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### **Curt Riess about the German Generals. Reviewed. The Self-Betrayed: Glory and Doom of the German Generals.**

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CURT RIESS ABOUT THE GERMAN GENERALS

Reviewed by K l a u s M a n n .

The Self-Betrayed: Glory and Doom of the German Generals  
by Curt Riess, G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York (\$3.00)

Curt Riess is a journalist of considerable intuition and experience. He began his career in Berlin as a sport reporter; went to France when Hitler came to power, and was a success in Paris - an exceptional thing to accomplish for any foreigner. The most popular French newspaper, the Paris Soir, sent him to New York as its special correspondent. ~~He composed for his French readers stories about American pugilists, American G-men, and American movie stars. The Parisians liked his articles. But then the Nazis invaded Paris, including the offices of the~~ Paris Soir. The readers of that prosperous sheet had to renounce the dashing accounts of Curt Riess, along with many other stimulating and familiar features of their former life. As for Riess, he ventured with unabated gusto on his third career, and established himself, swiftly and brilliantly, as an American author. During the last two years, he not only contributed to many a leading magazine in this country, but also edited the diary of a Nazi flyer and, moreover, produced four stately volumes of his own: a ~~weird~~ <sup>useful</sup> and ~~reliable~~ guide through the jungle of "Total Espionage"; a remarkable survey of clandestine activities in "Underground Europe"; a "novel of espionage", High Stakes, which I didn't read, fearing that it might affect my sleep and corrupt my imagination; and, more recently, The Self-Betrayed, <sup>an extensive</sup> ~~dramatic and thorough~~ study on the German General Staff - its past glory, its present troubles, and its future doom. This book is, in my opinion, the most solid and most effective job Mr. Riess has done, ~~up to now~~ so far. It deserves a better title - and a big success.

What I admire most in Mr. Riess' literary strategy is the psychological pincer movement by means of which he captivates his reader. At once thrilling and scholarly, he satisfied our thirst of knowledge and at the



same time seizes our imagination. The book is crammed with facts like a scientific compendium and yet full of suspense and drama. The ample material concerning that uncanny species - the German generals - is compiled with painstaking conscientiousness; but the story - far from being dry and onerous - reads <sup>like a</sup> ~~an excellently made~~ mystery novel.

The villain (and also the victim) in the weird account is by no means an individual but a group, a powerful set of men, or rather, the ruling caste in Prussia and <sup>in</sup> Greater Germany, from the time of Frederick II up to our own uproarious and pivotal time. This collective hero appears under various names - all of them are laden with guilt and with nobility. "He" is called von Fritsch or von Reichenau, von Keitel or von Seeckt, von Hindenburg, von ~~Hindenburg~~ Mackensen, or von Bock. "The" Prussian general adheres obstinately to a self-styled code of rigid traditions and arbitrary taboos. Being a professional warrior by instinct, upbringing and conviction, <sup>he</sup> he is aggressive and arrogant, but not insane and sadistic as are "his" former tools and present masters, the Nazis. "In all justice," ~~it must~~ writes Mr. Riess, "it must be said that the idea of world domination as such did not originate with the Prussian military caste. The East Elbian Junkers in the beginning were not national chauvinists. They wanted power for themselves in Germany; that was all. Until World War I they were, in fact, to a certain extent internationally minded. They spoke French, they loved Paris, they gambled in Monte Carlo."

Later, in the years preceding World War II, they gambled with the Devil. Cynically and stupidly, they believed that the Evil One could be exploited for their own selfish purposes. Indeed, they acted like the sorcerer's apprentice in Goethe's famous ballad: he, too, was destroyed by the very spirits whom he first raised foolhardily.

Riess opens his ~~meticulous and appalling~~ account with an almost farcical prologue - the story of what happened when Werner Eduard Fritz von Blomberg, Field Marshal and War Minister of the Third Reich, married



a humble female named Erika Gruhn. The witnesses at the wedding were Adolf Hitler, the Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces in Germany, and Hermann Goering, the Commander in Chief of the German Luftwaffe. From this idyllic event resulted a political scandal of major dimensions. Herr von Fritsch - an officer of remarkable influence but unpopular with the Nazis - succeeded in finding out ugly things as regards Fräulein Gruhn's pre-matrimonial life. ~~There were venomous rumours about a house of evil reputation, where the young lady had been active as a so-called "masseuse".~~ The Prussian gentlemen, led by Herr von Fritsch, turned against the War Minister, whose glaring mésalliance meant a blot, they said, on the Army's immaculate scutcheon. In reality <sup>almost needless to</sup> ~~say, the~~ ~~poor, depraved Fräulein Gruhn was of course but a pretext.~~ The military Puritans were ~~not so~~ scandalized, not primarily by Frau von Blomberg's past sins, but by Herr von Blomberg's present trescher~~ies~~. The Minister of War betrayed the interests of his caste to his new boss, Hitler. That is why he had to be done away with.

But the Fuehrer's protégés are not easy prey - not even to Herr von Fritsch. On February 2, 1938, Heinrich Himmler, ~~the~~ chief of the Gestapo, informed General von Fritsch, ~~the~~ Commander in Chief of the German Army, that on orders of the Fuehrer he would have to be taken into protective custody. The serious friction between Hitler and his General Staff was hardly settled when the Nazi Army invaded Austria, in March, 1938.

The second part of the book - "The General's Staff never surrendered" - begins with the German march to Vienna, but then jumps presently back to more distant historic events. There is a condensed and aptly-done survey of what German generals did and failed to ~~do~~, do, in the years from 1919 to 1939, ~~with occasional sidelights even on the conditions under Kaiser Wilhelm.~~ This sketchy ~~resumé~~ resumé, effective as it may be, seems somewhat awkwardly placed. It ought to be presented either as the ~~para~~



prologue, or as the beginning of Chapter One. The disregard of ~~any~~ historic sequence, not justified by any compositorial reasons, undoubtedly ~~mar~~sto a certain extent the opening part of the book. Yet it is ~~always~~ <sup>again</sup> impressive and ~~some~~ instructive ~~again~~ to watch the unfolding of the fantastic and yet logic drama from Versailles to Munich, from the Rapallo Treaty between Germany and Russia, in 1922, to the Stalin-Hitler Pact in 1939; from Hitler's Beer-Cellar Putsch, 19 years ago, to his triumphant entrance into the Chancellery, just ten years afterwards, in 1933.

The author is at his best when he dwells on the curiously ambivalent relation between the Nazi chieftain and the army chiefs. He describes the lurid intrigues, ~~initia~~ hatched by Herr von Papen and other crooks, ~~to~~ to ~~was~~ obtain old Hindenburg's blessing for the Nazi adventure and to destroy the unyielding anti-Nazis within the Army proper, especially Herr von Schleicher. Most of the generals kept wooing and fostering Hitler, while at the same time distrusting certain "radical elements" in his environment. Their triumph over such ~~dangerous~~ <sup>re</sup> restive plabelians as Captain Roehm and his ilk - the sinister butchery of June 30, 1934 - turned out to be, paradoxically, also their most humiliating defeat. Along with the S. A. rowdies, several prominent members of their <sup>own</sup> ~~own~~ <sup>sa</sup> caste perished in the ~~appalling~~ "purge" - General and Mrs. von Schleicher, Colonel von Bredow, and others.

The Nazi leaders and the generals need and loathe each other. True, when Hitler appeared the master of Europe, ~~in June, 1934~~, after the fall of France, the generals triumphed with him. "Germany was great," says Riess. "The generals were great." Some of them, however, did not live ~~anymore~~ to witness the great event: Herr von Fritsch, for instance, died under somewhat puzzling circumstances, as far back as September, 1939. Others were not destined to survive long the glorious summer weeks of 1940; Walter von Reichenau, for example, - the general who prepared the invasion of Austria \* and was the hero of the march into the Sudetenland - passed away,



rather surprisingly, while on his way to Berlin from the Russian front, in January, 1942.

There is no security for the generals under Hitler, nor can they wish for his fall. Their ~~and~~ dilemma is insoluble; they ~~are doomed~~, cannot but lose. The von ~~Bo~~ Bocks and von Keitels will certainly not initiate or lead the German Revolution. The ~~eventual~~ upheaval of the German people will be caused by the ultimate, inevitable defeat of those gentlemen, ~~and~~ of their ~~demonic~~ tools and enemies, the Nazis. The Don Quixots of obsolete ideals and aspirations will disappear, along with the fiendish adventurers whom they meant to <sup>use as their instruments,</sup> exploit. Curt Riess is right when he concludes his meritorious report with these forceful words:

"The German generals are doomed because they will be anachronisms. In the world of tomorrow they don't belong."

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