CHAPTER ONE

THE EARLY CAREER OF BAVARIA’S POSTWAR POLICE CHIEF AND THE ORIGINS OF THE MODERN BAVARIAN POLICING TRADITION

In late June of 1945, after a decade in Switzerland, the anti-Nazi exile Michael von Godin returned to the bombed-out ruins of downtown Munich, arriving in a staff car provided by Allen Dulles of the American Office of Strategic Services (OSS). Almost immediately, he was sworn in as chief of the Landpolizei, the Rural Police, a new public safety agency the Americans had created in the administrative region of Upper Bavaria. By April of the next year, Godin would become chief of an enlarged Landpolizei organization that stretched across the entire state. By the end of the occupation, the Landpolizei would absorb almost all of the rest of Bavaria’s municipal police forces, a process mostly completed by the time Godin retired in 1958.1

In that first postwar summer, however, this bureaucratic success story still lay in an unknowable future. In those first months after the end of the Nazi regime, the task of improvising a police force amidst the material shortages, political purges, policy confusions, and physical chaos marking the outset of occupation still stretched ahead.2 From the cramped living quarters in the central government district that he shared with other officials of the U.S.-sponsored administration, Godin would have had ample opportunities to stroll in the evening across the Old Town to the nearby rubble-strewn Odeonsplatz and the ruined Feldherrnhalle. There, facing his current challenges, he would have had the chance to summon up encouraging memories of a dramatic moment both in German history and in his own life that had unfolded at that very spot more than twenty years before.

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Around noon on 23 November 1923, a young lieutenant named Michael von Godin had ordered his platoon of riot-control troopers from the Landespolizei (Bavarian State Police) to move out from the adjoining royal Residenz on to the wide cobblestoned square.\textsuperscript{3} They had orders to confront a march on the government district by a group of right-wing radicals led by Adolf Hitler, who were intent on seizing power from the Bavarian state as a prelude to a nationalist revolution. The ensuing firefight spared Hitler, but killed several putschists and four Landespolizei men. Spearheading the conservative Bavarian government’s suppression of the Putsch, Godin’s stand at the Feldhernhalle was the key moment in a series of police, military, and political actions that day that kept the Nazis from power in Bavaria, and indeed Germany, for ten more years.\textsuperscript{4} The Nazis’ eventual seizure of power in 1933 was the end of this first chapter in Godin’s saga. It turned Godin into a fugitive, and ultimately led to his exile from Germany in 1936, first to Dollfuss’s Austria, then to neutral Switzerland and eventual contact with the Americans.

By the time of his return to Munich in the American baggage train, the man who was to preside over the re-creation of public order in Bavaria in the post-Nazi decades had thus already taken a dramatic walk-on role on history’s stage. The younger Godin had been a junior officer in an interwar Bavarian police state that had emerged alongside the constitutional government in response to political extremism during the early years of the troubled Weimar Republic. The complex role played by the Landespolizei in the political forces at play in interwar Bavaria was in turn but another chapter in the longer history of an authoritarian policing tradition coeval with the emergence of modern Bavaria itself.\textsuperscript{5} The firm application of armed police power in 1923 may have temporarily prevented the breakthrough of fascism out of Bavaria into the rest of Germany. However, despite Godin’s later tailoring of his past to the sensibilities of his eventual American

\textsuperscript{3} It is important to distinguish the term “Landespolizei,” meaning “State Police,” from “Landpolizei,” or “Rural Police.” “Landespolizei” denotes the heavily armed and barracked paramilitary police force from the Bavaria of the interwar Weimar Republic, which is the subject of a concise overview in this chapter. “Landpolizei” denotes the nonmilitarized police force dispersed across the towns and countryside of post-1945 Bavaria, which is the main topic of this book.

\textsuperscript{4} Gordon, Hitler and the Beer Hall Putsch, is the classic account.

\textsuperscript{5} Siemann, Deutschland’s Ruhe, Sicherheit und Ordnung, and Raef, The Well-Ordered Police State, discuss key aspects of the long-term origins of this tradition.