. The paper then added, “Count Waldersee cannot refuse to obey such a direct order from the most high war lord.”

On February 5, Mrs. Lee began to write to her cousin:

I pray to the Lord to sustain me to tell you the great surprise that has roused Berlin, [the] General Staff, and [the] best part of [the] Army itself and I may say other countries by Resignation of Alfred. The German papers are full of it – declaring the going of Bismarck was as nothing in comparison with [the] present excitement – “losing Count and Countess Waldersee seems more than people can bear; many are crying over it.”

Mrs. Lee was unable to continue writing and came back to her letter the next day. Of course, some of her statements were exaggerated – “the sorrow in Berlin [for] him was universal” – but she did not anticipate this shocking development. Her deafness prevented her from hearing any possible words exchanged in the ominous days leading up to the resignation. Alfred and Mary may have decided not to tell her until the change was official. Regardless, her letters reveal her surprise by the abrupt life-changing news. From her letter, it also appears that when either Alfred or Mary told her of the Emperor’s conversations with Waldersee, he or she emphasized the Kaiser’s expressions of kindness. “Well, we must wait patiently to learn what

244 Kreuzzeitung, February 3, 1891, GStA, Nachlass Waldersee, C. I Nr. 5.
245 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, February 5, 1891, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume C.
246 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, March 1, 1891, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume C. “Some said Emperor had cut off his right hand.”
the Lord means by it,” she wrote the next day, taking back up her pen with her usual calmness.\textsuperscript{247} Of course, during these dark times, the religious Waldersees found comfort in their faith. “You must think of us and pray for us,” wrote Mrs. Lee to her cousin, “it is only by the Lord’s help we can bear up.”\textsuperscript{248}

For the next month, the Waldersees received friendly visits and kind words of sympathy. Many people sent letters to Mary, from the Duchess of Baden, who lamented that on her visits to Berlin she would no longer see the Countess Waldersee, to an unknown poor woman in Altona, who rejoiced at Mary’s arrival. Empress Augusta Victoria tried to console Mary and told her to stay in touch. Mrs. Ellen Phelps, the wife of the American envoy to Berlin, spent some time visiting Mrs. Lee, saying she could not understand the Kaiser’s decision.\textsuperscript{249} The parting of the Chief of the German General Staff also upset Emperor Franz Josef of Austria-Hungary and King Albert of Saxony. When Waldsee spoke to Moltke, his friend and predecessor, shortly after hearing about his removal, the old chief thought the move to Altona “quite incomprehensible, and [he] expressed great concern about the Kaiser.”\textsuperscript{250} In late February, Moltke stopped at Herwarthstrasse 2 to tell the Waldersees goodbye. When he asked Mary what she thought of leaving, she answered that she could not understand the new situation. “And nobody else can,”

\textsuperscript{247} Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, February 5, 1891, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume C. “When Emperor first spoke to Alfred of the appointment he ‘assured A. he was very much attached to him’ – this deepens the ‘mystery’ as its (sic) called . . . On the 4\textsuperscript{th} Emperor gave to Alfred a long audience and quite alone they had interesting talk with each other – three times the Emperor embraced Alfred in most affectionate manner.”

\textsuperscript{248} Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, February 5, 1891, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume C. “From the first shock we put our trust in the Lord who changeth never. Already He has helped us by deepening your interest and causing us to bear up cheerfully. Well may we leave the future with Him and wait patiently to know His design.”

\textsuperscript{249} Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, February 5, 1891, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume C.

he replied. Saddened by the news of his friend and counterpart, Frederick von Beck, the Austrian Chief of Staff, wrote to Waldersee that, although as a soldier he set a good example by taking the command in Altona, his departure from the General Staff was a loss for Austria and good Austro-German relations.

Praise and sorrow did not just come from members of the aristocratic, political, and military elite. Waldersee was pleased to learn that a Russian newspaper called him the greatest general in Europe. Since the Waldersees had arrived at Herwarthstrasse 2 in 1882, the same man stopped by weekly to tend to the clocks. The Clock Man, as Mrs. Lee called him, was “respectable and respectful,” and she had encouraged him and his teenage son to join the Young Men’s Christian Association. On February 7, “as soon as he came in, tears rushed to his eyes, and he was so overcome he couldn’t speak, pointed to outside, and I understood at once he knew that we must leave,” wrote Mrs. Lee, “A little thing dear Mary but it touched me. [The] Clock Man is not the only one that cries.” The Young Men’s Christian Association held a going-away celebration for Mary, who sat in an armchair surrounded by flowers. In the large hall, there were a number of addresses, including one by Adolf Stoecker. Even though Mary had prohibited the orators from praising her, they said, “that in fact there was no need – for all their surroundings spoke loudly of her goodness and of her true Christian spirit.”

In the weeks after he was formally resigned to the command of the 9th Corps, Waldersee travelled back and forth between Altona and Berlin putting his affairs in order. Before he departed, he spoke to the officers of General Staff, with whom he had spent the past nine years.

251 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, March 1, 1891, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume C.
253 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, March 1, 1891, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume C.
254 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, February 5, 1891, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume C.
255 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, March 1, 1891, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume C.
They wanted to throw him a going-away dinner, but he did not want them to incur the expensive cost, though he appreciated the gesture. Waldersee told the officers that even though he did not want to leave them, he had been commanded to do so by the sovereign and “it was not fitting for a soldier to ask why!”

“I must say what is true of Alfred,” wrote Mrs. Lee, “He has not a bit of envy but seemingly to me a most conscientious man and always ready to serve in [the] best way he could his King and Country.”

Interestingly, however, to the Kaiser’s claim that the transfer to Altona was for Waldersee’s “benefit,” Mrs. Lee wrote, “I confess Alfred don’t (sic) see exactly in that light!” His mother-in-law thought emptying their apartment of all the things they had collected over the years was “no benefit” to her and her daughter.

On the morning of March 5, 1891, Mary and her mother passed through the entrance of their apartment in the Military Staff Building for the last time. “My dear Mary’s eye filled with tears,” Mrs. Lee wrote, “We were both too full to speak.” When they arrived at the station, a crowd had gathered to say final farewells. Mother and daughter stepped into the “palace carriage,” which the president of the Altona railway had provided for them, and on the center table sat a “gilded basket filled with beautiful orchids and other rare flowers from the Emperor!”

As the train pulled out from the station, a chapter in the life of the Waldersees

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256 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, February 5 and March 1, 1891, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume C. This attitude was shared by the military attaché in Vienna, Major Adolf von Deines, who wrote in a letter to Waldersee, that “the soldier should remain silent about the reasons” for an imperial order. Major von Deines to Waldarsee, February 7, 1891, Aus dem Briefwechsel, ed. H. O. Meisner, 419-420. In November 1891, a group of 32 officers of the General Staff, including the new Chief of Staff Alfred von Schlieffen, came to Altona to present Waldersee with an oil painting of Moltke as his belated going-away present. Moltke had wanted to sit for another painting of himself for Waldersee, but died before it could be done. There was a dinner, drinking, and toasting. The group also planted a linden tree in honor of Moltke.

257 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, February 5, 1891, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume C.

258 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, March 1, 1891, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume C.

259 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, April 5, 1891, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume C.
came to an end. In several ways, life in Altona would not be much different than in Hanover and Berlin: they continued to lead an active social life with members of the local and German elite; Mrs. Lee immediately resumed her correspondence with her cousin; and Mary began to establish new ways to help the poor and downtrodden. Although the Kaiser had wanted him to keep an eye on Bismarck at his nearby estate of Friedrichsruh, Waldersee immediately reestablished a cordial friendship with his former political opponent and fellow exile. The new military commander in Altona remained a force within the German military and elite, and through 1892, Waldersee continued to be floated in the press and in Berlin as a potential chancellor.260

But what about his view of the monarchy? In the early 1880s, Waldersee became a friend and father-figure to Prince Wilhelm of Prussia, in the hopes that he, unlike his father, Frederick III, would continue to rule as a good monarch, like Wilhelm I. After supporting Wilhelm II against Bismarck, Waldersee, before his dismissal, began to see the reality of the new, young Kaiser. “Like someone waking from a dream,” writes John Röhl, “[he] was suddenly brought face to face with what he had failed to see before, and was able to recognize the disastrous mistake he had made.”261 After the trip to Russia in 1884, Waldersee wrote that Wilhelm “justifies our best hopes for the future,” but in September 25, 1890, after the Silesian maneuvers, he opined despairingly in his journal: “My thoughts always keep coming back to the Kaiser, and unfortunately, I can no longer bring myself to the joyful hopes I once had . . . [He is] not the right man to lead the Fatherland out of the many dangers that threaten it.”262

260 For more on Waldersee and Bismarck’s relationship after the former’s dismissal, see Mrs. Lee’s letters in HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume C. For discussion in the press about Waldersee’s influence and possible chancellorship, see GStA PK, Nachlass Waldersee, C. I Nr. 6, “Zeitungsausschnitte, 1892.”
261 Röhl, Wilhelm II, 517.
262 Waldersee, May 28, 1884, Denkwürdigkeiten I, 238-239, and September 25, 1890, Denkwürdigkeiten II, 149-151.
In his biography of Wilhelm II, Röhl has provided a good analysis and summary of the different aspects of Waldersee’s view of the Kaiser in the 1890s, but he failed to point out an important one: he saw Wilhelm II’s flaws against the character of Wilhelm I, who showed what a good German monarch should be.263 In August 1890, before the Silesian maneuvers, he reflected on the Kaiser’s faults in his journal:

[Wilhelm II] fishes for ovations and – as of course follows from that – is very open to flattery. All this has developed so quickly that I am constantly surprised by what he does. As Prince Wilhelm he seemed to have many of the excellent qualities of his grandfather, he was modest and simple in his way of life, avoided attracting attention, did not like being escorted by adjutants and was very considerate towards old people. Now he loves splendor to an alarming degree and is beginning to behave like Louis XIV.264

Waldersee returned to this comparison in lifestyles in June 1893, writing, “[The Kaiser’s] love of splendor is compared with the simplicity with his grandfather.”265 In his removal from the General Staff, Waldersee believed the Kaiser was stepping beyond the boundaries set by his grandfather in monarchical relations to the military. Once again turning to the Kaiser’s vanity, Waldersee noted that he was removed because “[Wilhelm] fears having to submit to my authority and not receiving any fame. He wants to wage war not like his father or his grandfather, but like Frederick the Great!”266 The Kaiser’s behavior had a damaging effect on his a number of members of the court, government, and military. “[He] has offended, deceived,

263 For his seven points, see Röhl, Wilhelm II, 532-533. Or for a shorter summary, page 518: “In increasingly harsh terms he condemned the Kaiser’s autocratic behavior, his vanity and courting popularity, his love of pomp, his extravagance, self-indulgence and superficiality, his constant interference in army business and in matters of civil administration, his inconsistency and thoughtlessness, his incessant and unfortunate speeches, his inconsiderate treatment of colleagues and subjects, the coarse and undignified tone of his entourage, his receptiveness to flattery and gossip relayed by irresponsible outsiders and not least his inability to tolerate well-meaning criticism.”
264 Röhl, Wilhelm II, 519. Although Röhl cites Meisner’s Denkwürdigkeiten, these sentences are not in the entry for August 11, 1890 (Waldersee, Denkwürdigkeiten II, 137-138), so it must be assumed Röhl quoted from the original journal, but did not note that.
266 Waldersee, February 7, 1891, Denkwürdigkeiten II, 186-188.
and let down so many loyal, able people that it is no wonder that many of them are disappointed
and deeply hurt and leave him,” wrote Waldersee on June 8, 1896, “Unlike his grandfather he
does not have the gift of winning hearts and binding them to him.”

By the end of 1892, the former Chief of Staff also thought the Kaiser’s pandering to the
working class was a dangerous move that Wilhelm I would not have made:

While his grandfather was alive the whole world looked up to us, sensing that Germany
was a pillar of firm, healthy strength, a rock on which the waves of revolution would
break, a house beneath whose roof shelter might be found in trouble times. All this the
grandson has destroyed in an astonishingly short time. He is continuing his work of
destruction.

In the summer of 1893, Waldersee believed the Kaiser was unjustly representing his grandfather,
insinuating that in his last years, the aging Wilhelm I was not fully cognizant of what was going
on around him. “In fact,” retorted Waldersee in his journal, “the old gentleman was of
incalculable value to us all, particularly as far as the Socialist question was concerned.” He then
added:

[Wilhelm I’s] venerable personality, known throughout the world for the
conscientiousness and devotion to duty he showed until his dying day, with all his past,
and the fact that he never gave any reason for malicious tongues to wag, was for us a
bulwark against the tide of revolution. The present Kaiser, on the other hand, positively
cultivates Social Democrats.

In Waldersee’s eyes, the Kaiser was not living up to his grandfather and thus not being a good
monarch.


268 Röhl, Wilhelm II, 555. Waldersee, journal entry for December 18, 1892, not reproduced in
Meisner’s Denkwürdigkeiten.

15, 1895, Waldersee wrote, “The view is gradually gaining ground that the constitution must be
developed further in order to keep greater control of the Kaiser’s powers! This is how far we
have come, 7 years after Wilhelm I’s death!” Röhl, Wilhelm II, 528. Waldersee, January 15,
1895, Denkwürdigkeiten II, 334-336.
After the quick, tactless dismissals of some members of his grandfather’s administration, Wilhelm II had been certain not to burn his bridge with Waldersee. Accepting his resignation would have looked bad in the public eye, and thus the Kaiser had played up the command of the 9th Corps in Altona. As shown above, in his dealings with Waldersee, he tried to show affection, even if it was superficial, but the Kaiser continued to maintain a cordial relationship with his former Chief of Staff. In her letter from March 1, Mrs. Lee notes that the Kaiser had called Waldersee to come and dine with him, and a month later, he met Moltke and Waldersee in Lübeck.270 “Emperor is always attentive to Alfred and still maintains he is as fond of him as ever,” Mrs. Lee wrote. Shortly after visiting with Moltke during a trip to Berlin at the end of April 1891, Waldersee was called to his predecessor’s apartment with the rest of the General Staff, who had been having dinner together. “They were more than amazed and all came at once to the death chamber to look upon the one who had so long been their noble chief,” stated Mrs. Lee to her cousin, “I leave you to understand Alfred’s consternation and profound sorrow.” The Kaiser discussed funeral arrangements with Waldersee, and although Moltke had wanted a quiet and simple burial, Wilhelm wanted a national mourning.271 Waldersee was distraught by the loss of his friend and the man who had helped launch his career; he lamented that the Kaiser had not genuinely sought out Moltke’s advice, but gave the impression that he did.272 That Christmas Wilhelm sent Waldersee a present and wished for him to come as he usually did to congratulate him on the New Year, “so you see thus far all goes pleasantly,” wrote Mrs. Lee.273 On January 27, 1892, the Kaiser’s birthday, the Waldersees went to church then hosted a dinner in his

270 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, March 1 and April 1, 1891, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume C.
271 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, April 29, 1891, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume C.
272 Waldsee, May 2, 1891, Denkwürdigkeiten II, 205.
273 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, January 6, 1892, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume C.
That evening, at the Altona Citizen’s Association dinner for Wilhelm’s birthday, Waldersee presided and addressed the group, seeking to avoid “hollow glorification” of the Kaiser. “Unfortunately, this day is hardly suited for me to be joyful,” Waldersee wrote in his journal. Noting that it was the one-year anniversary of the Kaiser’s ordering him to Altona, he added, “Time has not healed the wound.” In the 1890s, Waldersee would once again have a friendly relationship with Wilhelm, but it would not be the same as it had been in the 1880s. Times had changed, and so had the monarch. Alfred von Waldersee confronted and slowly accepted the realities of a new age and a changed monarchy.

274 Anne Lee to Mary Hoppin, January 26, 1892, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume C.
Conclusion

Beginning in 1882, Count Alfred von Waldersee became a socialite and political partisan in the exclusive world of Berlin’s elite. With the fallout from the City Mission meeting in late 1887, he became an important figure at the imperial court and on the pages of domestic and foreign newspapers. His dismissal from the General Staff in 1891 did not silence public and private speculation that he was using his influence from his new home in Altona, waiting for the moment to become Chancellor. Throughout the 1890s, Waldersee was torn between his hope that Wilhelm II’s good qualities would prevail over the bad and his realization that the Kaiser’s attitude and ruling style were erratic and dangerous. His continued personal relationship with the monarch, though not as strong as it used to be, encouraged his optimism; his observation of the political developments in Germany and Europe reinforced his pessimism.

In May 1898, the Waldersees moved to Hannover, where the 66 year-old Count began his new job as the Inspector General of the 3rd Army. At their home – Hohenzollernstrasse 40 – Mrs. Anne Lee passed away at the age of 95 on March 30, 1899. Mary Hoppin, with whom Mrs. Lee had maintained a correspondence since the 1860s, received a telegram from Mary the next morning: “Dearest mother went to heaven yesterday.”¹ In August 1900, the Kaiser promoted Waldersee to the rank of Field Marshal and obtained international support to make him the Commander-in-Chief of the Eight-Nation Alliance that sought to suppress the Boxer Rebellion in China. By the time Waldersee arrived in Asia, major fighting had already ended. Military glory had always seemed to escape him, and the French-speaking, cosmopolitan socialite had to contend with the various, competing interests among the members of the international coalition.

¹ Mary von Waldersee, March 31, 1899, Cable Message by the Western Union Telegraph Company, HH, Von Waldersee-Lee Collection, Volume 8.
Although Waldersee had first become a public figure in 1887-1888, his role as the *Weltmarschall* (World Marshal), which the liberal press sarcastically labeled him, brought him fame and recognition once again.\(^2\) He was not simply discussed in print media, but in this new phase of his public image, his name and face were printed on items such as postcards, cigar bands, and trade cards for British cigarettes and Portuguese soap.

Image 10: Trade Card for Ogden’s Cigarettes. In the author’s possession.

Image 11: Trade Card for Claus & Schweder soap. In the author’s possession.

Image 12: Cigar Band. In the author’s possession.
After a brief stay in Japan, Field Marshal Alfred von Waldersee returned to Germany, arriving to a hero’s welcome in Hamburg. From there, he headed by train to Homburg, where the Kaiser received him. Cheering crowds had congregated at every station along the route, and in “democratic Frankfurt,” he wrote, 20,000 people turned out, many remaining outside his hotel late into the night. On August 12, 1901, he finally returned to his home in Hannover with much fanfare. Once again, newspapers and members of the political elite speculated about his becoming Chancellor. He explained his stance in his journal:

> It is wonderful that certain people and circles still believe I have the aspiration to become Chancellor and receive nightmares from this thought. How often I have declared that I would have to be a fool if I wanted to strive for this really unenviable position! I have already achieved some time ago everything a soldier can achieve, I hold a post that involves little work and no agitation or anger, and I know the position of a Chancellor under Kaiser Wilhelm II only too well that I would have to be mad to desire it.

Reflecting on his seventieth birthday in April 1902, Waldersee gave thanks for his wonderful wife and friends, the “blessed” life behind him, and his “illustrious” military career.

The details of his last days, which have never been described by an historian, reveal not only the Waldersees’ final moments together, but also the public and private reaction to the death of a celebrity and a Field Marshal of the German Empire. In February 1904, Waldersee became ill following a trip to Berlin. On the 24th, he and Mary rode out to visit the grave of one of his brothers. Afterward, reflecting on the deaths of his two brothers who died within 13 months of each other, he wrote to several friends. According to Mary, her husband believed “it now appeared evident [that] his generation should make way for the next and that he himself should

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4 Waldersee, Written at the end of December 1901, Denkwürdigkeiten III, 171.

5 Waldersee, April 10, 1902, Denkwürdigkeiten III, 184-185.
be prepared for the journey.”6 “On Sunday, February 28,” she wrote, “he came down to dinner for the last time, tasted hardly anything, and looked so ill I advised him to be go to bed, which he did.” Two days earlier, Waldersee complained of head pains, but he also had intestinal trouble, which the doctors believed the climate and his activity in China were the cause. His condition worsened, and Mary accepted that her husband would soon die. “Oh! The agony of being obliged to abandon the hope of saving this precious life, which had hitherto buoyed me up,” she later wrote, “I had always believed that the Lord would restore to me my beloved husband and now He asked of me this supreme sacrifice and earthly hope was at an end!” While Mary knelt and prayed at his bedside, the dying general, with a weak voice, accepted his fate and proclaimed his faith in the Lord. “Jesus has cleared away your sins in his blood,” Mary said. A little while later, holding his hand, she told him, “Auf Wiedersehen,” to which he replied, “Auf Wiedersehen.” Shortly after eight o’clock on the night of March 5, 1904, in the presence of his wife and a small group of family, friends, and doctors, Alfred von Waldersee took his last breath. Mary knelt, and “then came a flood of tears.”7

The next day, Sunday, March 6, Waldersee’s body was laid out, and an honor guard stood by day and night with swords drawn. Mary allowed the public to come pay their respects two days later, and thousands came. During her mourning, she would receive at least a thousand letters, 500 telegrams, and about 800 floral arrangements from around the world. Before the funeral at the local garrison church on March 9, Crown Prince Wilhelm arrived as his father’s representative and handed the widow letters from the Emperor and Empress. The Kaiser did not feel well enough to attend, but wrote a glowing letter about his “teacher, friend, [and] advisor,”

whose “devoted, unshakable loyalty for the royal house outshines everything [he did].”8 The Crown Prince escorted Mary to her seat in the crowded church, where generals, ministers, and nobles had gathered from throughout Germany and Europe. After the funeral that afternoon, a procession escorted the body to the train station. On the streets and in windows, crowds of people gathered to watch silently as bells tolled and a military band played funeral marches. From Hannover, the family and the casket travelled to Neverstorf in Holstein, the estate of Waldensee’s nephew, Count Franz Waldensee. The mausoleum for Alfred and Mary was still under construction, so Alfred von Waldensee was laid to rest in a temporary vault at the estate’s cemetery, shaded by oak trees and overlooking the Baltic Sea. Following a final prayer, some naval vessels off the coast and an artillery regiment on shore fired their guns in salute to the Field Marshal.

One day in April 1903, Waldersee sat next to the Kaiser at a dinner for the Chief of the General Staff, Count Alfred von Schlieffen. The men remembered fondly the deceased former Chief of Staff and Field Marshal Helmuth von Moltke. Waldersee was shocked when one of the generals present diminished his friend and predecessor’s role as a commander by saying that the old Field Marshal merely executed the orders of Wilhelm I. Believing this comment was directed toward Wilhelm II, Waldersee noted later that his former sovereign never believed himself to be a great commander. “He was much too smart for that,” he wrote, “[Wilhelm I] had
the wisdom to let Moltke counsel him,” and the advice that was accepted became an order, which was then issued.⁹ To Waldersee, Wilhelm I was the ideal monarch who listened to the counsel of others; Moltke was the ideal general who gave it. Count Alfred von Waldersee was a monarchist and soldier in this fashion. During his life, but especially from 1882 to 1891, he did not aspire to gain political power for himself; he never wanted to become Chancellor. Historians have typically called him an intriguer and a political general, but these terms ignore his special relationship with the monarch as a loyal friend and aide-de-camp; they capture neither the complexities of the man nor the time in which he lived. Waldersee’s actions – from supporting Stoecker’s City Mission to advocating preventive war – were motivated by a desire to defend and promote the monarchy and its traditional absolutist authority against its perceived enemies. As a general and one of the king’s men, he did not operate outside the German Empire’s power structure, convoluted as it was.

The great irony of Alfred von Waldersee was that in fearing the potential liberal, constitutional monarchy of Frederick III, he placed all his hopes in the future Wilhelm II, who showed signs of promise, but would not live up to Waldersee’s ideal of how a monarch should rule, i.e. like Wilhelm I. In the process, he sacrificed his once cordial relationship with Bismarck and became a hardline partisan for Wilhelm II. As a result, he allowed himself to become swept up in court politics, made enemies who would promote a false image of him that persists today, and, worst of all, he was dismissed by the very monarch for whom he had risked everything in the 1880s. Despite his continued friendship with Wilhelm II, which lasted until his death, Waldersee was first and foremost a member of Wilhelm I’s entourage and a man whose consciousness had been formed through the culture and experiences of an earlier era.

⁹ Waldersee, April 3, 1903, Denkwürdigkeiten III, 208.
According to Waldersee’s nephew, who instigated the publication of his uncle’s writings, the last words the dying Field Marshal wrote in his journal were, “I pray to God, that I do not need to experience what I see coming.” Walter Goerlitz insinuates that these words reflect regret on the Count’s part: they “may betoken Waldersee’s realization that he had been travelling the wrong road” or he “died convinced that his country’s end was near because she had rejected his advice.” This pessimistic quotation was, however, the last of many throughout Waldersee’s life. It can point not just to his long-standing concerns about Germany’s increasing isolation or the rise of anti-monarchical political parties, but also to his fears about the erratic and despotic rule of Wilhelm II. The final pages of Waldersee’s journals remained with Mary. As shown in this thesis, analyzing the context of his life and looking at more than just a few select quotations from his journals – as historians typically have done – have been fundamental to reevaluating who he was. Consequently, the meaning behind this quotation will remain a mystery without knowing the rest of his last words. What is known, however, is that Count Alfred von Waldersee could not completely come to terms with the swift, sweeping changes that occurred in Germany and Europe in the late nineteenth century, including the reign of Kaiser Wilhelm II.

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