

# Strength of the German Army (1890–1914)

## Abstract

While the navy was the focus of increased popular attention after 1897, the army underwent slower growth. It registered increases in the number of officers and non-commissioned officers, but its overall size remained stable as a proportion of the population. One reason for this slow growth was that conservatives feared that rapid expansion would bring Socialist workers into the army and dilute the officer corps of aristocrats. In 1911, nationalist critics began to lament the neglect of the army. They claimed that the country was in mortal danger, as the growing strength of the Russian and French armies threatened to outstrip Germany's capacity to fight a two-front war.

## Source

Size of the Army<sup>1</sup>

Year	Overall size	Officers	Personnel	Noncommissioned Officers	Total size as a percentage of the population
1880	422,589	17,227	401,659	48,531	0.937
1881	449,257	18,128	427,274	51,586	0.989
1887	491,825	19,262	468,409 <sup>2</sup>	55,447	1.035
1891	511,657	20,400	486,983 <sup>3</sup>	58,448	1.028
1894	584,548	22,534	557,112 <sup>4</sup>	77,883	1.138
1900	600,516	23,850	571,692 <sup>5</sup>	80,556	1.065
1905	609,758	24,522	580,158 <sup>6</sup>	82,582	1.006
1910	622,483	25,718	589,672	85,226	0.959
1914	800,646	30,739	761,438	105,856	1.181

Years were selected in which the army's overall size increased due to laws governing its peacetime size.

In fact, personnel numbers should have been presented in relation to the male population, but since the ratio between the sexes remains relatively constant in peacetime, the relation to the entire population serves the same purpose. Average population was used as a reference value.

A sizable portion of the army's overall personnel numbers comprised new recruits. Whereas the number of new recruits stood at 151,180 in 1880, by 1910 the figure had risen to 267,554. Some of the recruits were voluntary: 16,069 in 1875; 18,767 in 1880; 25,954 in 1889 (13,125 of whom were younger than the mandatory age for military service); 49,122 (22,738) in 1900; 69,146 (29,186) in 1910.<sup>7</sup>

In the 1870s and 1880s, a relatively large number of recruits managed to avoid military service by emigrating illegally; they were convicted by the courts. There were 17,451 such cases in 1875; 11,446 in 1880; and 19,139 in 1889. Figures on the number of convictions due to illegal emigration are not available for subsequent periods; however, the number of emigrants fell sharply during this time (from the mid-1890s on).

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<sup>1</sup> The size of the navy was comparatively small. The figures are:

**1880: 11,116    1894: 20,498**

1881: 11,352    1900: 28,326

1887: 15,244    1905: 40,862

1891: 17,083    1910: 57,374

<sup>2</sup> This number represents the army's peacetime strength set forth in the law of March 11, 1887 (excluding one-year volunteers); *Statistisches Jahrbuch für das Deutsche Reich* [Statistical Almanac for the German Reich] 1887, p. 161.

<sup>3</sup> This number represents the army's peacetime strength set forth in the law of July 15, 1890 (excluding one-year volunteers); *Statistisches Jahrbuch für das Deutsche Reich* 1891, p. 148.

<sup>4</sup> Based on the figure of 479,229 (the army's peacetime strength set forth in the Law of August 3, 1893), plus the non-commissioned officers no longer included in figures for the peacetime army; *Statistisches Jahrbuch für das Deutsche Reich*, 1894, p. 149.

<sup>5</sup> Compiled as described in note 4. *Statistisches Jahrbuch für das Deutsche Reich*, 1900, p. 172.

<sup>6</sup> Analogue to notes 4 and 5.

<sup>7</sup> The number of volunteers includes the number of one-year volunteers, i.e. privileged recruits who only had to serve one year due to their school education and payment of their subsistence costs. See Ritter and Kocka, *Deutsche Sozialgeschichte* [German Social History], p. 224 f.

Source: *Statistisches Jahrbuch für das Deutsche Reich*, respective volumes; reprinted in: Gerd Hohorst, Jürgen Kocka, and Gerhard A. Ritter, eds., *Sozialgeschichtliches Arbeitsbuch: Materialien zur Statistik des Kaiserreichs 1870-1914*. Munich, 1975, vol. 2, pp. 171–72.

Translation: Adam Blauhut

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