

= Walther von Brauchitsch =

Heinrich Alfred Hermann Walther von Brauchitsch (4 October 1881 ? 18 October 1948) was a German field marshal and the Commander @-@ in @-@ Chief of the German Army in the early years of World War II .

Born into an aristocratic military family , Brauchitsch joined the 3rd Guards Grenadier Regiment 1901 . He served on the staff of several formations that fought over a dozen major battles of World War I , serving with the XVI Corps , 34th Infantry Division and Guards Reserve Corps as a staff officer before taking part in no fewer than twenty @-@ eight notable clashes on the Western Front , including the Battle of Verdun , the Battle of Armentières , the Battle at the Aisne , and the Battle of the Lys . For his service on the Western Front , he was awarded the Iron Cross and the House Order of Hohenzollern .

After Hitler 's rise to power in 1933 , Brauchitsch was put in charge of the East Prussian Military District , and became a popular officer because of his kindness to the civilian Prussian population in times of local fires . Although he personally disliked Nazism , he borrowed immense sums of money from Hitler and eventually became dependent on his financial help . Brauchitsch primarily served as Commander @-@ in @-@ Chief of the German Army before World War II , from 1938 , and during the two first years of war , until 1941 . He played a key role in the Battle of France and oversaw the German military campaigns in Yugoslavia and Greece . For his part in Battle of France , Brauchitsch became one of 12 generals promoted to field marshal on 19 July 1940 . After a first heart attack in November 1941 and the failed Moscow offensive in December 1941 , Hitler dismissed him as Commander @-@ in @-@ Chief of the Army ; he spent the rest of the war in enforced retirement , and never saw Hitler again . After World War II , Brauchitsch was arrested on charges of war crimes , but died of a heart attack in 1948 before he could be prosecuted .

Brauchitsch married Elizabeth von Karstedt , an heiress from Brandenburg , in 1910 , with whom he had three children . They were divorced in 1938 and , shortly after , he married Charlotte Rüffer .

= = Early life = =

Brauchitsch was born in Berlin on 4 October 1881 as the sixth child of Bernhard Eduard von Brauchitsch , a cavalry general , and his wife Charlotte Bertha von Gordon , a housewife . The Brauchitsch family , which originally came from Silesia , had a long tradition of military service , and like his forefathers , Brauchitsch was raised in the tradition of the Prussian officer corps . His family moved in the leading social circles of Berlin 's high society , and his family name and father 's military rank put him on equal footing with any officer or official . In his teens , Brauchitsch was interested in liberal and conservative politics , and was fascinated by the fine art pieces that were sculpted in Berlin in the late 1880s . To help him pursue these interests , his father enrolled him at Französisches Gymnasium Berlin rather than a military academy .

In 1895 Brauchitsch joined the military academy in Potsdam . He later transferred to the Hauptkadettenanstalt Groß Lichterfelde , where in his final year he belonged to the " Selektä " (top class for gifted students) . and was chosen , as his brother Adolf five years before , as a page by Empress Augusta Victoria . During his time serving the empress at court , he learned manners and bearing that were noted for the rest of his life .

Upon graduation he received his commission and joined the 9th Company of the 3 . Garde @-@ Grenadier @-@ Regiment " Königin @-@ Elisabeth " in Charlottenburg as second lieutenant on 22 March 1900 . A medical condition made him unfit for service in the infantry , and Brauchitsch made a request for secondment to the recently formed 3 . Garde @-@ Feldartillerie @-@ Regiment (3rd Guards Field Artillery Regiment) , which was granted on 1 December 1900 . After the secondment of six months , the commander of the regiment approved his permanent transfer to the regiment , where Brauchitsch , himself a keen horseman , was put in charge of training recruits in riding and driving .

While serving as an adjutant and later staff officer of his regiment , he noticed that his fellow officers and superiors showed no particular interest in artillery tactics . As he considered artillery to be his

specialty , he instead joined the General Staff office in Berlin , where he was promoted to first lieutenant (in 1909) .

= = World War I = =

By the outbreak of World War I in August 1914 , Brauchitsch had reached the rank of captain (promoted in 1913) , and was appointed staff officer to the XVI Army Corps stationed near Metz . He would be in the thick of the Great War from start to finish serving in the 34th Infantry Division and Guards Reserve Corps . Between 1914 and 1916 , he was based near Othain , Véry , and Varennes , where he took part in the Battle of Verdun and Battle of the Argonne Forest . In the remaining two years of the conflict , Brauchitsch saw more action , taking part in notable engagements such as the third Battle of the Aisne , the Battle of Aisne @-@ Marne , the second Battle of the Aisne , the Battle of Armentières , and the Battle of Flanders . His contributions to the war effort did not go unnoticed ; Brauchitsch was awarded the Iron Cross 1st Class and the House Order of Hohenzollern , and ended the war with the rank of major .

= = Weimar Republic = =

The German military underwent a forced reduction in 1919 to comply with the Treaty of Versailles , but Brauchitsch managed to stay in the military . He remained with the General Staff , where he had no opportunity to use his knowledge of artillery . Eventually , in 1920 , he was permitted to transfer to the staff of the 2nd Artillery Regiment . The following year , he worked in the Ministry of the Reichswehr , in the Artillery Department .

Brauchitsch 's assignment in the Artillery Department was to reorganize artillery formations and implement lessons learned in the closing months of the war . He added ideas of his own , including modifying the classification system for light , medium , and heavy artillery . Heavy artillery , formerly known as " corps artillery " , now became " reinforcement artillery " . He also added emphasis on the combination and co @-@ operation between artillery and infantry .

After three years in the Artillery Department , he was promoted to lieutenant colonel in 1925 . As of 1 November 1927 , Brauchitsch was appointed Chief of Staff of the 6th Infantry Division in Münster , Westphalia , one of the strongest garrisons in the west of Germany . In the last years of the Weimar Republic , he took over the Army Training Department and became a colonel (promoted in 1928) .

= = Nazi Germany = =

In 1933 , Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party came to power and began to expand the military , in order to realize Hitler 's military ambitions . Two years before , Brauchitsch had received his major general promotion . On 1 February 1933 , he was named commander of the East Prussian Military District (Wehrkreis I) and Chief of the 1st Division in Königsberg . As a consequence of the German re @-@ armament the command position Befehlshaber im Wehrkreis I (Commander of the 1st Military District) was expanded . The staff of the 1st Division formed the staff of the 1st Army Corps and Brauchitsch was appointed its first commanding general on 21 June 1935 .

Although Brauchitsch felt at home in Prussia , he had a clash with Erich Koch , the local Gauleiter (party head and de facto head of civil administration of the province) . Koch was known as somewhat of a crook who greatly enjoyed the power he possessed , and who would bring violence to his enemies . As neither Koch nor Brauchitsch wanted to lose their jobs in the region , the two attempted to keep their feud unofficial . As a result , Berlin hardly learned of their dispute .

A dispute emerged a few years later , when Brauchitsch learned that Reichsführer @-@ SS Heinrich Himmler planned to replace the army guards in East Prussia with SS men , with the purpose of persecuting Jews , Protestant and Catholic churches in the district . Even though Brauchitsch managed to prevent the SS replacement of the army troops in the region , Himmler categorized him as " a junker " , and informed Hitler of the disagreement . Brauchitsch claimed he had done his duty , saying laconically , " Civilians are not allowed to enter that area . "

Brauchitsch obtained the rank of general of artillery in 1936 . So when the Commander @-@ in @-@ Chief of the Army , Werner von Fritsch , was accused of homosexuality , Hitler appointed Brauchitsch a colonel general and the new army chief , on the recommendation of the Army High Command on 4 February 1938 . The homosexual allegations were in reality a trap set by Hitler as an excuse to dismiss one of the aristocratic senior officers within the Army High Command . Fritsch 's removal was a severe test of the stability of the German internal administration of that time .

Brauchitsch welcomed the Nazi policy of rearmament . The relationship between Hitler and Brauchitsch improved during Brauchitsch 's confusion about whether to leave his wife for his mistress , in the middle of the Munich Crisis ; Hitler set aside his usual anti @-@ divorce sentiments and encouraged Brauchitsch to divorce and remarry . Hitler even lent him 80 @,@ 000 Reichsmarks so he could afford the divorce . Over time , Brauchitsch became largely reliant on Hitler for financial help .

Like Colonel General Ludwig Beck , Brauchitsch opposed Hitler 's annexation of Austria and intervention in Czechoslovakia , although he did not resist Hitler 's plans for war , again preferring to refrain from politics .

In the final months before World War II , Brauchitsch focused on Italy 's potential to aid the Nazi military cause . This turned out not to be an easy task , as the Italian leader Benito Mussolini expected economic support from the Reich in return for his military collaboration . Fritsch had already told Brauchitsch that the Italian military was in " extremely poor fighting shape " . Joachim von Ribbentrop , Germany 's Foreign Minister and the main architect of the Axis alliance , constantly interfered with Brauchitsch 's efforts , as he wanted to see his work consolidated at all costs .

= = World War II = =

Even though Brauchitsch was in charge of operational affairs during the Polish and French campaigns , he had very little influence , as a whole , as to the war 's progress . During the invasion of Poland , he oversaw most plans . The campaign was often cited as the first example of " blitzkrieg " . Blitzkrieg was not a theory or an official doctrine . The Polish Campaign did not resemble the popular perception of what became known as blitzkrieg . The Panzer Divisions were spread thinly among the infantry and were not granted operational independence or grouped en masse , as they would in Western Europe . The operative method of the Wehrmacht in Poland followed the more traditional Vernichtungsgedanke . What is commonly referred to as blitzkrieg did not develop until after the campaign in the west in June 1940 . It was not the cause but rather the consequence of victory . Brauchitsch himself had to be convinced that armour could act independently at the operational level , before the campaign .

By early November 1939 , Brauchitsch and Chief of the General Staff Franz Halder started to consider overthrowing Hitler , who had fixed " X @-@ day " , the invasion of France , as 12 November 1939 . Both officers believed that the invasion was doomed to fail . On 5 November 1939 , the Army General Staff prepared a special memorandum purporting to recommend against launching an attack on the Western powers that year . Brauchitsch reluctantly agreed to read the document to Hitler and did so in a meeting on 5 November . Brauchitsch attempted to talk Hitler into putting off X @-@ day by saying that morale in the German Army was worse than in 1918 , a statement that enraged Hitler . He harshly berated Brauchitsch for incompetence . Brauchitsch went on to complain :

The aggressive spirit of the German infantry is sadly below the standard of the First World War ... [there has been] certain symptoms of insubordination similar to those of 1917 ? 18 . "

Hitler flew into a rage , accusing the General Staff and Brauchitsch personally of disloyalty , cowardice , sabotage , and defeatism . He returned to the army headquarters at Zossen , where he " arrived in such poor shape that at first he could only give a somewhat incoherent account of the proceedings . " After that meeting , both Brauchitsch and Halder told Carl Friedrich Goerdeler , a key leader of the anti @-@ Nazi movement , that overthrowing Hitler was simply something that they could not do and that he should find other officers to take part in the plot . Hitler called a meeting of the General Staff , where he declared that he would smash the West within a year . He also vowed

to "destroy the spirit of Zossen", a threat that panicked Halder to such an extent that he forced the conspirators to abort their second planned coup attempt. On 7 November, following heavy snowstorms, Hitler put off X @-@ Day until further notice, which removed Brauchitsch and Halder's primary motivation for the plot.

While preparations were underway for the Battle of France, a German planner and strategist named Erich von Manstein, then serving as chief of staff of Army Group A, presented his famous Sichelschnitt ("sickle cut") plan. Brauchitsch and Halder, however, did not approve of the plan. When Manstein insisted on the plan being accepted, Halder suggested transferring Manstein far away to the east, so as to reduce his influence in the planning process. Brauchitsch agreed and transferred him to Silesia. However, Hitler invited a group of officers to lunch, and Manstein was among them. He managed to present his plan directly to Hitler. The following day, Hitler ordered Brauchitsch to accept Manstein's plan, which the Führer presented as his own.

Despite his original scepticism, Brauchitsch eventually saw the plan's potential and felt that the army had a real chance of success in France.

After the surprisingly swift fall of France, Brauchitsch was promoted to field marshal in July 1940, during the 1940 Field Marshal Ceremony. After France had been occupied and divided, he and the rest of the high command were looking forward to a similarly easy and swift campaign against Great Britain, now seriously weakened by the French campaign. He was confident that Britain would be easily defeated: "We consider the victory already won. England remains secure, but only so long as we choose."

Had Operation Sealion, the plan for the invasion of Britain, succeeded, Hitler intended to place Brauchitsch in charge of the new conquest. As the Luftwaffe could not gain the requisite air superiority, the Battle of Britain was lost and so the plan was shelved and eventually cancelled.

In the swift invasion and occupation of Yugoslavia and Greece in early April 1941, the Germans committed some 337 @, @ 000 men, 2 @, @ 000 mortars, 1 @, @ 500 artillery pieces, 1 @, @ 100 anti @-@ tank guns, 875 tanks and 740 other armoured fighting vehicles, all of which were under the overall command of Brauchitsch. By the end of the month, all of Yugoslavia and Greece were in German hands.

Brauchitsch supported harsh measures against the Polish population, which he claimed were needed for securing German Lebensraum ("living space"). He had a central role in the death sentences for Polish prisoners taken in the defense of the Polish Post Office in Danzig, rejecting the clemency appeal.

He ordered his army and commanders to cease criticism of racist Nazi policies, as harsh measures were needed for the "forthcoming battle of destiny of the German people". When Germany turned East and invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941, he again played a key part, making modifications to the original plan. Like his friend and colleague, Wilhelm Keitel, Brauchitsch did not protest when Hitler gave the German army the same instructions as the SS on who to kill in the occupied territory, but he later issued a series of decrees that ordered that Commissars were to be shot only if their anti @-@ German sentiments were "especially recognizable".

As the Battle of Moscow got underway, his health was starting to fail. Even so, he continued his work, as he was determined to take Moscow before the start of the severe Russian winter. The army's failure to take Moscow earned Hitler's enmity, and things worsened for him, as he endured a serious heart attack in November. He was also informed that he had a malignant cardiac disease, most likely incurable.

Like other generals in the aftermath of the failure at Moscow, Brauchitsch was made a scapegoat. He was dismissed as Commander @-@ in @-@ Chief of the German Army on 19 December and was transferred to the Führerreserve (officers reserve), where he remained without assignment until the end of the war; he never saw Hitler again.

Brauchitsch spent the last three years of the war in the T?i Trubky hunting lodge in the Brdy mountains southwest of Prague. One of his few public comments after retirement was a statement condemning the 20 July plot against Hitler for which he denounced several former colleagues. Later, he excused himself to Halder, claiming he had been forced to do so to save a relative's life.

== Trial and death ==

After the war , in August 1945 , Brauchitsch was arrested at his estate and imprisoned at Camp 198 in South Wales . His war crime charges included conspiracy and crimes against humanity . He died on 18 October 1948 of bronchial pneumonia in a British @-@ controlled military hospital in Hamburg , aged 67 , before he could be prosecuted . He was buried at Salzgitter cemetery , Lower Saxony , Germany .

== Personal life ==

In 1910 , Brauchitsch married his first wife , Elizabeth von Karstedt , a wealthy heiress to 300 @,@ 000 acres (1 @,@ 200 km²) in Brandenburg . The couple had two sons and a daughter , including Bernd von Brauchitsch , who later served in the Luftwaffe during World War II as Hermann Göring 's adjutant . They were divorced in 1938 after 28 years of marriage , as Brauchitsch had developed another romantic interest .

In 1925 , Brauchitsch met Charlotte Rueffer , the daughter of a Silesian judge . He wanted a divorce , but his wife refused . Rueffer later married a bank director named Schmidt , who drowned in his bath during a visit to Berlin . When Brauchitsch returned from East Prussia in 1937 , the pair resumed their affair . They married immediately after Brauchitsch had divorced Karstedt .

Brauchitsch was the uncle of Manfred von Brauchitsch , a 1930s Mercedes @-@ Benz " Silver Arrow " Grand Prix driver , and also Hans Bernd von Haeften and Werner von Haeften , who were members of the German resistance against Hitler .

== Assessment ==

Historian Helmut Krausnick characterizes Brauchitsch as " an outstanding professional who lived up to the traditions of his profession , but especially lacked the strength of personality to deal with Hitler " . Historian Ian Kershaw on the other hand regards Brauchitsch as a " spineless individual , who was frightened by Hitler . He was no person to lead any type of front or revolt . "

== Awards ==

Iron Cross (1914)
2nd Class (13 September 1914)
1st Class (1 October 1915)
Württemberg Friedrich Order with Swords (7 May 1915)
Knight 's Cross of the House Order of Hohenzollern with Swords (15 May 1917)
Saxe @-@ Meiningen Honour Cross for War Merit (2 January 1918)
Service Award for 25 service years (17 April 1920)
The Honour Cross of the World War 1914 / 1918 (18 December 1934)
Wehrmacht Long Service Award 1st Class (2 October 1936)
Royal Hungarian Order of Merit 1st Class (20 August 1938)
Star of the German Red Cross Decoration (5 September 1938)
Anschluss Medal (21 November 1938)
Grand Cross of the Royal Italian Order of Saints Maurice and Lazarus (3 January 1939)
Grand Cross of the Order of the White Rose of Finland (10 March 1939)
Order of the Yugoslav Crown 1st Class (1 June 1939)
Sudetenland Medal with Clasp (7 June 1939)
Clasp to the Iron Cross (1939)
2nd Class (30 September 1939)
1st Class (30 September 1939)
Knights Cross of the Iron Cross on 30 September 1939 as Colonel General and Commander @-@ in @-@ Chief of the Army

Memel Medal (30 November 1939)
Spanish Military Merit Cross 1st Class (1939)
Grand Cross of the Royal Bulgarian Order of St Alexander with Swords (15 May 1941)
Grand Cross of the Royal Hungarian Order of Merit with Swords (31 May 1941)
Grand Cross of the Romanian Order of Michael the Brave (11 October 1941)
Slovak War Victory Cross 1st Class (20 October 1941)
Grand Cross of the Finnish Order of the Cross of Liberty (19 July 1942)
Japanese Order of the Rising Sun 1st Class (26 September 1942)

= = Dates of rank = =

Leutnant (Second Lieutenant) ? 22 March 1900
Oberleutnant (First Lieutenant) ? 18 October 1909
Hauptmann (Captain) ? 18 December 1913
Major (Major) ? 15 July 1918
Oberstleutnant (Lieutenant Colonel) ? 1 June 1923
Oberst (Colonel) ? 1 April 1928
Generalmajor (Major General) ? 1 October 1931
Generalleutnant (Lieutenant General) ? 1 October 1933
General der Artillerie (General of Artillery) ? 1 October 1935
Generaloberst (Colonel General) ? 4 February 1938
Generalfeldmarschall (Field Marshal) ? 19 July 1940