Franz von Papen, *Der Wahrheit eine Gasse* (Munich: P. List, 1952), page 314 (excerpt):

“Nachdem ich die Fragen eingehend mit dem Kardinalstaatssecretär besprochen hatte, empfing mich Papst Pius XI. Seine Heiligkeit begrüssten meine Frau und mich voll väterlicher Güte und mit den Worten, wie beglückt er sei, in Hitler eine Persönlichkeit an der Spitze der deutschen Regierung zu sehen, die den kompromisslosen Kampf gegen Kommunismus und Nihilismus auf ihre Fahne geschrieben habe.”

Note: The title of Papen’s memoirs is difficult to translate, and the English and Italian translations of the book, which appeared within a year of the German original, avoid this challenge by simply entitling the book *Memoirs* (English) and *Memorie* (Italian).

The German word *Gasse* means alley. In military usage, it refers to an alley or lane enabling an advance during a breakthrough, an important concept in military tactics during the early 20th century when Papen received his German military training. Thus, the German title of Papen’s memoirs could best be translated *A Breakthrough for the Truth*. Such a title fits with Papen’s personality and purpose in writing the memoirs. Papen was an accomplished military intelligence professional. He sought to spin the truth in his favor, and his memoirs must be read from that perspective.

The start of World War One in 1914 found Papen in Washington, DC, as military attaché to the German Embassy. Though a relatively junior officer, Papen proceeded to take charge of German espionage efforts in North America. He placed munitions orders with minimal downpayments in order to tie up American industrial capacity to supply war materiel to the Allies, and he initiated plans to blow up strategically selected bridges on East-West rail lines in North America. Caught in the act, he was shipped back to Europe as *persona non grata*. These pieces of Papen’s career are briefly described by Barbara Tuchman in *The Zimmermann Telegram* (New York: Viking Press, 1958). Papen’s debriefings and subsequent staff work won the confidence of German Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg, developing a lifelong friendship between the two men, and setting the stage for Papen to be the person in January 1933 who could persuade Hindenburg to appoint Hitler as Chancellor.

Military background is one of three main factors central to understanding Papen. Aristocracy is the second. Papen boasted to his American captors and interrogators at the end of World War II that he had grown up on an estate that had been in his family for 1,000 years. Papen served for some time as the head of the *Herrenklub* – the lords’ club or nobles’ club in Berlin. He also purchased the controlling interest in *Germania* during the 1920s, the flagship newspaper of the Catholic Center Party.

Catholicism is the third factor for understanding Papen: not necessarily faith, but certainly identity, and loyalty to Rome. Papen’s Knights of Malta group in Germany helped finance Archbishop Pacelli’s new Vatican Nunciature in Berlin in 1925. Papen held a further Vatican-conferred title as a Papal Chamberlain, a title revoked by Pope Pius XII and later restored by Pope John XXIII.

Papen’s memoirs are generally dismissed by historians as self-serving. That is certainly true, though not necessarily more true than of other memoirs of political figures. They contain some information whose accuracy can be verified from other sources. As with any memoir – or any witness – Papen’s memoirs should be taken with a grain of salt that accounts closely for bias.