

**OUT OF MY
LIFE, VOL. II**

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Out of My Life, Vol. II by Paul von Hindenburg & F. A. Holt

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OUT OF MY LIFE



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FIELD-MARSHAL VON MACKENSEN

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OUT OF MY LIFE

CHAPTER XII

MY ATTITUDE ON POLITICAL QUESTIONS

I

Foreign Policy

I HAD always felt it my duty to take an interest in the great historical past of our Fatherland. The life histories of its great sons were to me of equal importance with books of devotion. Under no circumstances, not even war, would I neglect these sources of instruction and inward inspiration. And yet it would be perfectly accurate to say that mine is a nonpolitical temperament. It was against my inclination to take any interest in current politics. Perhaps my liking for political criticism is too weak, and possibly my soldierly instincts are too strong. The latter are certainly responsible for my dislike of everything diplomatic. This dislike can be called prejudice or want of understanding. I would not have dis-

avowed the fact, even here, if I had not had to give expression to it so often and so loudly during the war. I had the feeling that the business of diplomacy made unfamiliar demands on us Germans. No doubt this is indeed one of the principal reasons for our backwardness in matters of foreign politics. This backwardness must of course have played a larger part the more we seemed to be becoming a world people as the result of the immense development of our trade and industry and the spread of the German spirit beyond the frontiers of the Fatherland. I never found among German statesmen that sense of political power, silent but self-contained, which was characteristic of the English.

When holding my high posts of command in the East, and even after I was appointed Chief of the General Staff of the Field Army, I had never felt either necessity or inclination to mix myself up in current political questions more than was absolutely necessary. Of course I believed that in a coalition war, with its innumerable and complicated problems that affect the conduct of operations, it was impossible for the military leaders to have absolutely no say in political affairs. Nevertheless, I recognized that the standard which Bismarck had laid down for the relations between military and political leadership in war was thoroughly sound as applied to our case also. Moltke

himself was adopting the Bismarckian point of view when he said: "The commander in his operations has to keep military victory as the goal before his eyes. But what statesmanship does with his victories or defeats is not his province. It is that of the statesman." On the other hand, I should never have been able to account to my conscience if I had not brought forward my own views in all cases in which I was convinced that the efforts of others were leading us on doubtful paths, if I had not applied driving power where I thought I detected inaction or aversion to action, and if I had not made the very strongest representations when the conduct of operations and the future military security of my country were affected or endangered by political measures.

It will be allowed that the border line between politics and the conduct of operations cannot be drawn with exact precision. The statesman and the soldier must have co-operated previously in peace time, as their different spheres unconditionally demand mutual understanding. In war, in which their threads are inextricably intertwined, they have to be mutually complementary the whole time. This complicated relation can never be regulated by definite rules. Even in Bismarck's incisive phraseology the boundaries seem to overlap on both sides. It is not only the problem at issue which decides in these questions, but also the

character and temperament of the men engaged in their solution.

I grant that I have covered many expressions of opinion on political questions with my name and responsibility even when they were only loosely connected with our military situation at the time. In such cases I thrust my views on no one. But whenever anyone asked what I thought, or some question cropped up which awaited, but did not find, a decision or the definition of the German point of view, I saw no reason why I should hold my peace.

One of the first political questions in which I was concerned, shortly after I assumed control of operations, was the future of Poland. In view of the great importance of this question during and after the war I think I ought to treat more fully of the manner in which it was handled.

Until of late I have never had any personal animosity against the Polish people. On the other hand, I should have been entirely lacking in patriotic instincts and the knowledge of historical evolution if I had ignored the serious dangers which the restoration of Poland involved for my country. I never had the slightest doubt that we could not expect a word of thanks from Poland for freeing her from the Russian knout with our sword and blood, as we had received little recognition for the economic and moral advancement of the Prussian