In the late spring of 1945, units of the U.S. Third and Seventh armies were moving into Bavaria and the rest of south-central Germany, securing the bombed-out cities and major towns as well as the quiet villages now receiving a growing influx of refugees and displaced persons.¹ Among the instructions that American commanders and their security specialists carried was a “Public Safety Plan for Allied Control and Occupation of Germany.”² Although the plan’s main focus was dismantling the components of the national police system that had served the just-toppled Nazi regime, the document also devoted some attention to creating separate provisional systems of order and security in the American-occupied states of the defeated country. The Americans began with an agenda strongly focused on German police denazification and decentralization that implied the detailed supervision of many newly created and separate local auxiliary police organizations under the control of individual German communities and district authorities. Soon apparent in practice was the inadequacy of such scattered and poorly equipped forces, which were constantly losing personnel to repeated waves of denazification while facing unprecedented challenges to public order. Although accounts of the first few chaotic postwar weeks provide only fragmentary detail, the unsatisfactory results of these local and regional improvisations prompted a shift by the Americans in the fall of 1945 toward a new policy, one emphasizing the reevaluation of supra-local, more centralized approaches to policing (if not necessarily the actual older police organizations) that had operated during comparable times of upheaval before the Nazi takeover. By early 1946, an increased American flexibility regarding the pre-Nazi tradition of centralized and bureaucratically autonomous

¹ A concise but detailed account of the U.S. conquest of Bavaria can be found in Lanzinner, Zwischen Sternenbanner und Bundesadler, 13–24.
² A draft of this document dated 11 April 1945 can be found in RG260, USGCC B32F1, “Public Safety Plan,” Enclosure 5.
Bavarian state police would drive the occupiers to modify their original radical decentralization agenda. However, an unintended consequence of the gradual return of a more centrally organized model was the emergence of a standoff between the American-sponsored police leadership and the Bavarian government concerning the degree of meaningful civilian control over police operations. Unresolved, this tension between the police executive and the civilian government was to continue beyond the disappearance of direct American control over Bavarian police matters at the end of the occupation.

Before the collapse of the Third Reich, the American occupation planners had begun compiling a picture of the previous regime’s SS-Police system. The state of knowledge at war’s end was ultimately reflected in the occupation’s Public Safety Plan. However, although wartime intelligence work had elaborated beyond the broad outlines, the 1945 plan still betrayed an incomplete understanding on the occupiers’ part of how the Nazi system had functioned in practice. Also undeveloped was the Americans’ capacity to distinguish between what the SS had introduced in the way of radical innovation, and the elements of organization and practice in the 1930s and 1940s that harked back to pre-existing German traditions of policing. Particularly significant was the lack of a detailed understanding of how German policing before 1933 had encompassed considerably more areas of responsibility than anything in the Anglo-Saxon experience. Americans also knew little about how the police were linked to the various layers of local and regional non-Nazi Party and non-SS governmental and administrative authority beneath the national Reich level. These intermediate government echelons’ familiarity with local conditions in many small communities had figured into the actual day-to-day supervision of and assignments for locally based state police forces long before the Nazi takeover. Although the Americans acknowledged this lack of precise information in the text of their Public Safety Plan itself, and anticipated the need for adjustments and revisions as more information became available in

---