This chapter aims to examine the political, technical, and personnel problems in the creation of the Bundeswehr between 1950–58 and the role the U.S. Army and Air Force played in assisting the formation of their German counterparts. The assistance that the U.S. military provided to the Germans was hardly a straightforward process. Both the Germans and the Americans could have very different visions of an ideal army and air force, and there was considerable debate among the service staffs of the two nations throughout the whole process. Yet, while there was considerable debate and friction, the story is mostly one of very effective cooperation between the two nations. The build-up phase of the Bundeswehr resulted in a German force of which both the Germans and Americans generally approved. However, reaching the goal of an effective Bundeswehr meant overcoming numerous obstacles.

The Himmerod Conference

By 1949, after the Berlin Crisis and the founding of NATO and the establishment of the Bundesrepublik, the Western alliance realized that a major German rearmament program was essential in order to meet NATO defense goals. As Cold War tensions increased, a group of former Wehrmacht senior officers acting as military advisors for the Federal Government met in October 1950 at Kloster Himmerod to develop a program for German rearmament within the context of the Western Alliance. The Himmerod Conference, chaired by retired General Adolf Heusinger (who became the first Generalinspekteur of the Bundeswehr), laid the foundations for developing armed forces for a democratic West Germany.

The study that came out of the Himmerod conference served as a basis for planning new German armed forces, armed forces that would be formed and conceived only in full cooperation with the
Western Allies. When the Germans spoke of the Western Allies in 1950—and through the whole decade of the 1950s—they meant first and foremost the United States. From the start of the process in 1950 it was clear to all participants that the rearmament of West Germany, at least in the build-up phase, would be dependent upon receiving extensive support from the Allies. While German and Allied planners looked at procuring some of the heavy equipment and major weapons systems for the Bundeswehr from European allies, only the United States had the funds, industrial capacity, and the large stocks of reasonably modern surplus equipment to be able to provide the West Germans with the degree of support they would need. From the start of the process, the first Germans on the nascent military staff of the Konrad Adenauer government understood that the United States would play the key partner at every step of the process.

The American program to train and equip the Bundeswehr was not a truly unified program or strategy but, rather, separate plans developed by each American military service to support the foundation of their West German counterpart services. From the start of the process, each American service formed a unique relationship with its German counterpart. Indeed, in the formative years of the Bundeswehr, the U.S. Army relationship to the West German Army and the U.S. Air Force relationship to the Bundesluftwaffe took on very different natures. The West German Air Force readily and voluntarily embraced American doctrine, equipment, organization, and methods. From the start, U.S. and West German air force officers developed a remarkably close and cordial relationship. This was in contrast to the U.S. Army and the West German Army, where the relationship was somewhat less harmonious.

*Early German Thinking on Army and Air Force Organization*

In looking at the first comprehensive German rearmament plans that came out of the Himmerod conference in 1950, one must first understand that the dominant figures in early West German defense planning were all army officers. Adenauer’s first defense advisor was former panzer force commander General Count Gerhard von Schwerin. Adenauer’s two favorite military advisors, men who would go on to hold top positions in the Bundeswehr and NATO, were former army generals Adolf Heusinger and Hans Speidel. A key figure and editor of