

superior opponent and a sceptical, mocking observer of their words and deeds. No one expected this general to be long in command under Hitler.

Schwerin von Krosigk, Finance Minister under Hitler and sentenced as a war criminal at Nürnberg, wrote after the war:

Experts say he was one of the best strategic talents of the German army. He was only able to display this talent in war games and on manoeuvres. That bored him. So, the higher he rose, a failing in him appeared ever more prominent: Hammerstein was lazy—there is no other more polite way of putting it. He himself was aware of it and justified the trait by saying that every man in a leadership position must have the courage to be lazy. But he overdid the rest necessary to collecting one's thoughts when he, a passionate huntsman, went hunting from late summer well into the winter, only turning up in Berlin from time to time like a passing comet. We were neighbours in Dahlem. When I met him on the street in 1933, after his removal [actually 1934], and

asked him what he was going to do with himself, he replied that he would now make hunting and fishing his principal occupations. I knew him well enough to be able to respond: 'So not much will change in your daily life,' and he had enough of a sense of humour to laugh.

Efforts to retain his post were not in Hammerstein's line; he abhorred the idea of lobbying Hitler, Goering or Blomberg. He went his own straight way, kept to the direction he had recognized as imperative, and didn't care if he found favour or disfavour.

In his memoirs, Erich von Manstein, later Field Marshal, also sentenced as a war criminal in 1949 and, like General Foertsch, subsequently an adviser on the setting up of the West German army, assessed Hammerstein as follows:

Like me, he had come from the Third Regiment of Foot Guards and was, next to General von Schleicher, who had also served in our regiment, probably one of the cleverest people I've ever met. The saying 'Regulations are for the stupid,' by which he meant all average people, was his

THE SILENCES OF HAMMERSTEIN

and was characteristic of the man. He would have been an outstanding commander in wartime. As Chief of Army Command in peace time, he lacked a feeling for the importance of detail just as he viewed 'diligence' with a feeling of pity, since this virtue was indispensable to the average person. He himself made modest use of it, something he could also afford to do given his quickness of mind and his keen intelligence. His military talent was complemented by a markedly clear political judgement, formulated on the basis of a sober examination of the political situation and its conditions. He probably had less time for the imponderables of psychological factors. From the start, his mental attitude, related to the fact that his whole frame of mind was that of a grand seigneur, inevitably made him a firm opponent of the clamorous National Socialists.

All his military collaborators also agree that, while he didn't love paperwork, he had the rare gift of grasping situations with lightning speed and in an uncomplicated way and of expressing his thoughts in writing with classic brevity. To his adjutant, as Hammerstein's son



Kurt von Hammerstein as Chief of Army Command

Ludwig notes, he characterized the mode of working of a commander-in-chief, like this: 'Free yourself of work on the details. Make sure you have a few clever people for that. But leave yourself plenty of time to have ideas and to be quite clear in your own mind. Only then can you lead properly.'

Once, when he was asked according to what criteria he judged his officers, he said:

I divide my officers into four groups. There are clever, diligent, stupid and lazy officers. Usually two characteristics are combined. Some are clever and diligent—their place is the General Staff. The next lot are stupid and lazy—they make up 90 per cent of every army and are suited to routine duties. Anyone who is both clever and lazy is qualified for the highest leadership duties, because he possesses the intellectual clarity and the composure necessary for difficult decisions. One must beware of anyone who is stupid and diligent—he must not be entrusted with any responsibility because he will always cause only mischief.

There is an English translation of these maxims, which turned up in a surprising place. Eric M. Warburg was an American officer detailed to a secret command

post of the British army, navy and air force, which had established itself on Lord Latimer's estate in Buckinghamshire. 'I was not a little surprised,' he reports, 'when I saw in big letters on the wall behind the desk of the duty officer a quote from Colonel General von Hammerstein: "*I divide my officers into four groups*"'. . . . In the middle of the war, the British had adopted the principles of a German General Staff officer.

Cover-up

While front-stage the Communists had been planning the German Revolution since 1919, instigating uprisings and denouncing German militarism, in the background the Red Army was collaborating closely with the Reichswehr. Karl Radek, arrested in February 1919 as the Bolsheviks' emissary, received German officers in his cell and made the first contacts. One year later, then Chief of Army Command, General von Seeckt, argued that help in building up a new German army could not be expected from the victors but only from Bolshevik Russia: 'Germany and Russia are dependent on each other, as they were before the war. And if Germany allies itself with Russia it cannot be defeated. If Germany opposes