AMERICAN CONSULATE GENERAL
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MEMORANDUM ON MILITARY SPORT
AS NOW BEING POPULARLY DEVELOPED IN GERMANY
PREPARED BY
CONSUL RAYMOND H. GEIST.

One of the natural consequences of the growth of the nationalist movement in Germany has been the revived interest of German youth in all things of military nature. Among the older youth, that is young men between 16 and 22, who to a large extent are organized in semi-military formations, exercises which in effect are nothing but more or less disguised military training, are rapidly growing in popularity. All these exercises have been given the collective title "Wehrsport", a word which could be best rendered in English by "Military Sport" or "Defensive Sport". The Steel-Helmet, the National-Socialist organizations and also the recently dissolved Republican "Reichsbanner" have been engaged in exercises similar to those now classified as "Wehrsport". Now, backed by National-Socialist ideas of a militant State, "Wehrsport" has become more than a mere out-door pastime; it has become a scientific method of instructing young men in the art of war. The intensity with which the so-called sport is being undertaken and popularized throughout Germany will be realized if one considers that within the last half year or so, 23 books on this subject have been taken up in the catalogue of a Berlin bookseller specializing
specializing in literature of this kind. Wehrsport has not only been included in the active program of the National-Socialist defense organizations, the so-called S.A. and S.S., and in the "Stahlhelm", but has also been introduced in the daily exercises carried out in the voluntary workers' camps; and it is absolutely certain that it will constitute an important part of the daily routine of the compulsory labor service which is to commence officially in January, 1934.

The organization and planning of the Wehrsport has been centralized in the Reichsamt fuer Jugendertuechtigung (Federal Office for the Re-invigoration of Youth). On September 13, 1932, the President von Hindenburg promulgated a decree by which the Minister of the Interior was directed to form a special Federal Committee for the purpose of re-invigorating and vitalizing the youth of the nation. In his official decree President von Hindenburg pointed out that it was a solemn duty of the State to educate the rising generation to discipline, orderliness, comradship and willingness to make sacrifices. Furthermore, the President declared that this could best be done if those organizations which already in the past had devoted their energy towards vitalization and strengthening the German youth, cooperated in the future. The Federal Committee for the Re-invigoration and Strengthening of German Youth which was immediately formed, commenced working.
Organisations

Chairman of the Committee is the Reichsminister of Labor. The present Minister of Labor is the leader of the Stahlhelm organization, Herr Seldte. Acting President is Major von Neuville, also a Stahlhelm leader. The offices of the Committee are situated in Berlin. The State and Federal authorities, as also various private associations, as for instance the German Students' Association, the War Veterans' Association "Kyffhaeuser", the National-Socialist organizations S.A. and S.S., the Stahlhelm, the German Athletic Association and the Boy Scout and Hiking Leagues (Buendische Jugend) are represented in the Committee. Membership in the Committee is purely honorary. The Committee meets several times a year when it instructs the acting President and his staff of paid officers as to the program of the Committee. Up to the present the Federal Committee has confined its activities solely to recruiting the youth and organizing Wehrsport.

According to Mr. Riesenkerl, organizing manager of the Committee and the spiritual head of the Wehrsport movement, the German youth was not content with the forms of sport practiced in the old sporting clubs, as for instance hockey, football, track and field; they demanded a sport were they could show their fighting spirit (Wehrhaftigkeit) and where they have direct contact with nature. The form of sport chosen by these groups was called "open field sport" (Gelaendesport).
(Gelände sport) and in some quarters where the military tendency was more accentuated, "military sport" (Wehrsport); but Mr. Riepenkerl purposely avoided the military term "Wehrsport" for reasons which will be explained later.

According to Mr. Riepenkerl the fundamental principle of Wehrsport is military discipline which makes it possible for a single leader to camp, march, and maneuver with a large group of young men. The men march with full equipment. The idea is that all artificial gymnastic apparatus is to be supplanted by natural obstacles like trees, fences, creeks, rivers, lakes, hedges, etc. The men will be trained to use their five senses to know the elements of wood-craft and to read military maps. They will be taught to read a compass and to "shoot the sun" with a sextant. Every youth will be trained to handle a small caliber rifle, to lay telephone wires, and to be familiar with radio telegraphy. The actual purpose of this preliminary training is to make the men fit to take part in the manoeuvres which, according to Mr. Riepenkerl, constitute the actual Wehrsport. A fair knowledge of navigation and horse riding is also necessary as the manoeuvres are also carried out on horseback or extended over a chain of lakes. The following is an example of Wehrsport manoeuvre.

Two groups of about fifty men are stationed about 10 to 15 kilometers apart. Each party has previously
previously informed itself about the territory. As in a regular manoeuvre two or three arbitrators accompany each formation. A so-called leader (Spiel-leiter) is in charge of the whole manoeuvre. At a specified time one of the arbitrators of each party hands to the leader of a group a paper containing the strategic problem which the group must solve. For instance, one group is to occupy a railroad station, and the other is to intercept the movements of the first group. Outposts, couriers, flag signals, and telephones are used to keep the leaders informed about the movements of the enemy. A very interesting system is used to teach the men to take advantage of the geographical conditions of the territory over which the operations take place. A topographic model is made in a sand-box. Hills, houses, railways, power stations, etc. are marked in the sand-box.

The manoeuvres last often two or three days, wide stretches of country are covered, and sham-battles are engaged in.

As mentioned before in his conversation, Mr. Rippenkerl scrupulously avoided the term "Wehrsport", substituting instead the word "Gelaendesport". He said the purpose of the Gelaendesport movement is not to find a substitute for military training, but to teach young men the soundness and healthiness of outdoor life. The games as developed by the Committee for the Vitalization of Youth cannot be considered military training, and if they are, Mr. Rippenkerl said
said, they are certainly a very poor one. Mr. Riepenkerl observed that the training of young men to become soldiers is not intended by the Geländeasport, as Art. 177 of the Treaty of Versailles forbids schools, clubs and associations any such activity. The control exerted by the Federal Ministry of Labor in its training schools and training courses for teachers and leaders of Geländeasport is, according to Mr. Riepenkerl, a guarantee that Geländeasport will not develop into military training.

Mr. Riepenkerl said that he was well aware of the fact that the semi-military National-Socialist organizations, especially the S.S. and S.A., although they use the official rule-books published under the auspices of the Committee, were transforming Geländeasport into military training. But he pointed out that this transformation was brought about by the many old officers who were in these organizations, and that the Committee was doing its best to prevent this activity which is quite out of line with the purposes of the decree of the Reichspreisident. These old officers, to use Mr. Riepenkerl's own words, "had to play at soldiers". Of course, he said, especially as horseback riding and even motor cars can be used in "Wehrsport", a few changes will suffice to transform these perfectly harmless outdoor games into scientifically organized military maneuvers. This transformation is particularly easy, as German military strategicians believe that the elastic small group (Gruppe) will be
the unit of future infantry war. This point is especially borne out if one considers the literature which is catalogued under "Wehrsport". These books bear characteristic titles, like:

The Soldier's Primer (Zimmermann),
Pre-Military Training in Arms (Fecht),
The New Group (Zimmermann),
Labor Service - Military Service (Rosenstock),
The Group in Battle Formation (Kuschlwain),
The Art of War and Picture and Word,
Germany's Right to Fortify her Armaments (Haselmayer),
The Regimental Surgeon (Fulda),
Science of War (Banne),
Why Do We Need Military Sport? (Hartmann-Delitzsch),
Handbook for Soldiers and Wehrsport (Jahn),
Military Power and Will to Militarize (German title "Wehrkraft and Wehrwille" - Reinhardt),
Equality of Armaments, a Peace Army Within the Labor Service (Weidenmueller),
Military Sport, Maps and Wall Cards,
Card 1 Signals; Card 2 Communication;
Card 3 Reconnoitring; Card 4 Military Authority and Command.

It is believed that Mr. Riepenkerl and Major von Neuville were absolutely sincere when they said that the achievement of military training was not intended by the Reichskuratorium for Jugendertuechtigung. It must, however, be remembered that both these men have their sympathies more with the old conservative Stahlhelm organization with its many connections in the Reichswehr, and that they look professionally upon the S.S. and S.A. as amateur organizations intruding into the field of professional militarism. Although among a certain section of German youth "Wehrsport" will be received as a renaissance of boy-scoutism with a slight tinge of military discipline, it is certain that the militarists within the S.S. and S.A. will strive to make Wehrsport a disguised form
of military training. This is especially likely as the National-Socialists are endeavoring to get the Federal Committee for the Vitalization of Youth under their control. However, due to a lack of technical equipment, Wehrsport in the S.S. and S.A. could not, according to Mr. Riepenkerl, be a substitute for military training.

**Sources:** Personal conversation with Mr. Riepenkerl, the organizer of the Committee for the Vitalization of Youth, and author of the principal books on the subject of Wehrsport.

"Deutscher Gelaendesport" by Konrad Saas,

Official publications of the Committee for the Vitalization of Youth.
**RESUME.**

**General Regulations:**

In the general regulations the basic ideas of Wehrsport are emphasized: physical endurance, dexterity, strength of will; willingness to make self-sacrifice; fearlessness in face of danger; getting accustomed to bad weather; learning obedience, etc.

Besides general physical culture of all kinds, the following special training is emphasized:

(1) General physical exercises

(2) Learning to carry out sports in formations subject to discipline

(3) Learning to march while carrying knapsacks weighing 25 pounds and effecting a march of at least 25 kilometers at the speed of one kilometer in 12 minutes. Use of maps, compasses, etc. must be learnt.

(4) Observation faculties must be trained; judgment of distances, description of terrain, listening for sounds, etc.

(5) The ability to read and interpret maps and sketches of terrain must be perfected.

(6) Ability to make quick reports (military) in clear and precise language.

(7) Preparation of sketches of terrain or landscapes which illustrate the quick reports.

(8) Learning to estimate distances up to 800 meters with not over 30% error, also areas.

(9) Learning how to orient oneself by the compass, sun and stars, and weather side of trees.

(10) Proper description of natural objects, land contours, etc.

(11) How properly to utilize various terrains (obviously defensive or offensive).

(12) Terrain exercises:

- Hiding and spying out objects;
- Reconnaissant;
- Flight and pursuit exercises;
- Attacks;
- Camouflage.

(13) Exercise in the use of fire arms.