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ABSTRACT

THE CAPTAIN OF KÖPENICK: A STUDY IN MILITARISM

by

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Köpenick, a small suburb of Berlin, was the scene of a flagrant display of militarism in 1906. An elderly ex-convict, frustrated by the antiquated penal code of Germany and thwarted in his attempts to obtain a work-and-travel permit, costumed himself in a captain's uniform purchased from a second-hand store. He then proceeded to acquire as cohorts genuine grenadiers who apparently obeyed his uniform without considering the man wearing it.

Unhampered and virtually un-noticed due to the frequency of soldiers on German by-ways, the troops marched down the streets of Köpenick and into the town hall. The imposter captain arrested the mayor, Dr. Langerhans, and two other city officials and sent them off, on their honor, to Berlin as prisoners of the State. The officials gave no resistance to the admirable captain, or perhaps it would be more appropriate to say, to the captain's admirable uniform.

In the treasurer's office of the Köpenick town hall the captain was presented with the town's cash. With cash in hand and non-plussed by the ease of his onslaught, the

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Captain of Köpenick gave orders to his soldiers and disappeared, some 4,000 marks wealthier, into the evening shadows.

Militarism was so much a part of German lives, from citizen to Kaiser, that the Köpenick charade was easily accomplished. An ex-convict changed his character by changing his clothes, and soldier and civilian alike prepared to follow him to the ends of the earth.

The reaction to the news of the Köpenick capitulation, in German as well as European circles, was one of widespread glee. The laughter on behalf of the German populace connoted the recognition of the existence of militarism. Unfortunately, the laughter did not indicate a desire for change, or even a slight tendency to attempt to loosen the bonds by which militarism held them.

The German people had lived under militarism in varying degrees of intensity for centuries and apparently, as demonstrated by Köpenick, were quite willing to continue.

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Chapter I

Introduction

Köpenick, a small Berlin suburb, was the scene for Carl Zuckmayer's comedy play emphasizing German militarism. Zuckmayer's play, Der Hauptmann von Köpenick, had been based on the actual adventures of an imposter captain and his raid upon the Köpenick town hall. Wilhelm Voigt, an ex-convict of considerable experience, had been frustrated by the legal technicalities that kept him from obtaining a work-and-travel permit. The hapless Voigt, well aware of the high esteem in which the military was held, decided on impersonation of an army captain as the best method of achieving cooperation from the officials at the Köpenick town hall. Voigt figured he would meet no resistance in requesting the pass as militarism controlled Germany; the uniform would be obeyed. Even as Voigt assembled the bits and pieces of his costume from a second-hand store he had no conception as to how simple his task would really be. The uniform was a fetish in Germany. Neither militaryman, nor civilian, noticed the grizzled old man with the prison-pallor that wore the uniform into the Köpenick town hall; they saw only the uniform and obeyed it unconditionally.

As the news of the Köpenick assault reached the German press the public's reaction was humorous. The people laughed, proving that as a nation they did indeed possess a sense of

humor. Even the Kaiser laughed after he stifled his initial rage. It was a tremendous joke on the German military and subsequently, on the German people possessed by militarism. Unfortunately, the only lesson to be learned from the Köpenick attack was one for the outside world; the German population was well aware of the stranglehold by which militarism held them. And, despite this awareness, they did not, as a unit, rise up to loosen the shackles by which militarism bound them. They only laughed.

However, before the events of Köpenick can be put into a meaningful context some background on German history must be presented. Hopefully the difference between the military way and militarism can be clarified, especially in respect to conditions prevalent at the time of the assault upon the Köpenick town hall.

In Germany militarism had been endorsed by the Romantic movement. In part, it was also supported by reactions to the events of history like the onslaught of Napoleon, the Prussian's disorder at Jena, and the crushing Treaty of Tilsit; it was further encouraged by the army reforms, a last resort against liberalism. Then, too, rigid social stratification in the form of a partnership between Junker and monarchy was promoted by Bismarck, earnestly intent on preserving the old Prussian State. Bismarck's victories in foreign wars inflated Prussian pride. As a result, there was no opposition to the army's spreading tentacles, and the officer began to live in a world singularly all his own. Also conducive to the spread of mili-

tarism was the tension present in Europe at the turn of the century, the build-up of armaments and the verbal blunders of Wilhelm II. The military way, as defined by military historian Alfred Vagts, is concerned with power objectives: men, weapons, machinery, and conquest. All must be attained with the minimum amount of stress and strain on the power structure, whether that structure be men, or machines, or the combination of both. On the other hand, militarism, with which this paper is chiefly concerned, encompasses the all, the fruit and functioning of a nation and the attitudes and feelings expressed by that nation's peoples toward military functions. As a group or individually, militarism integrates the mind and body of a State, its thoughts, ideals, and operations toward positive military conceptions. According to Vagts, militarism:

... covers every system of thinking and valuing and every complex of feelings which rank military institutions and ways above the ways of civilian life, carrying military mentality and modes of acting and decision into the civilian sphere.¹

Positive attitudes and ideals toward the military set it at the apex of a country's institutions. Armies and wars, in turn, then make a firm foundation for that apex.

Vagts attested that in Germany, particularly since 1870, militarism had connoted the superiority of the military man over the civilian, of military ideals over civilian concepts, plus a total emphasis on military considerations,

¹ H. Fick, Der deutsche Militarismus der Vorkriegszeit, cited by Alfred Vagts, A History of Militarism (New York: The Free Press, 1959), p. 17.

spirits, ideals, and scales of value in the life of the various states.² In Germany this was quite obvious because the soldier had become an idol in peace, as well as war-time, regardless of the implications and realities of the victories and the losses and bloodshed of the nation's prime manpower; the costs were regarded as incidental and were all too easily forgotten. Germany's customs, social standings, and thoughts were closely associated with the military and tied with the threads of true military purpose, to make war, to gain objectives, and to do both of these as efficiently and successfully as possible.

The seed of German militarism was sowed in the Romantic Age in the latter part of the eighteenth century and was nurtured through the decades until maturation prior to 1914. The era of the Romantics was one of revolt against the Enlightenment and all that it had stood for. Everywhere during the ensuing period restraints that classicism imposed upon the populace were rejected. The imagination was loosened and set free to wander at will; rationalism was submerged by emotionalism.

German Romanticism was distinguished from the Romantic movements of other lands by its philosophical character, its interpretation of life that received its inspiration through history. It was impassioned by the artist, the individual that dealt with it. Their concern was not with politics and

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E. Fischer and G. v. Below in *Deutsche Rundschau*, Vols. CLXII, CLXXL, cited by Alfred Vagts, *A History of Militarism* (New York: The Free Press, 1959), p. 14.

national powers, but with the national mind and the poetic character that it possessed.³ The soldier, who had been portrayed as the passionless murderer during the Enlightenment, was baptized in the fount of Romanticism and emerged pure, prepared to submit himself to the idolatrous worshippings of the Romantics; they disregarded his real and actual purpose and substituted their own musings.

The pipe dreams of the age found some difficulty, however, in accepting the traumatic onslaught of the little French corporal and the pathetic flight of the proud Prussians from the blood-spattered battlefield of Jena in 1806. Even more crushing to the Romantics was the Treaty of Tilsit on July 9, 1806. Hohenzollern possessions were hacked away to approximately one half of their previous size by the creation of the Grand Duchy of Warsaw and the annexation of Prussian territories west of the Elbe to the new found Kingdom of Westphalia, designed especially for Jerome Bonaparte. When Frederick William III acquiesced to paying a heavy indemnity to Napoleon, only five million of a former ten million subjects were left in the scarcely recognizable Prussia, and the Prussian army was reduced to a crippling, embarrassing 42,000 men.

The army reforms of 1807-12 were a direct result of the suffering pride of the Prussian military that had been scourged at Jena and nearly obliterated by Tilsit. These

³Hans Kohn, The Mind of Germany (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1965), p. 69.

reforms aided, abetted, and actually nurtured the growth of militarism. Furthermore, as the controversial historian A. J. P. Taylor lamented, the reforms ". . . were all designed . . . to make the subjects of the King of Prussia more subject than ever."⁴ Attempts to restore efficiency in the Prussian Army were not attempts at democratization. Able military men racked their brains for reforms that would be permissible under the Napoleonic yoke. In accord with Taylor's thinking, the easiest way to achieve success in military reform under the existing circumstances was through the militarization of the Prussian citizenry. This was ". . . perhaps the greatest single factor in shaping the destinies of modern Germany."⁵ The shaping of destinies was not something to be left to mere chance, but the Prussian State still had the hampering Treaty of Tilsit to contend with; it deprived the Prussians of active involvement with military maneuvers. Frankfurt Assembly. This killed As an alternative the Prussians were forced to take the task from the sergeant to a different type of instructor; lessons moved from the parade ground to the classroom. Prussian and later German education became a gigantic engine of conquest, especially effective since it was conducted by volunteers.⁶ The volunteers seemed to breath new life into Germany.

⁴ A. J. P. Taylor, The Course of German History (New York: Capricorn Books, 1962), p. 43.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

Some of the reformers had hoped for an effective political reform to accompany the military changes, but were destined for disappointment. Rather than effecting political reform, the army became the strongest supporter of the monarchy and remained conservative and unchanging in its outlook. Furthermore, the army authorities discouraged fraternization between the troops and civilians and were careful to effect a change of garrisons at regular intervals so that the soldiers could not acquire any deep emotions toward the garrison town, or its inhabitants. Valentin, a German historian, critically asserted that the essential reason for this was to absent any sentimental qualms from the mind of the soldier when he was asked to use a musket, or bayonet against the populace.⁷

In the autumn of 1848, there was an open victory of militarism when the Prussian Army refused to take an oath to the new constitution compiled by the Frankfurt Assembly. This killed any semblance of a revolution that may have remained. The princes owed their continued safe existence to the support of the army and in turn, willfully aided the latter to the successful domination of Germany by the summer of 1849.

The rigid social stratification of Prussia also supported militarism. The peasant supplied the military with food and troops to eat it; the bourgeois, still narrow in their outlook and viewpoints, continued to be subservient to authority and interested themselves primarily in the profits

⁷ Veit Valentin, Geschichte der deutschen Revolution, 1848-49, cited by Gordon A. Craig, The Politics of the Prussian Army 1640-1945 (London: Oxford University Press, p. 92.

to be made from the situation; in their case, they furnished the weapons and uniforms for the army. It was the Junker, however, who sat in the driver's seat and retained his control there.

The name Junker had originally applied to the trans-Elbian nobility and followed them when they became cadets in the army.⁸ The Great Elector had made sweeping grants to his landholders in 1653, and transformed the Junker estates from fiefs, held as compensation for military and other services, into estates held in absolute ownership. Thus, the Junkers gained recognition as the only class authorized to acquire estates; the privileges they had extorted from their predecessors were both confirmed and stabilized. The Great Elector also recognized their authority in local affairs and their right to be regarded as the governing class in all matters that concerned the State as a whole.⁹

The partnership between monarch and Junker was further confirmed by the successors of the Great Elector. They were protected economically and given complete authority over their estates and the serfs that worked them; in their own districts they retained important police, judicial, and administrative functions as well. Frederick the Great maintained that it was the sons of the nobility who defended the State

⁸ E. J. Passant, A Short History of Germany 1815-1945 (Cambridge: University Press, 1969), p. 13.

⁹ Craig, Politics of the Prussian Army, p. 4.

and ". . . the race is so good that it deserves to be protected in every way."¹⁰ It was no wonder that the Junkers felt that theirs was a prescriptive right to the highest posts of the civil service and an absolute monopoly of the commissions of the officers corps of the army.

Junker survival as a social class through the years was dependent upon their support, through the army, for the undemocratic monarchy. In turn, they showed contempt, both for the German burgher and Slav laborer. Antagonism between the classes, therefore, was only natural as the gulf widened with the increasing arrogant behavior of the army officers.

The advent of Bismarck, who managed to neatly preserve the old Prussian State, saved all for militarism from any type of extensive opposition. The military-supported monarchy, military-caste, and Junkerdom (Bismarck's very own people), all depended upon the Prussian State for their own survival. As Engels maintained, Bismarck, to ensure the continued survival of the privileged Junker class and their age-old predominance in society, flooded all of Germany with Prussianism.¹¹ Initially, decisive measures had to be taken because the dominance of the Prussian Army and the Junker class promised to cause a political cleavage in the Reich. However, as Prussia

¹⁰ Gerhard Ritter, Friedrich der Grosse: ein historisches Profil quoted in Gordon A. Craig, The Politics of the Prussian Army 1640-1945 (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 16.

¹¹ Frederick Engels, The Role of Force in History (New York: International Publishers, 1968), p. 16.

became further involved on the foreign front, in the Schleswig-Holstein affair, which was really no military contest, attitudes became more favorable yet to the military. Enthusiasm was actually widespread as news of the tragic, unnecessary battle of Düppel was made public. This inspired a new wave of patriotism which further undermined any remnants of a liberal attempt to overcome absolutism.

Another victory for Bismarck came on September 3, 1866, when the Prussian parliament, by a vote of 230 to 75, gave him an indemnity for the unconstitutional collection of taxes.¹² This gesture made it apparent that a parliament was only necessary to legalize, by consent, expenditures already made for military purposes. This indemnity to Bismarck had a profound social result in regard to politicians; since it was apparent that parliament did not control the State, then parliament was no longer a path to power. Hence, only men who would never be really first class politicians, men of second rank, would aspire to it. Taylor insisted that it was with Bismarck's victory over parliament that, "The intellectual ability of the politicians steadily, relentlessly, declined. . . ."¹³

Then Bismarck attempted to ally himself with the working-class by championing universal suffrage; this made him the counterweight to middle-class liberalism. Final evidence that the middle-class was giving up the fight against the government and the army was given when the liberal press began to support Bismarck; e. g., the writings of the Kölnische Zeitung,

¹² Taylor, German History, p. 109.

¹³ Ibid., p. 110.

Preussische Jahrbücher, and Grenzboten.¹⁴

By 1870, three victorious foreign wars had produced a public pride in Prussian prowess. And, the pride was not only that of the Prussians, but of the other German states that were now absorbed in the empire, as well. Victory had wiped out many remnants of bitterness left over from the constitutional struggle; the advocates of constitutional government who had been unable to overthrow the militarists in peace time became reconciled to the militarists in war, thus converting many of the army's inveterate opponents into admirers and supporters. War had brought about a national unity that had not been possible by other means.

The German military leaders were well aware of their new-found strength. They were professional soldiers and largely lacked political gifts, yet they had the power to hound more responsible ministers from their parliamentary posts; the army had become a state within a State.¹⁵ The army claimed the right to define what was, and what was not, in the national interest; politicians who did not agree with army definitions of national interest were replaced. After the unifications of 1871, even the War Minister was deprived of his most important functions, and authority in matters of command, organization, and personnel was relegated to various army agencies.

¹⁴Craig, Politics of the Prussian Army, p. 175.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 252.

It was no particular wonder that a significant part of the officers corps looked upon civilian society with a mixture of contempt and hostility. They regarded themselves as forming a castle guard to watch over their master's unruly subjects and to see to it that they did their duty.¹⁶

From 1880-1914, the Prussian military officer lived in a world of his own. He entered the army in one of two ways: by enlisting in the regiment first as a private, being rapidly promoted to the position of a non-commissioned officer, then probationary ensign, or avantageur; or the young aspirant came directly from a two year course in one of the cadet schools and entered the regiment as a probationary ensign. In both cases the young officer was observed by the other officers during a probationary period and became an officer of that regiment only by the consent of the regimental officers, with each regiment functioning like a club.¹⁷

To become an officer in the Prussian army . . . it was necessary . . . to furnish proof of good origin, and here the fact of having a father who was a shop-keeper was quite sufficient to ensure disqualification. An ambitious man in Germany might become a Commercial Councilor, or even a Privy Councilor. . . . He might even secure the enobling 'von' but to become a reserve lieutenant was not so easy.¹⁸

Reserve officers served only one-year enlistments along with two periods of training thereafter. They were called

¹⁶

Ibid.

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James W. Gerard, My Four Years In Germany (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1917), p. 76.

¹⁸

Joachim Kuerenberg, The Kaiser, quoted in Edmond Taylor, The Fall of the Dynasties (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1963), p. 24.

in for maneuvers when the whole nation was arrayed for war, but they seldom attained a higher rank than captain and were often promoted while exercising civil functions. As a rule, the reserve officers were the one-yearers, or Einjähriger who, because they had attained a certain standard of education, served only one year with the army instead of the two required of others. Zuckmayer poked fun at the system when in his play, Der Hauptmann von Köpenick, he portrayed a reserve officer listening approvingly as his tailor fitted him:

Na, so you have managed to become a reserve lieutenant--that is the chief thing--that is the thing you must be these days--socially, professionally, in every connexion! The doctorate is the visiting card, but the reserve commission is the open door--that's the essential thing these days.¹⁹

So, quite apparently, in Imperial Germany the possession of a commission was an important sign of social acceptability, and it was eagerly sought after. On occasion the army was forced to rely on the wealthier sections of the middle-class to fill the gaps within the officers corps and by doing so, naturally demanded of them that they accept the feudal philosophy that had always reigned in the officers corps. The standards set up by the army for its officers had been designed to enforce, to prop up, the system of absolutism. Thus, the incorporation of some of the wealthier middle-class into the officers corps was successful, particularly in regard to the growing affluence and threat of Socialism; it combined to make large numbers of

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Carl Zuckmayer, Der Hauptmann von Köpenick quoted in Gordon A. Craig, The Politics of the Prussian Army 1640-1945 (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 237.

the middle-class essentially conservative, if not reactionary, in their views. Furthermore, middle-class social aspirations made them anxious to be accepted by the older nobility.

Quite apparently those concerned with arms also developed a mentality that was different from that of the civilian.²⁰ They dined on history, retaining the uniforms and customs of the past for as long as possible, while they stamped, indelibly, their will and method of thought on the German population. In 1870, a French military attache wrote, "other countries possessed an army, but in Prussia the army possessed the country."²¹ Napoleon reportedly had said that Prussia ". . . was hatched from a cannon ball. . . ." ²² And, Mirabeau had remarked at the close of the Revolution, "War is the national industry of Prussia."²³ Prussian militarism was no international secret.

Esteem of the military, helped along nicely by journalistic and literary activities of the military men themselves, had been widespread, quite a different attitude from that of mid-century. Military service was praised so extensively that it was called the basis of character and life. It was every healthy man's duty to serve the fatherland through extensive training and then, to achieve the ultimate, military perfection.

²⁰ Heinz Gollwitzer, Europe in the Age of Imperialism 1880-1914 (Harcourt, Brace, & World, Inc., 1970), p. 91.

²¹ Gerard, Years in Germany, p. 76.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

It was an adventuresome age, both within and outside Prussia's borders. War, instead of being dreaded, was considered a purifying process and a vital opportunity for true regeneration.²⁴

On rare occasion a town councilor might protest to the government against the indignities suffered by local citizens in a garrison town, or about the insufferable, indignant behavior of the extremely young lieutenants; e. g., the 1913, incident of Zabern, a tiny garrison town in the Rhineland (Alsace-Lorraine). But, largely speaking, there was no type of organized movement against the exalted position of the army, or against authoritarianism. The working-classes and the poor accepted domination somewhat apathetically, while the educated and the higher-classes, as well as officialdom were smugly confident that their system was the most efficient, the most functional, and the most enlightened in all of Europe. They felt that their monarchy had reached the epitome of perfection beyond which there was no room for improvement. The isolated individuals drowned themselves in martial music, mass chanting, and marching steps, snuffing out any sign of dissatisfaction from ordinary, everyday life. Their conversations were those of the memories of ex-soldiers, overly exaggerated and bearing little semblance to reality.²⁵

Vagts felt that the prolonged successful existence of German army militarism had been enhanced, and thus, guaranteed

²⁴Gollwitzer, Age of Imperialism, p. 178.

²⁵Vagts, Militarism, pp. 22-23.

by civilian militarism. Civilian militarism saw some of its own basic conservative desires, that of survival, security, and the desire for discipline, command, and employs not immediately concerned with material profit, in armies. This was especially true where the hope for individual happiness became dubious to great numbers. Those that had tired of peace and comfort, or of living safely and securely in poverty, where their place in security had seemed somehow wrong and private endeavors led nowhere, or where the party strife seemed senseless were especially susceptible. To them life with and within military bodies appeared to offer a desirable change, at least for a time.²⁶

One May day in 1870, a Bavarian statesman, while watching a parade on the Kreuzberg in Berlin, reflected:

I mingled with the crowd and was struck by the interest manifested by the lowest of the people in things military. No trace of the former animosity against the military which used to be noticeable among the lower classes. The commonest working man looked on the troops with the feeling that he belonged or had belonged to them. Everywhere stories of Königgrätz, Düppel, etc. by old service men who were among the spectators.²⁷

A. J. P. Taylor believed that militarism was part of the German character:

If a natural cataclysm had placed a broad sea between the Germans and the French, the German character would not have been dominated by militarism. . . . If. . . the Germans had succeeded in exterminating their Slav neighbors. . . the

²⁶ Ibid., p. 22.

²⁷ Craig, Politics of the Prussian Army, p. 217.

Germans would have been advocates of brotherly love and international reconciliation. . . Constant surroundings shaped a German national character strong enough to withstand the increasing changes in social circumstance which occurred in Germany in modern times.²⁸

Even if Taylor's geographical determination is valid, there is still no excuse for blindness to reality as shown by the absurdity of the Köpenick episode of 1906, when one old man utilized militarism against the citizens of the town of Köpenick.

Perhaps the situation of militarism was inevitable at the time of the Köpenick affair due to the tensions in Europe after the turn of the century. A strong national defense was surely a necessity, but that brings back the question of terminology again; was a strong national defense for Germany necessarily one that involved mass militarism? There were no signs of attempted liberation from militarism from within Prussia. If anything, the citizenry were highly amused by the Köpenick assault. Amusement did not mean that any serious attempt to change the condition of militarism would be undertaken by the masses; it merely connoted an awareness that it existed.

Each stage of social progress and regress within Germany had produced accompanying military institutions, along with militaristic needs and ideas and militaristic culture and economics. The army conditions generally reflected the state of society. According to Vagts, if an army was so

²⁸Taylor, German History, p. 15.

built that it served men and not war it was given the right to be termed militaristic, in total opposition to the army that existed solely for the purpose of war. In the militaristic army everything that was not in direct preparation for fighting, that merely existed for diversion, or peacetime whims--that too, was characteristic of militarism. "War is the criterion, and war only."²⁹ The rest Vagts regarded as only advertising, including the claim of Moltke that "the army is the most outstanding institution in every country, for it alone makes possible the existence of all civic institutions."³⁰

Militarism had been a Hohenzollern attribute from the beginning. Their belief was centered around the idea that power alone could hold a State together. The creation of a superb army had won the Hohenzollerns international recognition. Their policies, however, totally disregarded the subordination of their peoples that had been involved in the maintenance of the military establishment throughout the years.

The Wilhelmine era, the time of our hero and the trials and tribulations of Köpenick, had been one of particular fantasy and daring. Not only had militarism swallowed up the citizenry, but it had captured the Kaiser as well. Wilhelm II had been raised in a fantasy-land formed around the idealized exploits of his grandfather, Wilhelm I. His family's rejection, a

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Vagts, Militarism, p. 16.

³⁰

Ibid.

result of his paralyzed arm, made the fantasy easier to accept.³¹ From the picture-book universe and the bitter struggle with his handicap emerged the stoic, stiff-backed youth that Wilhelm I expected him to be. Furthermore, the little, relative successes of his child-efforts; e. g., goose-stepping with the other little Junkers during cadet drill in a Guard's Regiment, encouraged his tendency to arrogance and bombast.

Wilhelm II had done martial impersonations since before he ascended the throne at twenty-nine. Another factor, verbal intemperance, accompanied his militaristic belligerence. His statements were misleading, and he was a bully, but it is doubtful if he was really the great war lord that the English, French, and Russians had portrayed him; he was probably more correctly labeled a tactless blunderer. On one such occasion of an absence of tact, while still a young man, he presented an oil portrait of himself dressed in the black cuirasse of a Garde du Corps and brandishing a field marshal's baton to the German Embassy in Paris. This, alone, created such an uproar that a French general flippantly called it an act of war.³²

In true militarist fashion, Wilhelm felt happiest of all in a mess room with its officers, or on a parade ground riding at the head of his regiment. His mania for the military even went so far as to attempt designing new uniforms and

³¹ Edmond Taylor, The Fall of the Dynasties (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1963), p. 145.

³² Ibid., p. 137.

insignias, and generally causing a great deal of irritation to the army itself.³³ His own wardrobe had to be attended by twelve valets; it contained more than 200 military uniforms. He had an almost compulsive belief in fitting the military costume to the occasion.

. . . when he attended a performance of The Flying Dutchman at the Berlin Opera he put on his grand admiral's uniform; in Palestine--except when he dressed as a Bedouin--he wore a white cloak adorned with a Crusader's cross; he was once dissuaded with great difficulty from dressing as a Roman general to inaugurate a museum of antiquities.³⁴

In addition to Wilhelm's attiring himself in army dress, he also meddled in maneuvers; he made so much of a nuisance of himself that on one occasion the General Staff pretended measles at headquarters to keep him away.³⁵

Perhaps it was the speeches, more than anything else, that gave militaristic offense. In 1900, he spoke memorably to the marines departing for China in an effort to put down the Boxer Rebellion, avenging the fanatics' massacre of Western diplomats, among whom was the German Minister:

Give no quarter. Take no prisoners. . . Even as a thousand years ago when the Huns under King Attila made such a name for themselves as still resounds in terror. . . so may the name of German resound through Chinese for a thousand years. . . may you so conduct yourselves that no Chinaman will ever so much as dare to look crooked at a German.³⁶

³³ Ibid., p. 147.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 154.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 140.

In 1905, after President Emile Loubet of France had foolishly defied chauvinist opinion and had voiced his readiness to receive the Kaiser in Paris, Wilhelm delivered the following speech to his army: "The Order of the Day is: Keep your powder dry; keep your sword sharp; and keep your fist on the hilt."³⁷

The Wilhelmine Era, besides resounding in diplomatic tactlessness, was also characterized by the progressive usurpation of the authority and functions of the professional diplomats by the military agencies; one frustrated diplomat cried out in 1914, "Wer regiert in Berlin, Moltke oder Bethman!"³⁸

A great anti-German coalition was building-up in Europe. The expansive ideas of the Kaiser had their impact. The year 1905, was augmented by the Morocco crisis between France and Germany; the following year was filled with discussion on the great conference in Algeciras that extended from January to April. Nor had the Kaiser's touring pleasures brought luck to Germany; e. g., the Kruger Telegram, the Japanese problem, the Kaiser's friendship with the Sultan and the Mohammedans, the Morocco crisis, the Admiral of the Ocean speeches, the flotilla and naval braggeries, etc.

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 137-40.

³⁸ Craig, Politics of the Prussian Army, p. xvii.

On September 7, 1906, the Kaiser reviewed and toasted the parade of the 6th army corps in Breslau; on September 11, 1906, he reviewed another parade, this one of the 8th army corps.³⁹ On October 16, 1906, he was in Bonn for the unveiling of the Kaiser Wilhelm Monument while a mysterious captain lay siege to the town hall of Köpenick, arrested the city officials, and absconded with city funds.

The very existence of militarism which engulfed all of Germany like a great flood, controlling the thought of the poorest men in the streets, as well as those in residence in the Kaiser's palace, permitted Köpenick to become a reality. The incident itself was so odd, so strange, and so daring that the German populace was somewhat unsure whether to regard it as a comedy, or a tragedy; they safely decided not to spend too much time on deep introspection of the subject. Instead they laughed, at the incident, at the poor ex-convict who portrayed a captain so skillfully, and mostly, at themselves. They really had no intention of freeing themselves from the bonds of militarism, but still were able to be amused by their unfortunate situation. They were joined in their mirth by the rest of the world whose laughter tingled with a tinge of irony and bitterness.

There has not been much written on the assault upon the town hall of Köpenick in either the United States, or in England, discounting several articles of secondary value taken

³⁹ Wolfgang Heideimeyer, ed., Der Fall Köpenick (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Bücherei, 1968), p. 34.

from The Nation, The Outlook, and the New York Times. Thus the research for this paper has been taken almost entirely from German resource material, among which are many primary sources.

Amazingly enough, a great amount of pertinent information was gleaned from German newspapers. The story of Köpenick, a lesson in militarism, was written after utilizing several cross references that included police files, the statements from Voigt's attorney, and Voigt's somewhat exaggerated autobiography.

Hopefully, this paper will be of some value here in the United States, especially to those students of history who may have heard rumor of such a happening, or to those who have come across Carl Zuckmayer's play, Der Hauptmann von Köpenick. I feel that working on the Köpenick affair was worthwhile because it has indeed taught a lesson in militarism to myself and perhaps will teach one to those who may read this paper in the future.

¹ Wilhelm Voigt, Von dem Hauptmann von Köpenick wurde (Berlin: Julius Pustmann, 1909), p. 41.

² Walter Baep, Keine Illusionen (Leipzig: no publisher, 1908), p. 103.

CHAPTER II

Creating a Culprit

Forty-three years after the signing of the fateful Treaty of Tilsit, when Frederick William had given up the ghost of old Prussia to his conqueror, Napoleon, a boy was born in that same East Prussian town to the family of Adalbert Voigt. While his wife suffered the travails of giving birth that thirteenth day of February, 1849, Adalbert Voigt was off in the service of Kaiser Wilhelm I, stifling the Baden uprising of the 1849 Revolution.¹ After this short campaign Voigt, who had spend most of his military residency as a non-commissioned officer in the 41st Infantry Regiment at Pillau, decided to return to the doldrums of civilian life and his calling of a master shoemaker and citizen of Tilsit.² It was a difficult decision to make; it was not simple for a man to relinquish a career involved with the important task of serving the Kaiser for a civilian role of low esteem, but there was his family to consider.

Adalbert Voigt located his home, as well as his business, near the army garrison of Tilsit. It was an advantageous

¹ Wilhelm Voigt, Wie ich Hauptmann von Köpenick wurde (Berlin: Julius Puttmann, 1909), p. 41.

² Walter Bahn, Meine Klienten (Leipzig: no publisher, 1908), p. 103.

selection because not only did he manage to outfit many of the town's foremost citizens, but he was able to contract work on the boots of the dragoons as well. He was as happy in Tilsit as could be expected of any good Prussian citizen who had given up an illustrious military career; and the garrison's dragoons provided him with a constant reminder that he, too, had honorably served the Kaiser.

Adalbert Voigt conscientiously devoted his Sunday afternoons to reminiscing about military days gone by.³ Like a proper Romantic, he was soon guilty of replacing fact with fantasy, each time improving on Prussian prowess as he resurrected battle after battle for his father, who had fought in the War of Liberation and his young son, Wilhelm. Then Adalbert would listen intently as the elder Voigt relived his campaigns of 1813-15.⁴ Sitting on his grandfather's knee and listening avidly to the war stories, young Wilhelm was captivated by the exciting dramas.⁵ Before long memoirs became a regular form of Sunday entertainment. However, with the passing of time, Adalbert grew tired of his modest civilian existence and began to seriously yearn for days of old. As the past could never again be, the only alternative Adalbert felt, was to drink and wish, to wish and drink and create fantasies from past military exploits. And, too, Adalbert had an intent audience in young Wilhelm, who listened earnestly, eager for word of the days of

³Voigt, Hauptmann von Köpenick, p. 9.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Bahn, Meine Klienten, p. 69.

wonder. Wilhelm's Uncle Bassig acted as a rudder to the hapless Voigt family, a realist among romantic dreamers and children. He saw to it that Adalbert worked regularly to support his wife and three children (Wilhelm had a younger and older sister). However, all was not to go well for the family Voigt; with Uncle Bassig's premature death, Adalbert went to pieces and turned to excessive drinking, gambling away the family's funds, lamenting his woebegone civilian status, and more frequently than not, physically abusing his wife and children.⁶ Quarrels became a daily event. Wilhelm's mother worked and saved diligently and just as diligently, his father gambled the family wages, eventually reducing the Voigts to a state of near-beggary.⁷

During the good years, before Bassig's death, the child Wilhelm became absorbed in the undertakings of the soldiers at the Tilsit garrison. Like many another boy, of a different age, enraptured by playing with his toy soldiers, young Wilhelm was captivated by enthusiasms of the kaleidoscopic world of the military, with their flashing arms and brightly colored uniforms. His custom was to make his world of play around the soldiers of the garrison. And, just as he was absorbed with the soldiers, so the soldiers became fond of the young fellow racing about the cobblestones, his blond hair shining in the sun. One day a group of the Lithauischen Dragoons decided to show the young

⁶Voigt, Hauptmann von Köpenick, pp. 10-11.

⁷Bahn, Meine Klienten, p. 71.

sprite their affection. Saddling a cavalry mount, they sat him astride the worthy steed and taught him the elements of riding.⁸ Each day the fascination for the military grew. Young Wilhelm longed to be an actual part of them and later remarked in his memoirs, "I was always an ardent admirer of the military."⁹ His fascination persisted as he grew older, working with his father diligently over some cavalryman's boots; each spare moment was given to watching, learning, and observing the various comings-and-goings, as well as riding and learning cavalry technique.¹⁰

Wilhelm was a bright, alert child and attended school regularly; in Tilsit he completed the third class of the Stadtschule and then went on to a Realschule, a non-classical secondary school, where he enrolled for several additional classes.¹¹ Naturally, his special love became history, particularly that of the illustrious fatherland. Many years later, after becoming involved in the Köpenick fiasco, Voigt was described by his attorney, Walter Bahn, as "precisely acquainted with the fatherland's history."¹² He could name, correctly, the mighty personalities who had been on intimate terms with

⁸Heidelmeyer, Der Fall Köpenick, p. 17.

⁹Voigt, Hauptmann von Köpenick, p. 9.

¹⁰"Der Hauptmann von Köpenick vor Gericht," Vorwärts, #281, December 2, 1906.

¹¹"Der Hauptmann von Köpenick vor Gericht," Vossische Zeitung, Abend, December 1, 1906.

¹²Bahn, Meine Klienten, p. 70.

Napoleon, as well as describe, with great accuracy, Napoleon's uniform; he was particularly well-oriented with Napoleon's campaign of 1812, into Russia.¹³ During his younger years he was an ardent patriot, free from any cynicism toward Prussia, the Kaiser, and particularly, his beloved military, the ideal exalted institution of the time.

When Uncle Bassig died he left young Voigt a substantial collection of classical volumes from his personal library.¹⁴ Wilhelm welcomed these books, among which were Goethe, Schiller, Letzing, Herder, Wieland, Klopstock, and Uhland.¹⁵ Later Wilhelm added the works of his favorites: Raumer, Becker, Menzel, Daniel, Schart, Humboldt, Harnisch, Dickens, and Scott.¹⁶ He loved to read and later in life his attorney, Bahn, noted that he was wont to quote from Wallenstein, or Egmont in his conversations.¹⁷ Voigt spent his later reformatory years deeply involved with the educational process and continued to pick the brains of famous authors. The result was tragic; he was a man well-versed, intelligent, and acquainted with the fine arts in a militaristic world, equipped with the

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 71.

¹⁵ "Der Lebenslauf des Hauptmanns von Köpenick" (letter from Voigt to Bahn, November 3, 1906), Bahn, p. 104.

¹⁶ "Aus der Selbstbiographie des 'Hauptmanns von Köpenick'," Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger, #618, Abend, December 5, 1906.

¹⁷ Bahn, Meine Klienten, p. 71.

trade of a shoemaker in an age that could not accept such a combination of talents.

As young Wilhelm grew older he began to spend more time in the shoemaker's trade, working side by side with his father on the boots for the Lithauischen Dragoon Regiment. In addition to working and attending school, however, he was faced with an unhappy home situation. Matters had become progressively worse; nearly all the income was drunk, or gambled away, except that which his mother managed to eke out of her tiny garden.¹⁸ His sister, Bertha, three years his senior, was sent away from their unhappy home to live with relatives in Russia.¹⁹ Wilhelm also left home because arguments became more vicious and bruises more frequent. At fourteen, bound for Königsburg, about sixty-eight miles from Tilsit, on a dreary, cold winter's day, young Voigt sought escape from the troubles and terrors of his home life, thinking, as he trudged through the snow, that he might find employment in Königsburg repairing shoes.²⁰

Life is not always as easy as the mind of a fourteen-year-old boy visualizes it. Young Voigt was apprehended by the Königsburg police nine, or ten days after his descent on that town and questioned earnestly as to why he had come there. Wilhelm still possessed a vast amount of personal pride at

¹⁸ Voigt, Hauptmann von Köpenick, p. 16.

¹⁹ Bahn, Meine Klienten, p. 71.

²⁰ Voigt, Hauptmann von Köpenick, p. 13.

this time and refused to tell them about his home problems. Thus, he was branded a beggar, spent forty-eight hours in jail and paid a twenty-five pfennige fine.²¹

Youth is a time for temporary discouragement; as new ideas tumbled through young Voigt's head the road from Königsburg back home to Tilsit did not seem so dim, so long, or so cold to the boy as he trudged along on foot. Militaristic fantasies absorbed the time, along with vivid dreams and personal desires; he decided to join the navy. No doubt, the young fellow fancied, the navy would be the solution to the Voigt household problem. Another Voigt hero would emerge and bury apathy beneath his sword. However, there is a vast difference between fantasy and reality. Wilhelm Voigt could not join the navy; he had a police record. He had spent forty-eight hours in jail.²²

The tirade that befell Wilhelm Voigt for his failure was long and vicious; his father berated, abused and cudged him. The youngster had stolen and destroyed the life-long dream of the Father and had become a disgrace to the Voigt name. No man who could not serve his country was worth keeping alive. However, the boy was mostly disraught from his own grief. He had been brought up in militaristic Prussia where thought was consistently involved with the military. Thus, Wilhelm Voigt was a failure, a reject to Prussian thought; even in his own home his family was ashamed of him. All of

²¹ Ibid., pp. 14-15.

²² Ibid., p. 16.

his life his father held a grudge against him for his most grievous offense--a failing of the State. He abused the boy and kicked him out into the world.²³ Adalbert, the drunkard, gambler, and wife-beater, had lost face by his son's failing. He had been disgraced among his own kind by a son who could not serve Prussia. Wilhelm Voigt left home that fateful day, hearing as he walked away the weeping lamentations of his mother, who was losing her only son.

Voigt had been arrested three times for petty thefts by the time that he was sixteen.²⁴ Disgruntled and discouraged, he adopted the pseudonym of August von Zander in 1864, in a feeble attempt to cease disgracing his family; he retained this name in his journeys through Angermünde, Magdeburg, and Breslau.²⁵ However, young Voigt was very much afflicted with self-pity; his wanderlust was filled with confusion because he still worshipped the militaristic system that possessed the countryside and the people in it. He knew no other life.

A further influence on Voigt was a young Russian nobleman that he met while busying himself with odd jobs; he would not name this man in his writings, however. Each man found the other an ardent conversationalist, and they grew to be fast friends. The Russian filled Voigt's impressionable mind with delightful stories of Petersburg and invited him

²³ Ibid., p. 17.

²⁴ "Der Hauptmann von Köpenick vor Gericht," Berliner Tageblatt, #611, Abend, December 1, 1906.

²⁵ "Der Verhaftung des falschen Hauptmanns," Vossische Zeitung, Abend, October 26, 1906.

to the stables where he found employment doing odd jobs. This time things were different; the stable was not a civilian establishment, but was military. Voigt was delighted. He was back with his revered element and drank in, thirstily, all the sights and sounds of the military. As he renewed his acquaintanceship with the riding officers and their mounts he began to experience an innermost satisfaction. Even if he could not wear an illustrious uniform he could serve those that did. Probably his most exciting experience was when the Regiment Commander, Oberleutnant von Bernhardt, spoke to him concerning the welfare of his horse.²⁶ Another of his most memorable moments was driving Russian insurgents and Russian soldiers back and forth to the front.²⁷ (Although Voigt, when relating this experience, did not specify what front, this author believes that it was probably the Polish border uprising of 1863).

However, Voigt's wanderlust took precedence over his militaristic enthusiasms and one day he took leave of his Russian friend and set off for Danzig.²⁸ On February 10, 1867, he was in Breslau. Jobless and short on funds, he attempted to forge a money order in the amount of twenty-three talers.²⁹ He obtained the original money order in Berlin and was highly

²⁶Voigt, Hauptmann von Köpenick, p. 21.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Ibid., p. 25.

²⁹"Der Verhaftung des falschen Hauptmanns," Vossische Zeitung, Abend, October 26, 1906.

nervous, as well as totally lacking in the finesse of forgery when he tried to cash it. As a result, he was apprehended almost immediately by a policeman.³⁰ On April 13, 1867, Wilhelm Voigt was sentenced without any sign of clemency under the old penal code for Document Forgery to ten years in prison and a 1500 taler fine; as it was quite apparent from his forgery attempt that he was without funds, the payment of 1500 talers was a total impossibility. Therefore, his sentence had to be revised from ten to twelve years.³¹

Voigt was seventeen years old when he entered Moabit Prison; however, with his youthful aspirations he decided to make the best of a very undesirable situation. Moabit, according to Voigt, was equipped with an impressive library that contained many volumes of histories and geographies, in addition to many of the latest periodicals.³² As he had been interested especially in Prussian military history of the last 200 years and had intended the military as his career up until his fatal deed, he made this period his specialization. He felt that during those 200 years had lived some of the greatest personalities; e. g., Friedrich Wilhelm I and Old Fritz. These two were his very favorites.³³ Among his readings, as he recorded

³⁰ Voigt, Hauptmann von Köpenick, pp. 28-29.

³¹ Bahn, Meine Klienten, pp. 71-72.

³² Voigt, Hauptmann von Köpenick, p. 34.

³³ Ibid., pp. 34-35.

ships and hence, the introduction to perversity. Voigt's in his memoirs, were the works of Raumer, Ranke, Becker, and Menzel.³⁴ Even before Moabit Voigt had interested himself in observing, as well as reading, history; he had frequently walked in among the war spoils of 1866, on display on Unter den Linden.³⁵ In addition to reading history in Moabit, Voigt devoted time to his second passion, traveling; he read the geographical works of Schlacht and Daniel.³⁶ As a prisoner, Voigt had much time to devote to his studies; he lived his first three years at Moabit in solitary confinement.³⁷

After his period of isolation Voigt was transferred from Moabit to Sonnenburg on the Wartebruch by Küstrin, where he spent his next nine years.³⁸ Although very much subdued by this time, he continued to study Prussian history at Sonnenburg.³⁹ Bahn, his attorney for the Köpenick case, was impressed, as well as puzzled, that Voigt successfully managed to survive such a trying time during his youth which concerned, in particular, the ordeals of constant mechanical work as well as the prison curse--the deprivation of normal sexual relation-

³⁴ Ibid., p. 34.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 27.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 35.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 27.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 39.

³⁹ Sibylle B. Werner, "Der Hauptmann von Koepenick: Wirklichkeit und Dichtung am Beispiel des Schauspiels von Carl Zuckmayer" (unpublished M. A. dissertation, University of Maryland, 1954), p. 7.

ships and hence, the introduction to perversity. Voigt's sole outlet for his emotions was letter writing.

So he had then in the six years, that he served as punishment time in Sonnenburg, written and circulated 6000 letters.⁴⁰

There seems to be a discrepancy between Voigt's testimony that he spent nine years in Sonnenburg and Bahn's description of the time as six years. As Voigt's sentence was for twelve years and three of the twelve were served at Moabit, I am inclined to believe Bahn had committed a slight error in his calculations--Voigt had circulated some 6,000 letters over a period of nine years instead of six; nonetheless, it was a great amount of writing. There appears to be no record, however, as to whom the letters were sent.

Voigt was released from Sonnenburg on April 13, 1879, and went to Frankfurt to apply for a job as a shoemaker.⁴¹

Then he went home briefly. His mother had died in 1878, and he wanted to visit her grave.⁴² Not knowing where she had

been buried, he stopped to inquire at his father's home.

Adalbert Voigt, not one for extended grief, had soon remarried.

When Wilhelm reached his family home his father hastily told him that he was no more welcome in his home in 1879, than he had been in 1863, after the incident in Königsburg.⁴³

⁴⁰ Bahn, Meine Klienten, p. 72.

⁴¹ Voigt, Hauptmann von Köpenick, p. 49.

⁴² Ibid., p. 46.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 50.

Before leaving Tilsit, Wilhelm Voigt paid a sad call on his mother's best friend, who was also an immediate neighbor. His conversation there, rather than lightening his heart, intensified his feelings of hate for his father. He heard the story of his mother's death. On that fateful day his father had been gambling and returned home in search of additional monies, which his wife had refused him. The neighbor woman related that there was also, happening at that same moment, a parade of the Dragoon's Regiment in the street and as their trumpets sounded she turned to the window to look. She peered out, and subsequently glanced through the Voigt window opposite, watched Adalbert strike out at his wife and saw her fall back, striking her head against a bureau corner; the blow had apparently killed her.⁴⁴

Voigt left Tilsit, but did not return to Frankfurt. Instead, he went to Berlin where he had heard rumors of an American firm that was hiring; then he moved on to a Prague boot factory. He left Prague for Vienna, Budapest, Jassy, and finally Odessa, where he stayed for about two months. Odessa interested Voigt because there was a Russian garrison nearby. He set about to study their movements, etc., all the while making comparisons of the Russian, Prussian, and Austrian armies.⁴⁵ He might have stayed longer in Odessa, but his employer's brother spoke of a need for him as a technician in Lodz and took Voigt away with him; however, he did not like

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 51-52.

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 56-58.

Lodz and soon left for Riga.⁴⁶ His wandering took him to nearly thirty other places before the next fateful adventure of his life.

On his way to Potsdam he became involved in a Dornek wedding celebration that had set out on foot (it was May and the weather was conducive to outdoor celebrations) from Wronke. The party of about eighteen men and women, coming upon Voigt, asked him to share in their celebration. Voigt, not one to refuse an invitation, agreed and as dusk fell, they decided that a picnic would be appropriate. As they still were not too far out of Wronke, they decided to bring along a piano from the village for dancing. After considerable revelry the party, one by one, dropped off to sleep; for the first time in many years, Wilhelm Voigt slept soundly.⁴⁷ He was traveling under the alias of Karl Richard; perhaps his luck had changed. This was not to be, however. At eleven o'clock the next morning Wilhelm 'Karl Richard' Voigt was brought before the Wronke mayor, informed that the piano had been stolen, and that he was the likely suspect; and, without much ado, 'Karl Richard' was sentenced on July 5, 1889, to one year in prison at Posen for the theft of a piano that had provided music for a moonlight dance.⁴⁸

Wilhelm Voigt changed; he was an embittered man when he came out of prison, helpless and friendless and even worse,

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 59.

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 61-63.

⁴⁸ Werner, "Der Hauptmann von Koepenick", pp. 10-11.

constantly under police surveillance. Heedless of right, or wrong, Voigt allied himself with a man named Kallenberg. Together, armed, they decided to crack a safe; they had just begun breaking-and-entering when they were arrested. Neither man resisted arrest.⁴⁹

On February 12, 1891, Wilhelm Voigt received his sentence: fifteen years imprisonment and ten years loss of civil rights, thereafter. Voigt objected to this harsh sentence at his trial; the court went out of its way to confirm his assertion that the sentence was indefensible and that he had been illegally deprived of the right of appeal, but that was all.⁵⁰ Voigt, along with his associate, Kallenberg, was sent off to Rawitsch Prison. He immediately hoped for some legal alternative to his exceedingly harsh judgement, but was at a loss to do anything about it.⁵¹

Some time after Voigt's internment some Russian soldiers crossed the border from Liegnitz and were quartered, temporarily, at Rawitsch. On Sundays they toured the place and inevitably, Voigt struck up an association with an oberleutnant, who advised him to make an appeal. However, the appeal was turned down on the grounds of insufficient evidence.⁵²

These were the most difficult years; he was no longer a young man who sought to make the best of situations. Life

⁴⁹"The Kopenick Captain," The Nation, LXXXIII (December 6, 1906), p. 478.

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Voigt, Hauptmann von Köpenick, p. 70.

⁵²Ibid., pp. 78-81.

had not been good to him. He knew nothing of his family. Voigt grew morose and bitter. He was aware that life was not at all as the Romantics had portrayed it; civilization was enraptured by militaristic ideologies. He mentioned this to Kallenberg on several occasions. Reality was not an easy thing to come to a man at this age.

While in Rawitsch Voigt was unpopular with the inmates, many of whom had revolutionary tendencies. For an outlet he spent his time officiating in the church choir and developed a great passion for church songs. The parson, some time later, was to attest that Voigt, while at Rawitsch, was also a very loyal German subject.⁵³

Throughout his stay at Rawitsch Wilhelm Voigt had tried appealing his sentence four times, as well as appealing to the Kaiser's mercy; all of these attempts were in vain. When at last he had served out his fifteen-year sentence he emerged to face a further ten-year loss of civil rights. And, by now, his health was failing him. According to his attorney, Walter Bahn, "Voigt had served the fifteen-year sentence and came out of prison as a bodily broken man."⁵⁴

Yet, Voigt was an intelligent man, well-mannered, with an inclination toward self-righteousness. He had been able to read and write before he was six years old and had gone through the non-classical secondary school. His utmost dream had been to enter the military, and he had had those hopes crushed.

⁵³Bahn, Meine Klienten, p. 70.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 78.

Basically, then, his character had two concepts, or two roots: (1) an insatiable love for the military; (2) a desire for travel.⁵⁵ The time had been right to fulfill Voigt's first desire; the Romantic Age had built fantasies that easily permitted the aggressive military to sit atop the apex of German institutions, and it was supported by a strong spirit of civilian militarism. Feeble attempts had arisen against the system of oppressiveness, but they had been unorganized; e. g., the Revolution of 1848. The advent of Bismarck and military victories on foreign soil had pulled the chains of militarism even tighter, making the only heroes of the time those with the uniforms. The Schleswig-Holstein War had initiated cohesiveness and an important, victorious conclusion was had with the Franco-Prussian War, permitting Wilhelm I to be crowned Kaiser in the Versailles Hall of Mirrors. Even the politicians had been defeated by militarism. And in this case, one man's life, that of Wilhelm Voigt, was very much a part of this militaristic society.

In regard to Voigt's second desires, he indulged himself quite graphically and was a widely traveled man; his wanderlust was so extensive that he managed to visit both Russia and the United States when he was seventy-three.⁵⁶

Life for Wilhelm Voigt varied between reality and dreams and depended quite heavily upon the latter. The men that he admired the most, Friedrich Wilhelm I and Old Fritz

⁵⁵Heidelmeyer, Der Fall Köpenick, p. 16.

⁵⁶Ibid.

seemed a little remote. He believed very strongly that the world both misunderstood and mishandled him; they really had, but then, so had his family. In that pathetic situation he had been regarded by them as a failure and consequently, he came to believe that himself. He had lived amidst quarrels and beatings, conducive elements, Bahn believed, in creating a criminal.⁵⁷ Amazingly enough, however, Voigt emerged from his experiences with a yen for the ladies, even though he came to treat them as mere objects, eventually fleeing from their presence and ultimately, proving himself irresponsible. The latter characteristic had been a result, perhaps, of his own familial experiences and the tragedy of his mother. He had a wife and children in Bohemia that he had apparently abandoned without explanation and was seriously contemplating a second marriage prior to the Köpenick problem.⁵⁸

Wilhelm Voigt left Rawitsch determined to lead an honest life and was at first confused as to what town to settle in, to diligently ply his trade as a shoemaker. He was soon confronted by the law, however, called an undesirable character, and ordered to leave town. The results were always the same; wherever he stopped the police demanded his papers. When they found he had been an ex-convict he was ordered to move on. The police made a man that had once been a criminal always a criminal, and their system of papers and passports

⁵⁷ Bahn, Meine Klienten, p. 71.

⁵⁸ Heilmeyer, Der Fall Köpenick, p. 17.

always placed a man's destiny in their hands. They decided where he would live and whether he should have a chance at rehabilitation.⁵⁹ In Voigt's case, he was literally seeking refuge, in a nation bound by militarism, having no place for a wandering, educated ex-convict. It could be for this reason, that Wilhelm Voigt was forced into using an idea that he had conceived as a joke while in Rawitsch, a joke that was told to only one man, Voigt's friend, Kallenberg.

In addition to a prison sentence in Rawitsch, Wilhelm Voigt had also lost ten years of civil rights. This meant that upon his release from prison he had a further debt to pay to society. Because of a loss of civil rights he was unable to obtain an identity card, or a pass which would enable him to travel about unharrassed by the police. As time neared for his release, Voigt's first thoughts were to go to Bohemia where he had left four children; but the pass was necessary to get there.¹ Having lost his civil rights, and therefore his pass, Voigt found that obtaining that item was to be no simple matter.

Rawitsch officials advised him to return to Tilsit, the town of his birth, to apply for a new pass. However, in Tilsit his request was refused, and he was sent to Posen, his last place of employment before internment. This time, along with the refusal of the pass, Voigt met discouragement. As a last resort, he turned back to Rawitsch and his friend, Pastor Renner. Although Renner was powerless to provide Voigt with a pass, he did provide him with a suitable alternative. He found him a job in Wisner in Posen on the Baltic Sea in

¹"Der Hauptmann von Köpenick vor Gericht," Berliner Tageblatt, 7611, Abend, December 1, 1909.

⁵⁹The Nation, p. 478.

CHAPTER III

The Capricious Captain of Köpenick

In addition to a prison sentence in Rawitsch, Wilhelm Voigt had also lost ten years of civil rights. This meant that upon his release from prison he had a further debt to pay to society. Because of a loss of civil rights he was unable to obtain an identity card, or a pass which would enable him to travel about unharrassed by the police. As time neared for his release, Voigt's first thoughts were to go to Bohemia where he had left four children; but the pass was necessary to get there.¹ Having lost his civil rights, and therefore his pass, Voigt found that obtaining that item was to be no simple matter.

Rawitsch officials advised him to return to Tilsit, the town of his birth, to apply for a new pass. However, in Tilsit his request was refused, and he was sent to Posen, his last place of employment before internment. This time, along with the refusal of the pass, Voigt met discouragement. As a last resort, he turned back to Rawitsch and his friend, Pastor Renner. Although Renner was powerless to provide Voigt with a pass, he did provide him with a suitable alternative. He found him a job in Wismar in Mecklenburg on the Baltic Sea in

¹"Der Hauptmann von Köpenick vor Gericht," Berliner Tageblatt, #611, Abend, December 1, 1906.

a shoe factory, owned and operated by a master shoemaker named Hilbrecht.² To accompany Voigt to Wismar the pastor sent a personal letter of recommendation regarding Voigt's abilities as a machinist.³

Wilhelm Voigt was officially released from Rawitsch on February 21, 1906. Anxious to begin life again, he reached Wismar two days later.⁴ In Wismar he met warm acceptance from the Hilbrecht family and was taken into their home to live.⁵ Time began to heal his wounds. He attended church regularly with the Hilbrechts (he even took his own pew) and entertained himself occasionally with evening outings to the theater, or concerts.⁶

Voigt was a diligent worker, and he was happy with his job and his existence until the morning of May 21. The local constabulary had appeared and had taken him along to headquarters. There he was ungraciously informed that his presence in Wismar was objectionable to the authorities; he was a Prussian convict. Therefore, he was not wanted in Mecklenburg.⁷ As he did not possess the proper pass that

²Voigt, Hauptmann von Köpenick, p. 84.

³Wilhelm Schäfer, Der Hauptmann von Köpenick (München: Georg Müller, 1930), p. 236.

⁴"Der Hauptmann von Köpenick vor Gericht," Vorwärts, #281, December 2, 1906.

⁵Schäfer, Der Hauptmann von Köpenick, p. 236.

⁶"Der Hauptmann von Köpenick vor Gericht," Berliner Tageblatt, #611, Abend, December 1, 1906.

⁷Voigt, Hauptmann von Köpenick, p. 89.

would permit him to stay, he had no alternative. The pass was strictly and autocratically controlled. Voigt's lawyer, Bahn, after the Köpenick trial, described the issue concerning passes and identity cards as an extremely unfortunate situation that existed in Germany.⁸

Disgruntled, Voigt returned to the Hilbrecht home, packed his few and meager possessions into a cardboard box and set out for the nearest railroad station. He recalled hearing of a chain-firm, the Goldbaum Brothers, with whom he might find some sort of position, but after visiting several cities could not locate the firm.⁹ He then traveled through Marienburg and Graudenz, but was equally unsuccessful. In Potsdam he located a position in a coal mine, but was a dismal failure at that type of work. On one instance he described his back as a raw, bloody wound that his clothing stuck to.¹⁰ Coal mines at that time were mostly suitable to moles and lizards, rather than human inmates.

On a Sunday night, harboring one last hope, Wilhelm Voigt set out for Berlin to search for his elder sister, Bertha Menz, whom he had not seen in thirty-four years.¹¹ He finally located her at 27 Kopf Street, in Rixdorf, a Berlin suburb.

⁸ Bahn, Meine Klienten, p. 79.

⁹ Schäfer, Der Hauptmann von Köpenick, pp. 242-43.

¹⁰ Voigt, Hauptmann von Köpenick, p. 93.

¹¹ "Der Hauptmanns von Köpenick vor Gericht," Vossische Zeitung, Abend, December 1, 1906.

She was the wife of a book-binder.¹² Being careful not to have spoken of his prison escapades Voigt was subsequently asked to stay with the Menz family. Once again life attempted to right itself. At fifty-seven he even discovered that he had a bit of romantic spirit left in him. A neighbor, Frau Römer, was attractive and had a young son who was quite obviously in need of a Father.¹³

A police report of August 14, 1906, showed Wilhelm Voigt as still unemployed.¹⁴ Shortly thereafter, however, he obtained a job as a machinist at a shoe factory on Breslau Street where he managed to work until October 3.¹⁵ Then he was again harassed by the police, ordered out of Berlin personally by the Police President, and specifically denied the right of residence.¹⁶ The situation was hopeless. A simple police order served to expel him from any German town because he had lost his citizenship.¹⁷ There was no chance at all for

¹²Schäfer, Der Hauptmann von Köpenick, pp. 245-46.

¹³Ibid., p. 257.

¹⁴Pr. Br. Rep. 30, Nr. 1091: Personalakte des Königlichen Polizei-Prasidiums zu Berlin, betr. Wilhelm Voigt, hereafter referred to as Police Report.

¹⁵"Der Räuberhauptmann gefangen," Berliner Tageblatt, #546, Abend, October 26, 1906.

¹⁶Rep. 58, Nr. 54: Akte der Staatsanwaltschaft bei dem Königlichen Landgericht Berlin, betr. Wilhelm Voigt, "Grunde", hereafter referred to as Public Prosecutor's Report.

¹⁷Gerhard Masur, Imperial Berlin (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1970), p. 96.

a dependable job for him within the German Reich. He must go outside of the Reich to work, and thought seriously of Austria-Hungary, or Russia; but a pass, or identity card was still essential to leave the country.¹⁸

By now it has been ascertained that Voigt had a somewhat persistent nature; it was not beyond him to make a last attempt. He none-too-seriously considered suicide after another denial in Posen, but was deterred because of his contempt for water and the rope; he apparently had no gun.¹⁹ Off he went to Tilsit. In direct confrontation with the desk clerk he was told, in no uncertain terms, that he was not entitled to a pass. Driven by desperation, he decided to await the Chief and attempt to convince him of his dire need. The desk clerk sneered at him. Voigt's temper burst like a fury; he began to shake as he tried to control his rage. Helpless, he sat down to wait.

Shortly thereafter a captain from Breslau came limping into the office (Voigt later learned that he was also the District Commander). Suddenly the office became transformed; the clerks acted like department store mannequins. They were very much under the spell of the military. The old man, who had aggravated Voigt, clicked his heels and saluted the captain. Then the old clerk asked politely what he might do to serve

¹⁸ Voigt, Hauptmann von Köpenick, p. 83.

¹⁹ Schäfer, Der Hauptmann von Köpenick, p. 248.

²⁰ Voigt, Hauptmann von Köpenick, p. 118.

the captain.²⁰

Frustrated, Voigt fled, swamped by his own thoughts: ". . . I came to the conclusion that I must obtain a blank pass."²¹ There were only two methods available for this: either he could break into the Bureau at night, or he could try the more daring way and commit the crime by day. The latter method, of course, required force. It brought back to his mind an idea that he had spoken of in Rawitsch as a joke to his friend Kallenberg: ". . . if I have a couple of soldiers, then I can make a transaction."²² Later Voigt was to admit that this presumption was greatly facilitated by his extensive history studies: "I had later concluded, how I had learned the day of Köpenick from history."²³

On October 8, 1906, Wilhelm Voigt went to Potsdam.²⁴ He went to a shop owned by Berthold Remlinger at 3 Mittel Street. There he found a plenteous supply of both new and used military uniforms.²⁵ After considerable browsing, he chose a captain's uniform of the 1st Guards Regiment of Potsdam; it also bore that insignia.²⁶ He explained to the

²⁰Ibid., pp. 249-50.

²¹Voigt, Hauptmann von Köpenick, p. 96.

²²Public Prosecutor's Report.

²³Voigt, Hauptmann von Köpenick, p. 98.

²⁴Schäfer, Der Hauptmann von Köpenick, p. 252.

²⁵"Die Jagd auf den Räuberhauptmann," Berliner Tageblatt, #535, Abend, October 20, 1906.

²⁶Voigt, Hauptmann von Köpenick, p. 118.

clerk that he was to appear in a theatrical production and wondered if he might borrow the helmet, greatcoat, and cavalryman's sabre. The fat clerk's answer was negative, but he assured Voigt that those particular items were there, in the shop, for sale.²⁷ Voigt then purchased trousers and a greatcoat.²⁸ Two days later he returned and bought a field tie. On Friday, the 12th, Voigt returned to the shop for the third and last time and bought a military cap, a sabre, and a black belt with a blue strap. His costume had cost him: jacket, 7.50 marks; cap, 7.50 marks; greatcoat, 4.50 marks; field tie, 2 marks; trousers, 6 marks.²⁹ Then he gathered up his purchase and went to the Beussel Street Station where he entrusted its safekeeping to a porter. He retrieved it on October 15.³⁰ Then he set out to a barber, who relieved him of his infinitesimal beard; he also got a haircut.³¹

On Saturday Voigt visited his sister, whereupon his brother-in-law informed him about a newspaper ad seeking a machinist in a shoe factory. Early Sunday morning he put in his application for the position, was hired, and began Monday morning, working on a heel-constructing machine.³² Alas, as

²⁷ Schäfer, Der Hauptmann von Köpenick, p. 252.

²⁸ "Die Jagd auf den Räuberhauptmann," Berliner Tageblatt, #535, Abend, October 20, 1906.

²⁹ Police Report.

³⁰ Werner, "Der Hauptmann von Koepenick," p. 17.

³¹ Schäfer, Der Hauptmann von Köpenick, p. 252.

³² Ibid., pp. 253-54.

in the past, before the day was out he was removed from the job because of his lack of a proper identity card.³³ Now there was no alternative for him except to return to Potsdam and pick up the purchase that he had left with the porter. This he did.

At night, in the confines of his room, Voigt studied pictures of captains.³⁴ He had often studied officers' ways in public places of amusement.³⁵ The day before Köpenick he also studied the officers at Nauen where about fifty members of the General Staff were gathered at the Funken Station.³⁶

At last Voigt felt ready to settle the final details of his scheme. He planned to take a troop transport from a Berlin railroad station and operate from there. On his list of objective locations were Bernau, Fürstenwalde, Dranienburg, Nauen, and Köpenick.³⁷ He decided on the latter for the object of his attentions.

Köpenick, a suburb in the eastern sector of Berlin, was a settlement more than 700 years old.³⁸ In the 1300's there had been a war over the mastery of Köpenick between Brandenburg, allied with the House of Hohenzollern, and Meitzen. The ancestors of Kaiser Wilhelm II particularly loved Köpenick

³³Ibid., p. 262.

³⁴Ibid., p. 263.

³⁵"Our Own Times," The Reader, IX (January, 1907), p. 218.

³⁶"Der zeitweilige 'Hauptmann' von Köpenick," Vorwärts, #252, October 28, 1906.

³⁷Voigt, Hauptmann von Köpenick, p. 101.

³⁸Joachim Herrmann, Köpenick (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1962), p. 9.

because of its excellent boar hunting, and they much preferred sleeping there to Berlin. The first King of Prussia, Friedrich I, had lived there as a young prince and subsequently, his son, King Friedrich Wilhelm I, did also.³⁹ By 1906, Köpenick was a self-contained town consisting of factories. There were over thirty-one of considerable size, ranging in variety from fruit-processing to glass. At the time of Wilhelm Voigt's descent upon the town hall, the population was approximately 17,000 people.⁴⁰

On Monday evening, October 15, Voigt donned his uniform at the Beussel Street Station, took a train to Köpenick, had coffee at the Augustin at 14 Green Street, and strolled along Kietzer Street to Rosen Street.⁴¹ Then, apparently satisfied, he returned home.

Tuesday morning Voigt arose in the wee hours to dress. His image was not at all imposing, as a Prussian captain should be. His figure was gaunt and haggard and quite bony, as well as stooped; his shoulders bent forward. He appeared quite emaciated.⁴² His face bore a sardonic, or somewhat morbid expression over his prison pallor.⁴³ His cheeks were sunken

³⁹"Köpenick," Berliner Tageblatt, #550, Morgen, October 29, 1906.

⁴⁰Heidelmeyer, Der Fall Köpenick, p. 23.

⁴¹"Der Hauptmann von Köpenick vor Gericht," Vorwärts, #281, December 2, 1906.

⁴²"Der Köpenicker Kassenräuber ergriffen," Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger, #546, Abend, October 26, 1906.

⁴³"Der Handstreich gegen die Köpenicker Stadtdasse," Vossische Zeitung, Abend, October 17, 1906.

and his eyes, blue-gray and set deep in their sockets, wore a sick look.⁴⁴ His nose was long and crooked and he wheezed when he breathed.⁴⁵ His hair was thin and white, and he was nearly bald; he wore a thick, downward hanging moustache. His hands were definitely those of a working man, large and calloused; quite definitely, they were not those of an officer.⁴⁶

As already noted, Voigt's uniform and cap were of the 1st Guards Regiment of Potsdam.⁴⁷ One witness to his crime readily verified this, but another thought it was the uniform of the line infantry, and yet another believed his shoulder insignia bore another name.⁴⁸ However, it was generally agreed that his entire appearance was shabby. He wore a field-tie with a cap, an unheard-of combination. The Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger said the combination sounded mentally ill.⁴⁹ His sash was similar to a rope, not at all a part of regulation dress; it was said that his cap was not authentic.⁵⁰ His boots, a new purchase, were of a rubber-stretch fabric that had nails on the

⁴⁴"Der Köpenicker Kassenräuber ergriffen," Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger, #546, Abend, October 26, 1906.

⁴⁵"Die Schauermär von Köpenick," Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung, #43, October 28, 1906.

⁴⁶"Der Köpenicker Kassenräuber ergriffen," Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger, #546, Abend, October 26, 1906.

⁴⁷"Der Handstreich gegen die Köpenicker Stadtkasse," Vossische Zeitung, Abend, October 17, 1906.

⁴⁸"Der Köpenicker Kassenraub," Tägliche Rundschau, Abend, #487, October 17, 1906.

⁴⁹"Zum Gaunerstreich in Köpenick," Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger, #530, Morgen, October 18, 1906.

⁵⁰"Geniestreich eines 'Hauptmanns'," Berliner Tageblatt, #528, Morgen, October 17, 1906.

sides that could not hold spurs with proper security. He later lost one on his way to Köpenick.⁵¹ He had pulled on white gloves to conceal his work-scarred hands and carried a sword, or sabre. Wilhelm Voigt's appearance as the Hauptmann von Köpenick was quite different from what one would expect from a dashing officer of the Guard du Corps.

He left his apartment at approximately 3:45 A. M. to escape notice. He drove, in these early hours, to the site of his crime, to better survey the town hall.⁵² Again he stopped for coffee at the Augustin, only this time he plied the waitress with questions. She estimated the population of Köpenick at 21,000 and informed him that there were two town halls, a new and an old one. Voigt wanted the newer one for his business; it was easily identifiable by its high tower. Then he left the restaurant to survey the town hall.⁵³ By six o'clock he was prepared to return to Berlin.⁵⁴

In Berlin Voigt breakfasted on wine and buttered-bread.⁵⁵ The day dawned beautifully and the sky was a brilliant blue as Voigt, in high spirits, strolled off to a barber on Rosenhale Street for a shave.⁵⁶ For lunch he sought out a pub; there he was confronted by a major (Luftschifferabteilung), who paid

⁵¹"Hinter dem Pseudohauptmanns," Vorwärts, #246, October 21, 1906.

⁵²Voigt, Hauptmann von Köpenick, p. 102.

⁵³Schäfer, Der Hauptmann von Köpenick, pp. 267-68.

⁵⁴Voigt, Hauptmann von Köpenick, p. 102.

⁵⁵"Der zeitweilige 'Hauptmann' von Köpenick," Vorwärts, #252, October 28, 1906.

⁵⁶Schäfer, Der Hauptmann von Köpenick, p. 268.

him no mind. But then, as Schäfer, Voigt's biographer, put it, why should he? After all, Voigt was a Captain of the Guards, while the other man was merely a zeppelin major.⁵⁷

Voigt left the pub at approximately 11:45.⁵⁸ He then hailed a cab and drove down Chaussee-and-Müller Street to Lake Street.⁵⁹ He strolled along Lake Street until approximately 12:50 when he ordered an approaching Guard troop to halt.⁶⁰ Their leader, Corporal Klapdohr explained that he and three men had gone to the baths on Plotzen Lake and were returning to their barracks.⁶¹ In an energetic, military voice Voigt told them that he could not allow them to continue on to their barracks. He claimed to be on a special mission for His Majesty; he commanded the soldiers to accompany him.⁶² Voigt was familiar with a provision of the law that gave an officer the absolute right to requisition any body of men not under command of another commissioned officer and not on special duty.⁶³ Meanwhile, Voigt further explained, they were to wait for additional troops. Before too long Corporal Klapdohr halted another corporal and five men of the 4th Guard Regiment who were returning

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 269.

⁵⁸Voigt, Hauptmann von Köpenick, p. 103.

⁵⁹Schäfer, Der Hauptmann von Köpenick, p. 269.

⁶⁰Voigt, Hauptmann von Köpenick, p. 60.

⁶¹"Der Hauptmann von Köpenick vor Gericht," Vossische Zeitung, Morgen, December 2, 1906.

⁶²Voigt, Hauptmann von Köpenick, p. 104.

⁶³"The Cobbler of Koepenick," The Outlook, CI (July 6, 1912), p. 515.

from the shooting range.⁶⁴

After questioning the two corporals on their ages, Voigt appointed Klapdohr, the eldest, as commander of the little troop in his stead. Then he acquainted the second group with the idea that they were to be used for a very special service.⁶⁵ Not one of the soldiers thought to question the character, or the authority of their superior.⁶⁶ Everything had been accomplished with proper military procedure and disobedience to an officer was totally unheard of.⁶⁷

Off to Köpenick marched the captain and his ten soldiers. Approximately 100 steps away was the Putlitz Street Station.⁶⁸ There the captain purchased tickets, second-class for himself and third-class for the soldiers, to the Rummelsburg Station, Köpenick.⁶⁹ When they reached Rummelsburg, they had some free time according to Voigt's calculations; allowances were made for some refreshment. The group stopped at a restaurant where Voigt bought the soldiers their lunch and beer; Voigt and the uncommissioned officers had cognac.⁷⁰ Then he informed his

⁶⁴Public Prosecutor's Report.

⁶⁵"Der Hauptmann Kommt," Vossische Zeitung, Morgen, October 18, 1906.

⁶⁶"Der Gaunerstreich eines falschen Hauptmanns," Cöpenicker Dampfboot, #244, October 17, 1906.

⁶⁷"Der Hauptmann Kommt," Vossische Zeitung, Morgen, October 18, 1906.

⁶⁸"Die Schauermär von Köpenick," Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung, #43, October 28, 1906.

⁶⁹Public Prosecutor's Report.

⁷⁰"Die Uerurteilung des Hauptmanns von Köpenick," Berliner Tageblatt, #612, Morgen, December 2, 1906.

men that their immediate target was Köpenick's town hall, and their quarry, the mayor and several other officials.⁷¹ His orders were consistently calm and tranquil, thus keeping him beyond suspicion to the troops.⁷² In fact, Voigt was so very successful that after the conclusion of the Köpenick caper one of the troops, Feldwebel Ebert, remarked that he had believed Voigt was a Captain of the Palace Guard.⁷³

On to Köpenick marched the troop led by the somewhat shabby, newly-created captain. As each minute ticked by Voigt became more and more overwhelmed at being an officer; he even remarked later, in his autobiography, that he felt he had truly changed his character in a few minutes time.⁷⁴ Alas, somewhere between the station and the town hall, one of the short nails on Voigt's boots fell out, and he lost a spur. He was then forced to ask the corporal from the 4th Guard Regiment to remove the other one, and then they continued on, Voigt minus his spurs.⁷⁵ It is no small wonder, however, that no-one seems to have inquired why an infantry captain would wear spurs. The troops moved on to the Köpenick telephone station where Voigt ordered the official in charge to cut off any communication

⁷¹Public Prosecutor's Report.

⁷²"Der Handstreich gegen die Köpenicker Stadtkasse," Vossische Zeitung, Abend, October 17, 1906.

⁷³"Der handstreich des Pseudohauptmanns," Berliner Tageblatt, #529, Abend, October 17, 1906.

⁷⁴Voigt, Hauptmann von Köpenick, p. 106.

⁷⁵"Der Hauptmann Kommt," Vossische Zeitung, Morgen, October 18, 1906.

with the town hall for the next two hours, under penalty of incurring the Kaiser's displeasure.⁷⁶

Voigt was the first to enter the town hall and immediately began a barrage of orders. No one was to enter, or leave without his permission. He posted men in the corridors and at the doors; their bayonets were fixed on their rifles.⁷⁷ He stated that all minor officials must remain in their offices, along with anyone there on business.⁷⁸ Then he turned and walked into the office of the City Secretary, Rosenkranz, who looked startled at the intrusion. After verifying his identity Voigt shouted, "In the name of his Majesty, you are under arrest!"⁷⁹ Then, turning smartly, he left the confused secretary under guard.

At approximately 5:30-5:45 the Mayor, Dr. Langerhans, sat working with his secretary when the door was thrown open and in stalked Captain Voigt and two grenadiers, their bayonets fixed on their rifles. Before the startled Mayor could utter a word, Voigt snapped, "Are you the Mayor of Köpenick?"⁸⁰ The younger man was momentarily at a loss for words, and the short beard on his chin quivered. Then springing to his feet he

⁷⁶The Reader, p. 218.

⁷⁷"Der Gaunerstreich eines falschen Hauptmanns," Cöpenicker Dampfboot, #244, October 17, 1906.

⁷⁸Extrablatt des Cöpenicker Dampfboot, October 16, 1906.

⁷⁹Public Prosecutor's Report.

⁸⁰Schäfer, Der Hauptmann von Köpenick, p. 275.

answered the captain in the affirmative.⁸¹ Voigt then screamed, "You are my prisoner by His Majesty's orders, and you will be immediately taken to Berlin."⁸² The frustrated Langerhans asked Voigt for a warrant for his arrest; Voigt responded by saying that for the time being his uniform was legitimation enough and any further information could be obtained from the officials in Berlin.⁸³ Voigt then went into great detail to explain that even though he wore the uniform of the 1st Guards Regiment and that his men were a combination of the 4th Guards Regiment and the Gardesfusilierregiment, it was quite legitimate for an officer of the Potsdam garrison to command in and about Berlin.⁸⁴ Voigt left Langerhans under guard; the latter began to question his captors, but Voigt made no errors. He had left the mayor with two Polish guards, neither of whom understood German.⁸⁵

The captain's next stop was in the office of the Inspector of Police. There he found a rotund creature, the inspector, pleasantly sleeping, his hands folded comfortably over his round stomach.⁸⁶ After nudging him awake Voigt asked ". . . what he

⁸¹"Ein Geniestreich," Vorwärts, #243, October 18, 1906.

⁸²"Amazing Rogue," Daily Mail, October 18, 1906, in Denkwürdigkeiten des Hauptmanns von Köpenick. Der Rauber Hauptmann in der internationalen Karikatur und Satire, ed. Albert Brinitzer (Berlin: Dr. Ensler & Co., 1906), p. 18.

⁸³"Ein Geniestreich," Vorwärts, #243, October 18, 1906.

⁸⁴Voigt, Hauptmann von Köpenick, p. 118.

⁸⁵"Die Hauptmann von Köpenick vor Gericht," Vossische Zeitung, Morgen, December 2, 1906.

⁸⁶Schäfer, Der Hauptmann von Köpenick, p. 275.

did for the good city of Köpenick, that he sat here and slept?"⁸⁷ Visably upset at being caught napping, the inspector took the captain's orders without question. Voigt directed him to dispose a squad of police around the town hall to keep back the crowds of curiosity seekers; to prove his zeal, the inspector arrested five citizens who showed an undue curiosity about the proceedings of the military.⁸⁸ Voigt then permitted the inspector to go home because he had ". . . pleaded his need of a bath."⁸⁹ Alas for Voigt, this inspector had been the lone official who had the power to issue the desired pass.⁹⁰

At 5:45 two cashiers had also reported to the City Treasurer, von Wiltberg, about an uncivilized captain who had spoken sharply to them and ordered city officials to stay in their offices. Shortly thereafter, Captain Voigt entered the Treasurer's office, accompanied by two grenadiers. He asked for the treasurer and then proceeded to inform von Wiltberg that he was to appear, along with the mayor, before the Neue Wache, or watch, in Berlin. When the confused treasurer asked for Voigt's name, a guard hastily told him that it made no difference.⁹¹ Then Voigt asked to see the books. When von Wiltberg said that he could do this only with the permission

⁸⁷ Voigt, Hauptmann von Köpenick, p. 109.

⁸⁸ The Reader, p. 218.

⁸⁹ Masur, Imperial Berlin, p. 97.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ "Ein Geniestreich," Vorwärts, #243, October 18, 1906.

of his superior, the mayor, Voigt said that he no longer had the mayor as his superior.⁹² In an abrupt about-face von Wiltberg then asked Voigt to take over the cash on hand, roughly 4,000 marks. For the first time during the episode Voigt was speechless:

I was entirely astonished over it. I had no words and was horrified, that I would undertake the cash. . . he wanted to have namely, a receipt, that the cash was handed over correctly, and I wanted to assure him that it was so.⁹³

Then the treasurer offered Voigt additional money: "Captain, here lies well over two million belonging to the city of Köpenick."⁹⁴ The money was in the form of government securities. Voigt later vehemently denied that this was his reason for refusing it.⁹⁵ Of course, securities were not as easy to dispose of as cash.

Voigt had to sign a receipt for the 4,000 marks and consequently, had to take off his right-hand glove. He was appalled at the sight of his rough, shoe-maker's hand, but even more so because he still wore the brass ring, the mark of a guild, that young Hilbrecht had given to him. Also, he had no idea what to write. Schäfer, Voigt's biographer, said that he signed "v. Mabieg."⁹⁶ The Vossische Zeitung insisted that

⁹²"Der Gaunerstreich eines falschen Hauptmanns," Cöpenicker Dampfboot, #244, October 17, 1906.

⁹³Voigt, Hauptmann von Köpenick, p. 123.

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 124.

⁹⁵Ibid.

⁹⁶Schäfer, Der Hauptmann von Köpenick, pp. 284-85.

the signature was "v. Malzahn."⁹⁷ The police records indicated that the signature read "v. Malzahn."⁹⁸ Whatever the spelling, Voigt wrote in a clear and decisive hand. The London Daily Telegraph even went so far as to declare that the signature was truly that of an educated man.⁹⁹

Captain Voigt quickly regained his poise and deposited the sacks of money in his pocket.¹⁰⁰ As he was leaving the Treasury he stopped a young man and asked him for his pass. His second shock within minutes came when a military pass was thrust before his eyes. His joy of play-acting had put the original purpose of his visit aside, and now it had been brought back to mind. He remembered that he had obtained his first pass in Tilsit from the Landratsamtes, and not the Secretary of Police. His trip to Köpenick was all in vain.¹⁰¹ There was no Landratsamtes in Köpenick. Feeling totally dejected, Voigt made his way back down the hall from which he had come. On his way, a clerk, Dr. Göring, approached him and requested leave to attend a department meeting upstairs. Voigt's remark was insolent:

Certainly . . . you may go. As the Mayor and the Treasurer have both been arrested I entrust you with the supreme position. You are the new master of the town.¹⁰²

⁹⁷ "Der Hauptmann von Köpenick vor Gericht, Vossische Zeitung, Morgen, December 2, 1906.

⁹⁸ Public Prosecutor's Report.

⁹⁹ "Berlin's Great Hoax," The Daily Telegraph, #16,060, October 19, 1906, in Brinitzer, p. 56.

¹⁰⁰ Schäfer, Der Hauptmann von Köpenick, p. 286.

¹⁰¹ Voigt, Hauptmann von Köpenick, pp. 116-17.

¹⁰² "Berlin's Great Hoax," The Daily Telegraph, #16,060, October 19, 1906, in Brinitzer, p. 56.

At 6 o'clock Dr. Göring secretly sent a telegram off to Berlin: "Town hall set upon by military. Please specify grounds for force--to soothe the excited populace. Dr. Göring."¹⁰³

At 6:30 Voigt requested three carriages to be brought to the door for his captives; he considerably charged the fee to the city of Köpenick.¹⁰⁴ According to his original plan, the mayor must report to the Neue Wache in Berlin. This plan was facilitated by the fact that he had learned that the mayor was also a lieutenant of the Reserves; thus, he easily gave his word of honor not to attempt to escape.¹⁰⁵ Against Voigt's will, however, Langerhans' wife insisted upon accompanying her arrested husband to Berlin. The London Daily Mail, especially critical of the entire situation, decided that she was "... the only 'man' in the whole incident."¹⁰⁶ The prisoner Langerhans was escorted down the stairs to the coach, which was surrounded by an agitated crowd; Voigt put Langerhans, his wife, and Sergeant Jankowski into it and ordered them off to Berlin.¹⁰⁷ Some minutes later, also under guard, von Wiltberg was sent away with orders to report to the Neue Wache sentries in Berlin.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰³"Zum handstreich auf die Köpenicker Stadtkasse," Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger, #529, Abend, October 17, 1906.

¹⁰⁴"Der Hauptmann Kommt," Vossische Zeitung, Morgen, October 18, 1906.

¹⁰⁵Voigt, Hauptmann von Köpenick, p. 119.

¹⁰⁶"Amazing Rogue," Daily Mail, October 18, 1906, in Brinitzer, p. 18.

¹⁰⁷"Der Gaunerstreich eines falschen Hauptmanns," Cöpenicker Dampfboot, #244, October 17, 1906.

¹⁰⁸Ibid.

The number of the curious crowd multiplied as they milled about. Tension increased and generally, public opinion denounced Langerhans' arrest. What would happen next?

Voigt called his remaining soldiers to him and informed them that he was about to leave. His orders specified that they were to leave one half hour after him. He gave them money so they could stop at a restaurant for dinner; then they were to march to the nearest station and take a train back to Berlin. He then bid them adieu and left the town hall on foot, his money (or Köpenick's) secure in his pockets, bound for the nearest station.¹⁰⁹ Obediently, the soldiers withdrew exactly one half hour later.¹¹⁰

Voigt took a train to Berlin, drove to Frankfurter Avenue and walked to Friedrich Street. He hailed a cab and rode as far as Schützen Street. Here he stopped and entered von Hofmann's ready-made clothing store sometime between 7:15-7:30, bought a new black suit, winter overcoat, and black felt hat; he paid for his purchase with a 1,000 mark bill.¹¹¹ Then he carried his purchase, in a carton, to his waiting cab and ordered the driver to take him to the Hermann Street Station in Rixdorf. There he changed clothes. The Berliner Tageblatt allotted him a wide margin of time, 8:15-10:00, to have done this, and no one,

¹⁰⁹Voigt, Hauptmann von Köpenick, p. 125.

¹¹⁰"Der Gaunerstreich eines falschen Hauptmanns," Cöpenicker Dampfboot, #244, October 17, 1906.

¹¹¹Police Report.

including Voigt, contradicted this, or provided an alternative.¹¹² Voigt then gave the porter three marks for permitting him to change in an attendant's room.¹¹³ He later explained that he had gone through this change so that he could walk home afterward, relatively insignificant and unnoticed in the late evening hours.¹¹⁴

Attired in his dark civilian suit, Voigt left the station carrying the same box, only now it contained the military uniform. His coachman, Wilhelm Knopnabel, later volunteered information about him to the police. They left, along either Siegfried, or Emser Street, to Oder Street on their way to the Tempelhofer Field, approximately five minutes from the station.¹¹⁵ Schäfer said that somewhere along the way Voigt threw his hat into an open sewer.¹¹⁶ The Vossische Zeitung contradictorily insisted that his black cap was found at the Rixdorf Station.¹¹⁷ There is general agreement, however, that Voigt scattered the uniform behind the Temple. The London Daily Mail said that the sabre was left behind at the station; this was later verified by the

¹¹²"Auf den Spuren des falschen Hauptmanns," Berliner Tageblatt, #531, Abend, October 18, 1906.

¹¹³"Die Jagd auf den Räuberhauptmann," Berliner Tageblatt, #535, Abend, October 20, 1906.

¹¹⁴Voigt, Hauptmann von Köpenick, p. 127.

¹¹⁵"Auf den Spuren des falschen Hauptmanns," Berliner Tageblatt, #531, Abend, October 18, 1906.

¹¹⁶Schäfer, Der Hauptmann von Köpenick, p. 290.

¹¹⁷"Der Handstreich gegen die Köpenicker Stadtkasse," Vossische Zeitung, Abend, October 17, 1906.

police files.¹¹⁸ Apparently the sabre could not fit into the box with the uniform. Why should Voigt have cared about fitting the sabre into the box? The same coachman had taken him both to-and-from the station, first as a captain and then as a civilian. The porter had known about the clothing change. Lastly, since Tempelhofer Field was only five minutes away, why the ruse?

Wilhelm Voigt returned home to 22 Long Street feeling quite wretched. He had failed on his most important mission; he had not gotten his pass. He carelessly threw the Köpenick funds into a nearby bureau drawer and sat down to fret over his latest predicament.¹¹⁹

Meanwhile, the obedient, trusting Langerhans had driven directly to Berlin to report to the Neue Wache, located opposite the palace on Unter den Linden. They arrived at approximately seven o'clock and presented themselves as under-arrest to the stupefied officer of the guard who was, to put it mildly, quite astonished to receive a prisoner.

. . . his stupefaction increased when the grenadier on the box was subjected to cross examination and proved to be wholly ignorant of the famous captain's name.¹²⁰

However, he was somewhat more capable to deal with the confusion than the citizenry of Köpenick, who had done merely nothing; he immediately telephoned the commandant of Berlin, Generalleutnant

¹¹⁸"Amazing Rogue," Daily Mail, October 18, 1906, in Brinitzer, p. 18.

¹¹⁹Schäfer, Der Hauptmann von Köpenick, p. 292.

¹²⁰"Amazing Rogue," Daily Mail, October 18, 1906, in Brinitzer, p. 18.

Graf von Moltke, nephew of Moltke the Elder.¹²¹ Craig, a historian of the Prussian Army, described the Commandant as an emotional man, somewhat insecure, who strongly doubted his own abilities. He was a follower, rather than an original thinker because of this insecurity.¹²²

All high orders came through his office, but still doubting--perhaps there might have been some error--Moltke decided to attend to the matter personally. Accompanied by the Officer of the Day, Prince Joachim Albrecht, the bull-necked, pot-bellied Commandant demanded an explanation of the Wache, who in turn asked Langerhans to explain.¹²³ Dr. Langerhans had concluded, from Voigt's charade, that he personally had been denounced for some military offense, and thus, arrested.¹²⁴ Both Moltke and Albrecht apologized to Langerhans about the embarrassing situation and the inconvenience that the Köpenick officials had suffered.¹²⁵ They requested that he repeat his story and as the little mayor told his story, up pulled another coach with two more grenadiers and their prisoner, von Wiltberg.¹²⁶ The soldiers were imprisoned and were to be subjected to lengthy interrogation

¹²¹"Ein Geniestreich," Vorwärts, #243, October 18, 1906.

¹²²Craig, Politics of the Prussian Army, p. 287.

¹²³"Der Gaunerstreich eines falschen Hauptmanns," Cöpenicker Dampfboot, #244, October 17, 1906.

¹²⁴"Amazing Rogue," Daily Mail, October 18, 1906, in Brinitzer, p. 18.

¹²⁵"Der Gaunerstreich eines falschen Hauptmanns," Cöpenicker Dampfboot, #244, October 17, 1906.

¹²⁶"Ein Geniestreich," Vorwärts, #243, October 18, 1906.

by Moltke at a later time.¹²⁷ The Köpenick group set out for home; Moltke immediately telegraphed the Kaiser about the affairs of Köpenick.¹²⁸

On October 18 the public learned that parts of a military uniform had been found in the Field of the Knights Templar on the previous evening. They especially noticed that it had obviously been purchased at a second-hand store; in particular, the trousers were very old and shabby.¹²⁹ There was no mention of an overcoat, or rubber boots. In fact, the Berliner Tageblatt claimed that a sabre had also been found in the field, contradicting other reports.¹³⁰

¹²⁷"Der Gaunerstreich eines falschen Hauptmanns," Cöpenicker Dampfboot, #244, October 17, 1906.

¹²⁸"Zum handstreich auf die Köpenicker Stadtkasse," Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger, #529, Abend, October 17, 1906.

¹²⁹"Lokales," Vossische Zeitung, Abend, October 18, 1906.

¹³⁰"Der Räuberhauptmann von Köpenick," Berliner Tageblatt, #533, Abend, October 19, 1906.

CHAPTER IV

The Hilarious Tragedy

The telegram to Berlin, sent by the Köpenick clerk, Dr. Göring, had received a prompt telephone reply at seven o'clock from the District President's Office where they had no idea what Göring was talking about, nor could they give any explanation about the puzzling arrests. At eight o'clock the Köpenick officials received another telephone call announcing that the mayor was free.¹

Meanwhile, the news of the masquerade had seemed to spread through Köpenick on the wind. A crowd of well over 100 people waited directly in front of the town hall; its numbers increased with every passing moment, and it soon seemed that the excitement was contagious. It became necessary to have gendarmes control street traffic. Various opinions were ventured about the exciting military spectacle, and the public apparently wanted to receive any further information firsthand. They were generally confused as to whether Köpenick was the deed of a madman, or was a military coup; most favored the latter opinion. The crowd's excitement had risen to a feverish pitch when Langerhans, Rosenkranz, and von Wiltberg were arrested and subsequently whisked off to Berlin under military guard. They waited for an explanation and milled about, anxious to hear

¹Extrablatt des Cöpenicker Dampfboot, October 16, 1906.

more about the most unusual sensation.

The Berlin police were also in a turmoil. Commissioner Nasse felt that the description of the military culprit provided for them by the Köpenick officials was particularly vague.² The captain's age was estimated at between forty-five and fifty (Voigt was a not-so-well preserved fifty-seven), he wore a uniform of the 1st Guard's Regiment, long pants, white kid gloves, and a field tie.³ Rather than confuse the situation further, the police spent the entire night searching for an elusive spur. Needless to say, they did not find it.⁴ By the next morning, October 17, the police report was still barren of details:

A man disguised as a captain commanded a division of soldiers to the Köpenick town hall, arrested the mayor, robbed the municipality's cash box, and drove away in a hack.⁵

The first police breakthrough was the discovery of a sabre at the Hermann Street Station in Rixdorf. It was of an ornate type with an engraved blade and a guard's star on the handle. Attached to the sabre was a blue strap adorned with figures.⁶ The sabre was the type that an infantry officer

²"Der handstreich des Pseudohauptmanns," Berliner Tageblatt, #529, Abend, October 17, 1906.

³"Zum handstreich auf die Köpenicker Stadtkasse," Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger, #529, Abend, October 17, 1906.

⁴"Der Gaunerstreich eines falschen Hauptmanns," Köpenicker Dampfboot, #244, October 17, 1906.

⁵Carl Zuckmayer, Der Hauptmann von Köpenick (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1961), p. 11.

⁶"Zum handstreich auf die Köpenicker Stadtkasse," Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger, #529, Abend, October 17, 1906.

would have used. Having found the sabre at the station, the police concluded that the mysterious captain may have changed his clothing there. Another report came in saying that the culprit had been seen on Siegfried Street carrying a carton. The only other progress was a handwriting analysis of the "v. Malzahn" signature. The conclusion had been that the letters were tight and close--as an old man would write.⁷

On Thursday, October 18, the police divided into four detachments and patrolled Berlin in circular maneuvers. They received alleged clues by the hour, but most of these were useless. Beyond Berlin's boundaries battalions of mounted soldiers, gendarmes, and police scoured the countryside. There was much widespread belief, however, that the culprit captain would never be found. Discouragement was fed by rumors; e. g.,

It is said that he dined tonight in Berlin quite unconcernedly, reading the newspaper accounts of his exploits, which have completely pushed the Hohenlohe memoirs out of memory.⁸

At 1:00 A. M., October 17, the Kaiser received a special telegram from the Berlin police informing him of all the events of Köpenick; thereafter he was kept constantly informed of all happenings via telegraph.⁹ Wires began to burn between Berlin

⁷"Auf den Spuren des falschen Hauptmanns," Berliner Tageblatt, #531, Abend, October 18, 1906.

⁸"Amazing Rogue," Daily Mail, October 18, 1906, in Brinitzer, p. 18.

⁹"Der Hauptmann von Köpenick," Tägliche Rundschau, Morgen, #504, October 27, 1906.

and Bonn. Both impatient and impulsive, Kaiser Wilhelm II then took it upon himself, as in so many other instances, to interfere:

At the rigorous direction of the Kaiser himself, the search for the swindler is proceeding with a thoroughness unequalled in German criminal annals.¹⁰

Wilhelm was most careful to repeat his command that all information must be dispatched to him in its fullest possible extent.

The London Daily Mail had reported on the Kaiser's concern in a much lighter tone:

His sense of humour has been deeply touched, as is manifested by his telegraphic reference to the bogus officer as "Genialer Kerl" (amiable scoundrel). . . . It is understood, however, that language of an extremely forceful and explicit nature fell from the Imperial lips when the incident in all its side-splitting details was laid before him by a non-commissioned officer.¹¹

On Friday, October 19, the London Daily Telegraph reported:

It is stated that the Kaiser has signified his intention shortly to issue an Imperial Rescript to the army which will make such occurrences impossible in the future.¹²

The Reader added to the hilarity and fun-poking by saying that ". . . official Germany grew apoplectic with rage."¹³ Thus, amusing anecdotes were recorded by the foreign press, but the German press largely ignored any combined reference to the Kaiser and Köpenick.

¹⁰"Amazing Rogue," Daily Mail, October 18, 1906, in Brinitzer, p. 18.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²"Berlin's Great Hoax," The Daily Telegraph, #16,060, October 19, 1906, in Brinitzer, p. 56.

¹³The Reader, p. 218.

The Cöpenicker Dampfboot compared the deception over the Köpenick cash, accomplished through military might, with the bold, audacious daring of a Russian bandit scene. Surely Köpenick's robbery had been a fantasy produced by some romantic individual with the primary purpose to defraud under the guise of a captain. The Dampfboot concluded that the greatest criminality of the Köpenick affair was the employment of the military in a robbery that ultimately brought them dishonor.¹⁴ The Tägliche Rundschau made the Köpenick event an opportunity for attack against the Social Democrats, belying the latter's attitudes of outspoken trust toward their fellow-man.¹⁵

As the Köpenick incident appeared in the newspapers, a lady friend of Voigt's, who was by trade a newspaper vendor, laughed aloud, joining in the public mirth.¹⁶ Voigt, who was in her company at the time, fled the scene and took to his room; he began to collect newspapers and vigorously corrected errors as he pored over the accounts.¹⁷

Dr. Langerhans was also beset with problems. The Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung accused him of committing high treason.¹⁸ Daily he received a great number of abusive letters.

¹⁴"Der Gaunerstreich eines falschen Hauptmanns," Cöpenicker Dampfboot, #244, October 17, 1906.

¹⁵"Der Köpenicker Kassenräuber verhaftet," Tägliche Rundschau, Abend, #503, October 26, 1906.

¹⁶Schäfer, Der Hauptmann von Köpenick, pp. 290-91.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 295.

¹⁸"Die Schauermär von Köpenick," Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung, #43, October 28, 1906.

As Langerhans had a somewhat sensitive nature, he soon found it impossible to put up with the abusive insults and resigned his post.¹⁹ In response to Langerhans' distress, a public meeting was held on October 20 at a Köpenick theater to show support for him.²⁰ Also, on that same day, the Köpenick Town Council met and gave him a vote-of-confidence, assuring him of the citizens' trust. A man named Anderson requested that Langerhans reconsider his resignation. Keeping their heads, the Social Democrats sent word that they allocated all blame on the unfortunate plight of militarism.²¹ The affair of Köpenick, they maintained, was not a matter of individuals, but a helpless curse that militarism had rendered possible in Germany.

In support of the Social Democratic theory is the fact that such a relatively inconspicuous news item as Köpenick had, within a few hours, grown into a world-wide, humorous sensation emphasizing the German's deference to their army. The Reader poked fun:

. . . the public, which is getting a little tired of being pushed off sidewalks by insolent young officers, and being obliged to defer on all possible occasions, is having a merry time of it.²²

¹⁹"Die Tagd auf den Hauptmann," Vorwärts, #245, October 20, 1906.

²⁰"Aus der Reichshauptstadt," Tägliche Rundschau, Abend, #493, October 20, 1906.

²¹"Auf der Jagd nach den Köpenicker Kassenräuber," Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger, #532, Morgen, October 21, 1906.

²²The Reader, p. 218.

The London Daily Mail noticed that the army was not so very amused:

Germany is giving itself over to one mighty roar of laughter at the expense of its befooled army, mingled with the melancholy dirge of self-pity for its own cowering respect for the omnipotent uniform.²³

The newspaper went on to opine that the incident had definitely been a serious blow to the military caste:

Only the army refrains from joining in the tumultuous amusement wherewith the country is rocking, for the incident, by general consent, has dealt military caste a blow from which it will probably take decades to recover.²⁴

Another source felt that the capricious captain should have the nation's gratitude. He had given the people a national operetta, as well as a universal comedy, a performance for millions without tickets, billings, and wardrobe mistresses.²⁵

Vorwärts, the voice of the Social Democrats, gleefully reported that on Sunday, the 18th, at the Metropol Theater, out marched a group of ten actors dressed as soldiers of the Guard.²⁶ Vorwärts believed that if a captain's uniform could accomplish so much, imagine what a general's uniform could do. The London Daily Telegraph verified the theater report. In the middle of

²³"Amazing Rogue," Daily Mail, October 18, 1906, in Brinitzer, p. 18.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵"Ein Plaidoyer für den Räuberhauptmann," no other information, in Brinitzer, p. 78.

²⁶"Die heldentat des Talmihauptmanns," Vorwärts, #244, October 19, 1906.

³⁰"Berlin's Great Hoax," The Daily Telegraph, #16,060, October 19, 1906, in Brinitzer, p. 50.

a burlesque the soldiers had marched out with a disreputable man in a shabby captain's uniform at their head. To every one of his orders they replied with enthusiastic "Ja's".²⁷

Children in Berlin began playing a game called Köpenicker Hauptmann. Included in the game were the parts of the mayor, treasurer, captain, and soldiers; the part of the mayor was seldom sought after, however.²⁸

Carl Zuckmayer, much amused by the Vorwärts' account, wrote a satirical play about Köpenick, using much of the newspaper's materials; e. g.,

The world laughed. Beyond the German border, across the English Channel and the Atlantic Ocean pierced a shrill, scornful laughter. The world laughed at the expense of the German Junker State. . . .²⁹

By Monday Friedrich Street was lined with rows of seedy individuals selling postcards of what they called the coup d' état at Köpenick. Doggerel verses were sung recounting the epic strains of the captain's valiant deeds. One third-rate publishing house announced a forth-coming history of the robber captain and how he had seized the town hall.³⁰ However, there is no evidence that such a writing was ever undertaken.

Apparently Köpenick also had dramatic possibilities. Die Lustigen Blätter, a popular comic weekly, published an

²⁷"Berlin's Great Hoax," The Daily Telegraph, #16,060, October 19, 1906, in Brinitzer, p. 56.

²⁸"Die Tagd auf den Hauptmann," Vorwärts, #245, October 20, 1906.

²⁹Zuckmayer, Der Hauptmann von Köpenick, p. 18.

³⁰"Berlin's Great Hoax," The Daily Telegraph, #16,060, October 19, 1906, in Brinitzer, p. 56.

illustrated feature, "Der Räuberhauptmann von Köpenick, oder Der geschundene Bürger."³¹ The Königsburger Illustrierten Zeitung published a sketch showing a man wielding a life-sized puppet made only of helmet and uniform; in front of the uniform the Köpenick officials bowed down and made offerings. Under the sketch was the caption, "Gott Univorm."³² Another was entitled Jena oder Köpenick, an illustration showing a German captain in uniform, standing on a small, elevated platform while all the mayors of the monarchy assemble to study a real Captain of the Guard.³³ Die Welt am Montag stated that the only man in the town hall was Langerhans' wife.³⁴

From Vienna came the publication Figaro with cartoon illustrations, firstly of Prussian troops literally running away from Jena; secondly, 100 years later, Prussian troops marched in goose-step fashion behind the captain on his way to Köpenick.³⁵ Another series of Viennese cartoons appeared in Der Floh: In court the mayor of Köpenick was questioned about additional money that the captain did not find; the soldiers that accompanied Voigt each received the Pour le merite for

³¹Zuckmayer, Der Hauptmann von Köpenick, p. 12.

³²"Schuster Voigt aus Tilsit der 'Hauptmann von Köpenick'," Königsberger Illustrierte Zeitung, #43, no date, in Brintzer, p. 29.

³³"Auf hohen Befehl," Jena oder Köpenick, no date, in Brintzer, p. 37.

³⁴"Die heilige Uniform," Die Welt am Montag, #43, October 22, 1906, in Brintzer, p. 22.

³⁵"Nach hundert Jahren," Wiener "figaro", #43, no date, in Brintzer, p. 47.

following him blindly; a judge shouted, false captain, or not, you must respect the uniform--ten years in prison; an old man, holding a Prussian uniform, addressed a younger man, telling him that the mayor submitted to it, and they need not worry about war with France as long as they had the uniform.³⁶ Another Viennese caricature captioned "What is possible only in Germany" depicted a monocled captain reading an ultimatum from the Kaiser to the Köpenick mayor and his wife, who are kneeling at his feet.³⁷ Ulk called its series of sketches "Prussian Discipline": A gorilla escaped from a zoo, entered a closet filled with Prussian military uniforms, and dressed; then he reviewed the Guard and took them with him on a path of destruction; finally, the uniformed gorilla seated himself above the Brandenburg Gate.³⁸

Punch, or the London Charivari, issued a caution to the House of Commons Police. A cartoon showed swindlers disguised as the Speaker and the Sergeant at Arms slipping past a House of Commons policeman. Beneath the illustration they warned:

After the brilliantly humorous exploit of the German "Captain" at Berlin, the House of Commons Police will have to use double extra vigilance (not sparing even the authorities of the House); or some talented swindlers, neatly disguised as the Speaker and Serjeant-at-Arms will be absconding with the Mace in solemn procession.³⁹

³⁶"Köpenick," Der "Floh", Wien, no date, in Brinitzer, p. 16.

³⁷"Was in Deutschland noch möglich ist," Wiener Caricaturen, #43, October 28, 1906, in Brinitzer, p. 15.

³⁸"Preussische Disziplin II," Ulk, #4, November 2, 1906, in Brinitzer, p. 45.

³⁹"Essence of Parliament," Punch, or the London Charivari, #302, October 24, 1906, in Brinitzer, p. 9.

L'illustration of France devoted a front cover to portray a captain, sword hanging, accompanied by four gendarmes, confronting the civilian mayor of Köpenick.⁴⁰

Despite all the humor, the search went on. Flaming red police posters appeared on advertising pillars in Berlin, offering rewards for the detection of the bogus captain. Amounts of 2,000 marks were offered by the Administrative President of Potsdam and 500 marks by the Town Council of Köpenick.⁴¹ The London Daily Mail called these amounts the largest ever offered in Berlin: "This fact indicates eloquently how madly anxious the authorities are to apprehend the criminal."⁴²

Meanwhile, in another quarter, Wilhelm Voigt, no longer able to stand the suspense, paid a call on his sister and brother-in-law. He confessed to them that he was the false captain and that the money was at his dwelling; his sister asked him where he lived. He meekly answered her and then went home to await the police, confident that his family would turn him in.⁴³

The Berlin police, at last on Voigt's trail after some ten days, checked at Rawitsch and then went to see his sister in Rixdorf. Voigt's sister made a series of vague excuses and then suggested that Voigt might be living in Hamburg. The police, not to be easily deterred, went to Voigt's fiancée, (Frau Römer.

⁴⁰"Une Scene D'Operette Vecue," L'illustration, November 3, 1906, in Brinitzer, p. 13.

⁴¹"Zum Gaunerstreich in Köpenick," Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger, #530, Morgen, October 18, 1906.

⁴²"Amazing Rogue," Daily Mail, October 18, 1906, in Brinitzer, p. 18.

⁴³Schäfer, Der Hauptmann von Köpenick, pp. 298-99.

She glibly told them that he lived at 22 Long Street along with a family named Karpeles.⁴⁴

On Friday morning, October 26, Wilhelm Voigt was apprehended. At nine o'clock he sat at the table, drinking his coffee, when the police burst in. Voigt calmly told them that he would be glad to accompany them, but wanted to finish his coffee first. In the meantime, while Voigt sipped away, they searched his room. There they found new clothing, a cavalry officer's sabre (apparently not the sabre used at Köpenick), and a money pouch with nearly all of the money still intact.⁴⁵

The police took Voigt back to headquarters, but found difficulty in believing that the depressed, taciturn old man was the dashing culprit Captain of Köpenick. To facilitate Voigt's talking, the police gave him half a flask of wine; the wine accomplished their purpose. Voigt talked.⁴⁶ While with the police Voigt learned that there had been over 2,000 other suspects, most of whom had been former officers and military men.⁴⁷ The field had been eliminated when Voigt's old friend, Kallenberg, an ex-convict from Rawitsch, had been hungry for the reward and turned him in.⁴⁸

⁴⁴"Der Verhaftung des falschen Hauptmanns," Vossische Zeitung, Abend, October 26, 1906.

⁴⁵"Der Räuberhauptmann gefangen," Berliner Tageblatt, #546, Abend, October 26, 1906.

⁴⁶"Der Köpenicker Kassenräuber ergriffen," Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger, #546, Abend, October 26, 1906.

⁴⁷"Der Verhaftung des falschen Hauptmanns," Vossische Zeitung, Abend, October 26, 1906.

⁴⁸Voigt, Hauptmann von Köpenick, p. 128.

Wilhelm Voigt told the police that he had sought a pass from Köpenick. The Public Prosecutor was enraged. There was apparently nothing in the penal code to deal with such an offense.⁴⁹ The police report thus concluded that Voigt had invaded Köpenick solely for the money.⁵⁰

The police found still greater difficulty in perceiving Voigt as the culprit. The fact that he had actually passed as an officer was most unbelievable. The Tägliche Rundschau described him as a very gaunt, thin-haired, and stooped figure.⁵¹ The Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung ascertained that Voigt was truly a criminal with quite obvious extra ordinary talents. But it was nearly impossible for the authorities to believe how he had been so over-rated. Now the affair surely was a comedy.⁵²

Wilhelm Voigt was officially charged on November 17, 1906, with the unauthorized wearing of a uniform, fraud, falsification of documents, etc.⁵³ The false Captain of Köpenick was brought to trial Monday, December 1, 1906. The streets that day were filled with throngs of people and there were

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 130-31.

⁵⁰ "Der Verhaftung des falschen Hauptmanns," Vossische Zeitung, Abend, October 26, 1906.

⁵¹ "Der Köpenicker Kassenräuber verhaftet," Tägliche Rundschau, Abend, #503, October 26, 1906.

⁵² "Der gefangene Hauptmann von Köpenick," Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung, #44, November 4, 1906.

⁵³ "Der Lebenslauf des Hauptmanns von Köpenick" (letter from Voigt to Bahn, November 3, 1906), Bahn, p. 89.

large crowds around the court house door. The crowd was genial, however; the mere mention of the "Captain of Köpenick" brought smiles to their faces. By nine o'clock the courtroom, as well as the hall, held a capacity crowd. Requests for admission had come from all over Germany.⁵⁴ Journalists from throughout the world were well-represented; e. g., Paris, Stockholm, and Vienna. Allegedly, an unidentified American paid a doorman 100 dollars so he could see the trial for five minutes.⁵⁵ Elegant ladies were well-represented. Seated and standing amidst these throngs were numerous officers, ministerial officials, public prosecutors, and attorneys; the German press was entirely represented. Finally, there among the court officials, were the attorneys for the defense, Dr. Schwindt and Walter Bahn.⁵⁶ Voigt entered the court room around 9:30. Clearly, he was not a military figure. He slouched, was thin and grizzled, appeared sick-looking, and had deep-set eyes with dark circles beneath them.⁵⁷ His walk, however, could have belonged to another man-- it was quick and with spirit.

Five charges were brought against him: (1) unauthorized wearing of a uniform; (2) unauthorized practice of impersonating an officer; (3) interference with personal freedoms

⁵⁴"Koeppenick Robber Quickly Convicted," New York Times, #17,844, December 2, 1906.

⁵⁵Voigt, Hauptmann von Köpenick, p. 135.

⁵⁶"Der Hauptmanns von Köpenick vor Gericht," Vossische Zeitung, Abend, December 1, 1906.

⁵⁷"Der gefangene Hauptmann von Köpenick," Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung, #44, November 4, 1906.

by the detention of Langerhans, von Wiltberg, and Rosenkranz; (4) unlawful procurement of property from the Köpenick Town Hall; (5) unlawful obtaining of such property by a false answer on documents--forgery. These were violations of the penal code 360⁸, 132, 239, 263, 287, 268I, 73.⁵⁸

Dr. Langerhans began his testimony. A man in a captain's uniform came into his office accompanied by two soldiers who pointed their bayonets at him; the former told him that he was under arrest. Langerhans maintained that he jumped to his feet and said that he would not permit that; Voigt then told him that he had nothing to permit. Langerhans could not, of course, question the soldiers who detained him as they were Polish and understood no German. Then he went on to say that Voigt did not have the disposition of an officer (apparently Langerhans was the only person who took notice of this). The woeful mayor closed his testimony by saying that his only excuse for his own personal behavior was that he was taken totally unawares, by the apparent officer and two gendarmes, as he had worked diligently at his desk.⁵⁹

Then the soldiers who had followed Voigt's commands entered the court room in full-uniform with knapsacks on their backs and guns on their arms. The New York Times recorded,

⁵⁸"Köpenick Robber Quickly Convicted," New York Times, #17,844, December 2, 1906.

⁵⁹"Der Hauptmann von Köpenick vor Gericht," Vossische Zeitung, Morgen, December 2, 1906.

"When called on by the court they shouted 'Here!' in stentorian tones, and the spectators laughed aloud."⁶⁰ The Berliner Tageblatt described the same situation somewhat differently, by saying that 'brave' soldiers marched into the courtroom and that Voigt looked with 'envy' at those who were able to wear the 'prestigious' uniform. As their names were called out they answered hier 'shortly' and 'smartly'.⁶¹

The Court asked the soldiers if Voigt's speech, mannerisms, or dress indicated that he might be anything other than a captain. Their answers were unanimously negative; they had certainly seen a captain before.⁶²

Voigt had several defense witnesses. Pastor Renner of Rawitsch was the first. He said that Voigt was certainly not a hypocrite. He described him as being consistently courteous, reserved, and calm, entirely respectable, and sincerely spiritual. He had written a letter of recommendation for Voigt when he had left Rawitsch and received a letter of thanks from Voigt's employer, Hilbrecht.

Hilbrecht also testified on Voigt's behalf. He described Voigt as a good worker who was both sober and diligent; he had taken him into his home. They ate together and attended church

⁶⁰ "Koeppenick Robber Quickly Convicted," New York Times, #17,844, December 2, 1906.

⁶¹ "Der Hauptmann von Köpenick vor Gericht," Berliner Tageblatt, #611, Abend, December 1, 1906.

⁶² "Die Uerurteilung des Hauptmanns von Köpenick," Berliner Tageblatt, #612, Morgen, December 2, 1906.

together. Furthermore, Hilbrecht emphasized that he totally trusted Voigt with his own money.⁶³

Inspector Krause of Rawitsch also supported the other defense testimonies. He described Voigt as ". . . quiet, diligent, modest. . . ." ⁶⁴

Walter Bahn, one of Voigt's attorneys, described him as having:

. . . good manners and a cultured way of speaking (he made only a few errors). . . . entirely a contrast with the low criminal type. . . . He is a foremost speaker. Many amusing hours I have spent with him in the cell when he was full of humor and in his light, satirical, half wistful way told me of the assault of Köpenick. . . . beautiful handwriting and a good correct style.⁶⁵

Wilhelm Voigt testified on his own behalf. His bearing was quiet and modest, and he told his story simply and straightforward. He spoke entirely without flourishes, or pathos and was void of theatrics and poses. Furthermore, it was clear that he did not seek applause.⁶⁶ He began by telling of his early life, his school days and his apprenticeship. Then he went on to describe his first digression, the forged money order, and the ensuing ten years in prison. He also told of receiving the unfair sentencing of fifteen years in Rawitsch.

⁶³"Der Hauptmann von Köpenick vor Gericht," Vossische Zeitung, Morgen, December 2, 1906.

⁶⁴"Der Lebenslauf des Hauptmanns von Köpenick" (letter from Voigt to Bahn, November 3, 1906), Bahn, p. 92.

⁶⁵Ibid., pp. 87-88.

⁶⁶"Der Hauptmann von Köpenick vor Gericht," Berliner Tageblatt, #611, Abend, December 1, 1906.

The New York Times said, "This sentence. . . was barbarous, but he was unable to appeal because he was not given the opportunity until too late."⁶⁷ The court confirmed Voigt's statement.

The tale of Voigt's sufferings seemed to make a deep impression on the audience. Then, the Prosecution asked Voigt if he had known the soldiers before; his answer was grimly negative.⁶⁸ Langerhans turned out to be the object of Voigt's scorn. He described him: ". . . he bent (or broke) like a lily. . . ." ⁶⁹ He also made light of the town council. His plea was guilty to the first three points, but he pointedly denied the last two. He made a futile attempt to explain this, but his voice was lost in the clamorous din of the hall.⁷⁰

Wilhelm Voigt was found guilty of the unauthorized wearing of a uniform, violation of official ordinances, denial of freedoms, fraud, and forgery of documents, and was sentenced to four years in prison. It was quite apparent that it was difficult for the high court to deal with him. This was especially evident when after the sentencing the Court President went up to Voigt, shook his hand and said, "May God give you the

⁶⁷"Koeppenick Robber Quickly Convicted," New York Times, #17,844, December 2, 1906.

⁶⁸"Der Hauptmann von Köpenick vor Gericht," Vorwärts, #281, December 2, 1906.

⁶⁹"Der Lebenslauf des Hauptmanns von Köpenick" (letter from Voigt to Bahn, November 3, 1906), Bahn, p. 92.

⁷⁰Voigt, Hauptmann von Köpenick, p. 136.

⁷⁴"Le Kaiser Est Sans Pitié," Le Matin, November 3, 1906, in Brinitzer, p. 30.

strength to weather these four years."⁷¹

The finding and sentencing of Voigt to four years in prison was apparently found satisfactory by the court audience. "Even the prisoner himself, when asked if he desired to appeal, said that he did not."⁷²

The trial had lasted only a few hours, but it had created widespread sympathy for the poor, wretched shoemaker. Even the press persistently refused to regard Voigt as an ordinary malefactor. The fun-loving on two continents adored him and were lenient toward him because of the humor that he had provided by his daring deed.⁷³

No comment came from the Kaiser, however; all that was heard from him was when he had commented briefly upon the apprehension of Voigt: "For persons who have spent over twenty years of their life in prison, there is no amnesty."⁷⁴

⁷¹"Die Uerurteilung des Hauptmanns von Köpenick," Berliner Tageblatt, #612, Morgen, December 2, 1906.

⁷²"Koeppenick Robber Quickly Convicted," New York Times, #17,844, December 2, 1906.

⁷³The Nation, p. 477.

⁷⁴"Le Kaiser Est Sans Pitie," Le Matin, November 3, 1906, in Brinitzer, p. 30.

CHAPTER V

An Unfitting Conclusion

Although much of the Köpenick exploit was treated lightly and with humor, there were those who were seriously alarmed by the matter. The Vossische Zeitung in a serious moment warned that there was nothing amusing about events when a relative unknown, in this case Wilhelm Voigt, could, unhindered, strangle the processes of law and hamper the freedom of society. The tale of humor had a very sober, sad coloring that made it a daring parody of reality.¹ The Berliner Tageblatt simply labeled the affair a tragedy.²

Others cynically portrayed the hapless Voigt as a hero of sorts, one who had exposed the militarism of Wilhelmine Germany and who had unearthed an unpleasant, foul-smelling corpus delecti of conditions that had come about in Prussia. Carl Zuckmayer, whose satirical comedy about Köpenick was written some years later, expressed such an attitude toward Voigt:

One could even give him a present. He is a kind of teacher to the people, and that sum of 4,000 marks, that he himself had taken, is paltry enough.³

¹"Der Verhaftung des falschen Hauptmanns," Vossische Zeitung, Abend, October 26, 1906.

²"Die Uerurteilung des Hauptmanns von Köpenick," Berliner Tageblatt, #612, Morgen, December 2, 1906.

³Zuckmayer, Der Hauptmann von Köpenick, p. 12.

The Berliner Tageblatt soberly affirmed that Köpenick was nothing other than a mockery of the submission and deficiency of German citizenry.⁴ The facts remained all too clearly that the Captain of Köpenick called attention to the many problems of Germany that otherwise lacked widespread publicity; e. g., the apparent need of revision of the German Criminal Code. In addition, the captain had also proved to be a great embarrassment to the nation's military, if only temporarily, by dispersing the illusion of superiority that had long been enjoyed by the Junkers and the German Army. Furthermore, the uniform had been exposed as a mere object of fetish-worship. The assault of Köpenick was an exposé of the vast influence that militarism exerted on German lives. The most horrifying factor gleaned from the Köpenick assault, however, was evident when the German populace, from man in the street to Kaiser laughed heartily at the capricious captain and then made no over-all attempt to evoke change, or to loosen the stranglehold of militarism on their lives. Each of these disclosures merits closer scrutiny.

Although none of these problems were of a minor nature, perhaps least significant to the purpose of this paper was the obvious need of revision of the German Criminal Code. Under that unfair set of laws there was no recourse left to a man recently returned to society from prison, than to return to

⁴"Die Uerurteilung des Hauptmanns von Köpenick"
Berliner Tageblatt, #612, Morgen, December 2, 1906.

the pathways of a criminal, since he was apparently ineligible to work at the tasks reserved for the honest. What alternative was left to the ex-convict than to return to his criminal ways, when he found he could not obtain a pass to leave the Reich, his hopes crushed when he learned he could not begin anew in a different environment and under changed circumstances? What alternative was there to criminal life when the all-important pass, the life's blood of German survival, was monopolistically controlled by the police? Keep in mind that fifteen-year sentences were delegated for attempted robberies; after those punishments had been endured an additional ten years' loss of civil rights had to be assumed; i. e., ten years without the pass. What remained for a man to do than attempt to regain that pass by whatever means available? In Voigt's case he merely decided to assault the Köpenick Town Hall in search of a pass.

The assault upon Köpenick had demonstrated more than adequately the entire attitude of the German government toward the criminal by calling attention to those abuses. Through this attention some reformers dared to hope that perhaps the gallant Captain of Köpenick would achieve an honorable position in German penology, similar to that which Captain Dreyfus' martyrdom had accomplished for French military procedure.⁵

Far more essential to this case, however, than the outmoded and impractical criminal code was the stripping of

⁵The Nation, p. 478.

the German military before the eyes of the world. Köpenick had called shrieking attention to the unreasoning awe in which the German Army was held. It was this ridiculous awe that had made it simple for Voigt to buy a shabby, second-hand uniform and suddenly assume the role of a commissioned captain. The awe of the uniform enabled Captain Voigt easily to recruit his soldiers at random from the Berlin streets; nary a protest was heard from the enlisted men, for the uniform commanded them. It had been equally as simple for the group to besiege the town hall of Köpenick, arrest the mayor and other officials of import, and walk off with the city's treasury. According to Stenkewitz, the historian of militarism at Zabern, Köpenick was primary evidence of the great esteem enjoyed by the military.⁶

Apparently no-one in a town of well over 17,000 people took notice of the shabby, helmetless captain and his troop on their way to the town hall. But, as Heidelberg, editor of a series of news articles about the Köpenick affair, was wont to emphasize, it was all very understandable; it was not at all unusual to see men in uniform marching along the streets in Germany in 1906.⁷ In fact, it was evidently so commonplace that it was not even cause for comment. No questions were heard from a town that contained well over thirty-one factories of considerable size; surely people on their way to, or from work had passed the troop.⁸ If the troops had been at all an

⁶Kurt Stenkewitz, Immer feste druff (Berlin: Rutten & Loening, 1962), p. 27.

⁷Heidelberg, Der Fall Köpenick, p. 24.

⁸Ibid., p. 23.

unusual sight, if anyone had even glanced at the shabby, grizzled captain, a following would have developed--none did.

The Berliner Tageblatt had discussed the phases of military training in Wilhelmine Germany among which was included cultural training, the theater, the church and church activities, as well as other higher forms of entertainment.⁹ It was not unusual for the oldest, as well as the youngest officers to frequent the opera houses. Considering the relative ease of the Köpenick action, would it have been so impossible to perceive the bayonet-fitted grenadiers storming the town hall and arresting the mayor as a phase of their cultural education? No-one in Wilhelmine Germany would have answered such a ridiculous question in the affirmative, yet there was no-one to question the actual deed of Köpenick and no-one to halt the attackers, either. Would it be unfair to suggest that prior to the assault on Köpenick no-one had apparently thought much at all about the situation of militarism? Why else would such a bedraggled little captain with a prison pallor have been obeyed unconditionally? Nor had anyone thought to question the captain's advanced age. As the Cöpenicker Dampfboot explained, one day too late, it was highly unusual for a military man to be in his late years unless he was an under-officer, or a one-year volunteer.¹⁰

⁹"Der Hauptmann von Köpenick," Berliner Tageblatt, #529, Abend, October 17, 1906.

¹⁰"Der Gaunerstreich eines falschen Hauptmanns," Cöpenicker Dampfboot, #244, October 17, 1906.

A captain hardly qualified for the definition of under-officer, or a one-year volunteer.

The German uniform, The Nation suggested, had become a modern form of Gessler's hat before which all must bow down.¹¹ However, unlike Gessler's hat, which remained in the main square of Altdorf where all Swiss were ordered to bow before it, the German uniform could be found throughout Germany, allowing all German civilization and society to fall prey to it. What, other than the army uniform, could have blinded the civilians that had come into contact with the captain? There was no other conclusion. In the case of the Captain of Köpenick the uniform was no less illustrious because of its shabbiness, or irregular arrangement; e. g., field tie and no helmet. It had stymied the entire civilian population that it had come in contact with, the waitress in the coffee shop, the porter at the station, the quaking Mayor of Köpenick, and the treasurer who willingly turned over the town's assets without further thought. Perhaps it would have been appropriate to compare the uniform to a magician's cloak, for surely the little ex-convict had accomplished the work of a magician.

In Prussia, in Germany, the uniform commanded and ruled. The Berliner Tageblatt tried to make this condition comprehensible to the relatively free cities of the West, as well as to portions of southern Germany not yet engulfed by the militaristic amoebic-like uniform worship by emphasizing that it

¹¹ The Nation, p. 478.

was not the man, but his uniform that was obeyed.¹² The uniform was a fetish. Its power had been absolute enough to arrest a high standing official and to turn over the city's cash to an imposter. Was it not obvious, then, that Köpenick would have been an utter impossibility had not the Prussian soldiers, as well as the civilians already condemned for their digestion by militarism, been so systematic in their thinking. Understandably, the soldiers had been obedient, but to what extent goes obedience? Voigt was old, sick-looking, shabby, and improperly attired. He wore cavalry spurs, until he lost them, with an infantry uniform. He was grimy, battered, and common. And he had never been in the military himself ". . . but the men saw only the uniform. It always had hypnotized them, and it did so again."¹³ The soldiers had believed him genuine and gave him their respect, devotion, and service. They did not question his commands and had been willing to follow him through thick and thin. This was a peril that Germany was faced with. What would follow Köpenick?

Blame for the unfortunate situation that permitted the assault upon Köpenick does not fall on the military alone. Laws, as well as administration, were also guilty of contributing toward the condition of militarism. It was their institutions that had seen to it that the German citizen respected

¹²"Fetischuniform," Berliner Tageblatt, #529, Abend, October 17, 1906.

¹³The Reader, p. 218.

the military epaulet. Köpenick had been easy because the military had a privileged arrangement and operated entirely independently of the individual, the person who wore the uniform. No citizen, or policeman for that matter, had the right to take an offensive officer to the police station for temporary confinement, or even for identification. Therefore, it was not outrageous for the Vossische Zeitung to conclude that ". . . the officer in uniform is a sacred person. Indeed only in uniform."¹⁴ The exception was not, then, the offending officer, but the offender's uniform that protected him against all comers. The Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung lamented that citizens had to live in terror of the army because they were not safe from the uniform.¹⁵ A sorrowful state of affairs had descended upon the citizenry which enabled Prussian soldiers to rob a town hall and Prussian gendarmes to protect a thief. The Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung went on to mention that world conditions, that were already in such a sad state of affairs, were only worsened by the Köpenick implications, all of which was quite enough to cause gastric distress.¹⁶

The Dresdener Gerichtszeitung made its editorial a form of warning that blamed neither the military, nor the laws, but the people. Surely something was very seriously wrong with

¹⁴"Das Königs Rock," Vossische Zeitung, Abend, October 19, 1906.

¹⁵"Die Schauermär von Köpenick," Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung, #43, October 28, 1906.

¹⁶Ibid.

citizenry who could not recognize a scoundrel merely because he wore an impressive uniform.¹⁷

Attaching the blame was somewhat inconsequential; what really was of primary significance was the fact that "The country of Goethe and Schiller had become a land of barracks, where the uniform cast a spell, and the sergeant called the roll."¹⁸

Wilhelm Voigt had not been unique in donning a uniform for criminal purposes. The Russians seemed to prefer the uniform as a fitting costume for assassinations. In 1812, an escapee from a Russian hospital christened himself General Mallett and skillfully accompanied Napoleon, undetected, nearly to Paris when he was finally disarmed by General Laborde. During the German Kulturkampf a couple of "Police Inspectors" in Posen demanded and absconded with the church's cash. Sixty years before Voigt's venture a "Postal Inspector" in full uniform and with false papers (his actions, uniform and papers were all incorrect) got away with a very large sum of money.¹⁹ Thus, the assault upon Köpenick by way of using a uniform for the crime was not nearly so astounding. Yet, as the Berliner Tageblatt had queried, considering the circumstances that had permitted Voigt's actions, what was there (other than his own

¹⁷"Der heilige Rock von Köpenick," Dresdener Gerichtszeitung, no date, in Brinitzer, p. 40.

¹⁸Masur, Imperial Berlin, p. 97.

¹⁹Oscar Klaussman, "Bluffer in Uniform," Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger, #530, Morgen, October 18, 1906.

convictions) to prevent the Socialist leader, August Bebel, from donning a general's uniform, or a red soldier from apprehending the Reichskanzler as he drove along Wilhelm Street?²⁰

The real crisis was that the uncomfortable situation witnessed at Köpenick, citizens victimized by militarism, was present in Berlin as well as elsewhere within the Reich. Militarism was the culprit of Köpenick, not a quaking mayor, or an imposter captain. It was militarism, not the military, that seized the treasury, militarism that allowed the false captain to acquire the gendarmes, to march unnoticed to the town hall, to invade the privacy of the offices, to seize their funds, arrest their officials, and virtually disappear for more than ten days. As the voice of the Socialists, Vorwärts, indicated, the siege of Köpenick was a prime example of typical German obedience to their "stupid militaristic carcass. . . ." ²¹

The Köpenick exploit had exposed the military spirit and blind obedience of Wilhelmine Germany, controlled so tightly by militarism that until the siege of the Köpenick town hall the people scarcely recognized the fact, other than through occasional Socialist articles. The day after the onslaught Berlin newspapers had carried long leaders commenting on militarism, each according to its particular political viewpoint. However, it was especially the liberal and left-wing papers

²⁰ "Der Hauptmann von Köpenick," Berliner Tageblatt, #529, Abend, October 17, 1906.

²¹ "Der Zuchthäusler als Hauptmann," Vorwärts, #251, October 27, 1906.

that had quickly grasped the wider implications of the case, the significance not in the fact that the action had taken place, but that conditions had permitted a man who had never even served in the military to throw German officialdom into chaos. The Captain of Köpenick had exposed the arrogance and narrow-mindedness of German militarism in a great burst of audacity.

Stenkewitz, who spent his whole book on the Zabern affair condemning German militarism, believed that militarism was the sole driving force of all Germany.²² Whether in civilian clothing, or in uniform, the people massed together stood alone under the influence of militarism. Officers, respected and esteemed as the first men of the State, had become the ideal of manly society and all else was subservient to that ideal. This idealism, blind obedience and hypnotic influence of the officer could not have been more in evidence than at Köpenick's Town Hall when Wilhelm Voigt marched in and began issuing commands. Again in 1912, the ugly head of militarism with its malignant odors of idolized officers, obedience and hypnotic influences was to rise again in Zabern, an Alsace-Lorraine garrison town.

The Mayor of Köpenick, Dr. Langerhans, had been a victim of blind obedience, but he had also been an officer in the reserves and thus, doubly dedicated to the uniform.²³ Not even Kaiser Wilhelm II had the right to arrest a citizen, but

²² Stenkewitz, Immer feste druff, pp. 26-27.

²³ "Fetischuniform," Berliner Tageblatt, #529, Abend, October 17, 1906.

the little old imposter in the shabby officer's uniform had been enough for the mayor. Langerhans saw only the uniform; its authority was complete. Even more fantastic was the fact that Langerhans made no attempt to escape--he had given his word of honor that he would not.

Some sixty years prior to the Köpenick caper a notoriously irresponsible German captain had ordered his Landwehr Company to swim across a flooded river at Graudenz with their knapsacks on their backs. Had that order been obeyed, the entire company would have drowned. Instead, the men had refused and disarmed their captain, who had been about to attack them with his sabre. For disobedience the entire company was sent to prison where some of them died; a few were eventually pardoned under Wilhelm I.²⁴ Langerhans was not about to attempt disobedience, nor were von Wiltberg, or Rosenkranz. The captain was to be obeyed unconditionally; there was no greater testimony to that obedience than their arrival in Berlin and the embarrassing confrontation with Moltke. But Langerhans, if he did seriously question the abrupt arrest, was not willing to risk another Graudenz.

As a child Wilhelm Voigt had been accustomed to militarism which extended from street parades to barracks playgrounds; hence, there was nothing particularly unique in the fact that with some imagination and interest, first-hand experience as a young boy, and a simple curiosity for history

²⁴ Ibid.

accompanied by necessity had created an imitation captain. Voigt's ensuing popularity had not been accredited to merely a sense of German humor, but also as an unwitting protest against militarism run mad. His spectacular impersonation had struck home with the masses. People who had been badgered by iron-handed authority rejoiced that the laugh had been on those whom they had regarded as their natural enemies.²⁵ The laughter was an embarrassment to Langerhans, who paid the consequences by resigning his post, but even more to the military. Those that had been duped and hypnotized, the civilian population, suddenly seemed temporarily beyond influence. The peoples' weapon was mirth, one for which the German Army had no counter-weapon.

The most shattering conclusion to be drawn from the assault upon Köpenick, the saddest lesson to be learned was that even as the people laughed at the military and indirectly, at themselves, they were to make no decisive moves against the system. Langerhans, cut to the quick of his pride, turned in his resignation on October 19; he had received a great number of obscene letters and simply could not face the implications, the hilarity of his situation.²⁶ Yet the next day the Tägliche Rundschau suprisingly reported sympathetic gatherings of great masses of people in favor of recalling the absent Langerhans to his post. Even the newspaper began rationalizing: others

²⁵ The Nation, p. 478.

²⁶ "Die politische Bedeutung des Köpenicker Gaunerstreichs," Vorwärts, #245, October 20, 1906.

could have made the same error as Langerhans; similar situations could have faced his most ardent critics; and finally, the men that passed Captain Voigt on their way to work--why were they any less guilty than Langerhans? They did not question Voigt either.²⁷

That same day Fabarius, head of the Köpenick Town Council, rallied to Langerhans' defense by saying that he would have done the same thing as the disraught mayor, under similar circumstances. The administration supported Langerhans and could not, Fabarius felt, reproach him. They did not want him to leave. After all, the grenadier had forced him, under the command of the imposter, to act as he did. He and the other city officials had been forced by bayonet. Therefore, Fabarius and the remainder of the town council refused to accept Langerhans' resignation; this vote of confidence passed by a large plurality.²⁸

On Sunday evening the Köpenick Town Council met again to reassert their faith in their mayor and his subsequent actions during the assault. Herbst, a Social Democrat, spoke out in the name of his political friends in agreement with the town council's words; Langerhans certainly was not personally responsible for the country's misfortune and the absence of the peoples' power due to militarism. Herbst felt Langerhans was

²⁷"Aus der Reichshauptstadt," Tägliche Rundschau, Abend, #493, October 20, 1906.

²⁸"Zum Kassenraub in Köpenick," Tägliche Rundschau, #491, Abend, October 19, 1906.

a correct and impartial mayor and should withdraw his resignation. The council finally sent their regret to Langerhans insisting that he had their trust as well as that of the citizens, so much so that the latter literally sorrowed over his absence. It was a simple concession to make; after all, they concluded, Köpenick had flourished under Langerhans.²⁹

The Berliner Tageblatt reported on a meeting held by an independent group of citizens on the 21st. The decision was that Langerhans should return to office with all speed, since the people needed him. If anyone was a culprit, it was the press who had slandered the defenseless mayor to his point of resignation. After all, bayonets had been drawn against him.³⁰

At none of these meetings were suggestions made to prevent any recurrence of a Köpenick assault and only one person from all the groups, the Social Democrat Herbst, dared to openly mention the state of militarism. The rest, like sheep, stayed together, some amused, others frightened, but all united to do nothing.

Vorwärts, the voice of the Socialists, said that the conservative and militaristic press was tramping down the significance of the Köpenick trick for the subordination of the citizenry by portraying the event as a local occurrence, a light citizen's trick that could occur only in Köpenick. Ever

²⁹"Der Bürgermeister von Köpenick," Tägliche Rundschau, Morgen, #494, October 21, 1906.

³⁰"Bürger und Bürgermeister," Berliner Tageblatt, #537, Morgen, October 22, 1906.

since the Prussians' humiliation at Jena, a hundred years before Köpenick, they had worshipped a cult of the uniform. While the conservatives laughed, the Social Democrats took a political view of the attack upon Köpenick, culminating only with the wish that the discipline of the nation might loosen enough to destroy the peoples' faith in the high Prussian authority.³¹

Obedience was continually stressed in Wilhelmine Germany. The army must not think, question, or ask. On November 16, 1893, the Kaiser had told his recruits that soldiers shall not have their own will, but must have his ". . . and that is my law."³² And the civilian population, as supported by the Köpenick capitulation, was subservient to militarism. It was their life. Thus, was it not entirely feasible under such conditions that an ex-convict of many convictions could purchase segments of a military uniform, assemble them according to catalog illustrations, mimic Junker officers' actions, acquire gendarmes on a street, march into a town hall and arrest the three highest ranking officials after being willingly presented with the treasury's cash deposits, order the arrested figures to turn themselves in to the Neue Wache in Berlin, and then fade into the night? Would the tale have differed in its essential details had Wilhelm Voigt acquired his sought-after pass? No, only he might never have been apprehended. Wilhelm

³¹"Die politische Bedeutung des Köpenicker Gaunerstreichs," Vorwärts, #245, October 20, 1906.

³²"Fetischuniform," Berliner Tageblatt, #529, Abend, October 17, 1906.

Voigt was only of secondary import; militarism had permitted the rape of Köpenick and for some reason, Germany would not stifle that militarism. They had laughed at it and at themselves, but they would not stop it.

At point, Wilhelm Voigt wrote to his sister from prison and asked her to dispose of his meager worldly goods as she wished. His possessions consisted of the following motley lot: one coat, two pairs of socks, one pair of boots, two pairs of shoes, two pairs of slippers, one gray and one black hat, four shirts, three collars, two handkerchiefs, three combs, one brush, one pair of suspenders, and two pairs of garters.¹

Voigt's life, however, was not so simply finished. Public opinion had been sympathetic and not long after his internment people from all over the world began to send food and money to make his confinement easier.² Voigt's spirits, not to be long discouraged, began to rise as consolations and condolence letters began to pour in. Many sent money. A well-known Berlin newspaper collected nearly 2,000 marks for him, a Frankfurt newspaper collected 440 marks, and a Berlin woman promised him a stipend of fifty marks monthly, while he was in prison, and 100 marks per month after he was discharged.³ Apparently because there had been a hint of an air of romance

¹"Der Internirte des Hauptmanns von Köpenick" (letter from Voigt to Frau, November 3, 1906), *Bahn*, pp. 89-91.

²Voigt, Hauptmann von Köpenick, p. 131.

³Ibid., p. 146.

Epilogue

With his morale at its lowest point, Wilhelm Voigt wrote to his sister from prison and asked her to dispose of his meager worldly goods as she wished. His possessions consisted of the following motley lot: one coat, two pairs of socks, one pair of boots, two pairs of shoes, two pairs of slippers, one gray and one black hat, four shirts, three collars, two handkerchiefs, three combs, one brush, one pair of suspenders, and two pairs of garters.¹

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¹"Der Lebenslauf des Hauptmanns von Köpenick" (letter from Voigt to Bahn, November 3, 1906), Bahn, pp. 89-91.

²Voigt, Hauptmann von Köpenick, p. 131.

³Ibid., p. 146. quoted in Werner, pp. 35-36.

in the deed, women's circles also expressed a great deal of sympathy toward Voigt.⁴

Voigt made do with these consolations for some twenty-two months until the evening of August 15, 1908, when the Kaiser's orders came for his release.⁵ He was formally discharged at 4:45 on August 16.⁶

Not one to be ungrateful, Voigt immediately set about writing a thank-you letter to the Kaiser, the entire contents of which were printed in Scientia:

All great majesty! All merciful emperor, king, and man! Majesty! All merciful majesty, your favor and mercy have given me an unhoped for present, that is overly pleasing and understood. For me the significance of your majesty's mercy is not only the abbreviation of a sentence at a penal institution, but on the contrary, a wakening to new life. Your majesty has made my old age as happy as my youth. Only who, like myself, who through his own fault, had missed life, can be able to judge, what it is to me that your majesty's mercy, has signified. I am able, only in feeble words, your majesty, to speak my thanks, but I hope and plead, your majesty might permit and attest, that my thanks is good and truthful. Permit me, your majesty, to also further see your all merciful majesty. All submissive, W. Voigt.⁷

Voigt's demeanor was one of great personal pride, quite similar to that of a general, or a renowned professor.⁸ With

⁴"Der Verhaftung des falschen Hauptmanns," Vossische Zeitung, Abend, October 26, 1906.

⁵"Der Hauptmann von Köpenick auf freiem Fusse," Die Welt am Montag, #33, August 17, 1908.

⁶"Der Hauptmann von Köpenick begnadigt," Berliner Tageblatt, #416, Morgen, August 17, 1908.

⁷Rudolf Eger, Berühmte Kriminalfälle, Scientia AG. (Zurich: 1949), p. 207, quoted in Werner, pp. 35-36.

⁸"Voigt in Freiheit," Berliner Tageblatt, #417, Abend, August 17, 1908.

this new attitude he paid a call on his sister, whose husband had died eight weeks prior to Voigt's release.⁹ After consoling her, he then paid another call on his forty-two year old fiancée, Elise Römer, but apparently broke off the relationship, for there was no further mention from his ensuing exploits, or from police files, that he ever married her, or for that matter, ever saw her again.

Invitations began to pour in; a man from Schmöckwitz invited Voigt to accompany him on his four weeks' vacation.¹⁰ Whether he did remains somewhat vague. In January, 1909, the Berliner Börsen-Corinar reported that a book entitled How I Was the Captain of Köpenick would be released in February from a Leipzig publishing house for 100 marks.¹¹ Also in January, Voigt was reported as traveling about in his own auto driven by a chauffeur.¹² In March, along with his private secretary, he attended a Heidelberg theater performance and was quickly recognized by the public.¹³

⁹"Der Hauptmann von Köpenick begnadigt," Berliner Tageblatt, #416, Morgen, August 17, 1908.

¹⁰"Voigt in Freiheit," Berliner Tageblatt, #417, Abend, August 17, 1908.

¹¹No title, Berliner Börsen-Corinar, #25, January 16, 1909.

¹²"Der Hauptmann von Köpenick," Deutsche Tageszeitung, January 25, 1909.

¹³"Wilhelm Vogts Schsäsale in Heidelberg," Berliner Tageblatt, #165, March 31, 1909.

Not at any time during his ensuing fame did Voigt bury the conception of the Captain of Köpenick. In June he nearly caused a riot in Nance, France, when he went to a theater dressed in a captain's uniform. He caused a tremendous sensation and was quickly taken into police custody. Some of his civilian clothing was ordered brought to the station and he was forced to change his outfit.¹⁴ Aside from the uproar that Voigt had caused, it was somewhat significant of French-German relations at the time that he was not welcome to wear the German captain's uniform on French streets.

On April 1, 1910, the Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger reported that Voigt, in Rixdorf, had recently returned from a trip to England and America.¹⁵ Contrary evidence, however, came from the Berliner Morgenpost which on April 26 reported him as being in New York. While there he was said to be offering on sale autographed post cards of himself in two different poses, a civilian pose that he sold for ten cents, and a military pose that he sold for twenty cents. On one evening occasion he had stopped at the Café Bismarck. The band leader, on recognizing Voigt, immediately struck up the German national anthem, Wacht am Rhein.¹⁶ During his stay in the United States Voigt had

¹⁴"Schusster Voigts Gastrolle in Frankreich," Die Welt am Montag, #140, June 18, 1909.

¹⁵"Der Hauptmann von Köpenick als Gasstwirt," Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger, #163, April 1, 1910.

¹⁶"Der Hauptmann von Köpenick in New York," Berliner Morgenpost, #113, April 26, 1910.

offered to recount his adventures of Köpenick in a series of lectures, but apparently his presence was somewhat too controversial, again perhaps indicative of United States-German relations of the time, and he was deported.¹⁷

On June 14, 1912, an obituary of Wilhelm Voigt appeared in the Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger indicating that he had died at age sixty-three in a London hospital.¹⁸ The news spread quickly throughout Europe and many people sorrowed for the convict-hero who had courageously exposed German militarism. However, there was not much sorrow in Luxemburg, where Wilhelm Voigt, basking in the hot summer sun with friends, only laughed at the misrepresentation.¹⁹

After leading a life of much hardship, confusion, and comfort during his last years, Friedrich Wilhelm Voigt, the enterprising Captain of Köpenick, quietly passed away from old age in Luxemburg in January, 1922.²⁰

¹⁷ The Outlook, p. 515.

¹⁸ "Der Schumacher Wilhelm Voigt," Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger, June 12, 1912.

¹⁹ The Outlook, p. 515.

²⁰ Public Prosecutor's Report.

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