

Hans-Jürgen von Arnim

Full General (Generaloberst) ret.

* 1889 , † 1962

Hans-Jürgen von Arnim stems from the Uckermark family branch of Suckow. His **father** was the Royal Prussian Major-General (retired) Hans von Arnim (1861 - 1931), his **mother**, Martha Honrichs (1865 - 1953), came from Reichenbach, Silesia. Already his **grandfather**, Theodor von Arnim, has also been a military officer and was retired as Royal Prussian Colonel.

Hans-Jürgen von Arnim entered the 4th Guards Regiment on foot after his "Abitur" and started his career like his ancestors as a regular / professional soldier. At the end of 1st World War he was captain and was taken over by the "Reichswehr". Having served as a commander of a battalion and commander of a regiment he was promoted to become the commander of a division. After promotion to Full General (Generaloberst) he received the supreme command of the armed forces in Africa - Commander-in-Chief of the Army Group Africa (Heeresgruppe Afrika).

When the German army surrendered in May 1943 to the meanwhile superior British army he was taken prisoner by the British and was later held in captivity by the Americans.



Hans-Jürgen von Arnim,
circa 1940 as Major-General

- 1889 Born in Ermsdorf, Silesia, nr Reichenbach on April 4th.
- 1908 After his baccalaureate (Abitur) of the classic grammar school of Görlitz he enters the 4th Guards Infantry Regiment in Berlin as officer cadet.
- 1909 Promoted to Lieutenant.
- 1914 - 18 Active service as aid-de-battalion and -de-regiment, company-commander in the West [France] as 1st Lieutenant, as orderly and aid-de-division of the 4th Guards-Infantry from autumn 1916;
Captain's rank by the end of the war, 3 times wounded;
Awards: Iron Cross 2nd and 1st class, House Order of Hohenzollern with swords.
- 1917 Marriage with Annemarie von Dechent in Berlin on March 26th.
- 1918/19 Commander of Free Corps "Reinhard" (Freiwilligenregiment "Reinhard").
- 1919 Enters upon the "Reichswehr".
- 1928 Promoted to Major.
- 1931 Served as commander of battalion over the Rifle Battalion Ortelsburg.
- 1932 Promoted to Lieutenant Colonel.
- 1934 Promoted to Colonel;
served as 1st "Generalstabsoffizier" (Ia) of the 22nd Infantry Division in Bremen.
- 1935 Commander of the Infantry Regiment no. 68 in Brandenburg.
- 1938 Promoted to Major-General (Generalmajor),
Commander of the frontier section West Silesia in Schweidnitz.
- 1939 Commander of the 52nd Infantry Division;
promoted to Lieutenant-General (Generalleutnant).
- 1940 battle against France; commander of 17th tank-division,
battle against Soviet Union.
- 1941 award of the "Knight's Cross to the Iron Cross",

- promoted to "General der Panzertruppe", commanding the XXXIXth "Panzerkorps" in the battle against Soviet Union.
- 1942 promoted to Full General (Generaloberst), Commander-in-Chief of the 5th "Panzerarmee" in Tunisia.
- 1943 after the dismissal of Rommel in March 1943 Commander-in-Chief of the Army Group Africa (Heeresgruppe Afrika); capitulation on May 12th/13th.
- 1943 - 47 prisoner of war in England and USA.
- from 1947 taking Residence in Bad Wildungen.
- 1962 Hans-Jürgen von Arnim died there on September 1st.



Hans-Jürgen von Arnim, 1909

Hans-Jürgen von Arnim was raised in a Prussian home where military values and the service to the state and crown were the fundamental basic ethos. Both father and grandfather had chosen a military carrier. Since around 1650 four predecessors had served in battle for Brandenburg/Prussia, before they took responsibility for their estate Suckow. Six (6) brothers of his great-grandfather fought against Napoleon, two of them had died in those struggles for liberty.

His only daughter Elisabeth remembers him in 1986 in her life-retrospective: "The thinking and acting of my father was shaped by generations of officers, focused on the Prussian directives of loyalty, duty, model lifestyle, discipline, engagement for the emperor (till 1918), for the people and his 'fatherland'. Having undergone an austere education, and a frugal community life as a young officer, this made him very modest for the rest of his life.

In his memoirs he writes about his emotions he had as a young officer in the beginning of the 1st World War: "Far away from an easy hurra-acclamation everybody was conscious of the difficult battles that lay ahead." He was strongly convinced "to fight a, not provoked by us defense battle that was forced on us by revenge and competitive envy of our neighbouring peoples!" The proof for this he found, among other points, in "the unanimous acceptance of the credits provided for the war, even by the Socialists." Politically he was a conservative, directed to support emperor and 'Reich' (Kaiser und Reich), the two being inseparably linked in his thoughts.



Hans-Jürgen von Arnim, 1915/16



Hans-Jürgen von Arnim, 1927

After the collapse of the monarchy, there must have been a change in his attitude, since he devoted himself with equal intensity to the democratic 'fatherland'. Intentionally, there was no right to vote attributed to service-men in the Weimar Constitution. His daughter continues: "As a Prussian Officer he had no link to internal politics. (...) After the 1st World War General von Seeckt consciously had trained the army to political neutrality, to ensure a reliable 'Reichswehr' after any change of government. This was the basis for the firm confidence of the officers in the emperor and subsequently in governments elected by the people, also after 1933!

Thus also my father kept his oath while openly criticized NS-men and violations of justice by the SA and SS. After the General von Fritsch affair and his dismissal, though he was rehabilitated afterwards, my father proposed to his senior -General Busch- an advance through the supreme generality. Answer: General von Fritsch doesn't want this for his own sake. My father: 'The following years showed, how totally false

this statement was.¹ My father ordered, with great civil courage, and only bound by his conscience, and on his own risk, to disobey Hitler and not shoot the imprisoned political commissaries. This explains his honest and frank approach. He criticized more and more Hitler's inflexible directions for battle and his lack of prior planning.

In accordance with his soldier's oath, he put all his power and courage patriotically into his country, Germany. Thus, of course, he also helped stabilize the Nazi system, a fate he shared with most of those that had leading positions at that time. Since he was a Nazi general, he often was identified as a Nazi. After the capitulation in Tunis he reflects on his position: 'Differently to General Alexander, (a typical English Gentleman), Eisenhower refused to talk to me with the words: 'I do not receive a Nazi general!'"

His thought and action were drawn towards his fatherland and not the Nazi regime. He finishes his personal memoirs with "heartfelt thanks to all Africa Soldiers, they not only excelled in battle, but also maintained as prisoners of war an attitude of honest manliness. In spite of all sinful actions in the name of Germany, but against her will, one day she will recover her place among the free peoples of the world, because she can count on such respectful, diligent and honest men."



Hans-Jürgen von Arnim, 1942

¹ General (Generaloberst) von Fritsch was Commander in Chief of the German land forces when in 1937 his increasingly public criticism of Hitler's war plans and race to arms led to a fall out with the Führer. A subsequent smear campaign accused Fritsch of being a homosexual. This intrigue by the Nazi leadership just exemplifies how deep the divide sometimes was between the established army leaders and those in power in Berlin.

The pressure on Fritsch mounted and Hitler forced him to resign from his post, not without bringing him to trial shortly after. Despite the verdict of not guilty Fritsch was not allowed to return to his command.

The smear campaign and the degradation of a General by institutions of the Nazi party disgusted many officers and was considered unfair and dishonourable to do. As a response to the affair, Hans-Jürgen von Arnim requested solidarity with Fritsch and support from his fellow highest ranking Generals.

Hitler explained the dismissal of Fritsch later as follows: "A political leader has no use for a Commander in Chief for the execution of his plans who tends to see not only military difficulties but also political obstacles and who does not cooperate with the Head of State accordingly".

Text by Jasper von Arnim, 2003

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