

Appendix I

Smith's Letter to Brigitta von Schell, 1967

On hearing of the death of his old friend, Adolf von Schell, in October 1967, Smith wrote the following letter to his widow. The friendship of "Marshall's Men" began in Fort Benning

October 14, 1967

Dear Brigitta;

The black bordered envelope, postmarked "Heidelberg" told me without opening it of the catastrophe which had occurred. I had not dreamed that Adolf would soon depart this life. No word had reached me that he was even in poor health. To be sure, his letter to me, written a month or so ago, and letting me know of the tragic death of his Hanover son was itself a grim, melancholy letter. I took this letter from my file and re-read it. In retrospect, this letter seems to contain a premonition of his own approaching death; that his life was scarcely worthwhile any longer.

I have always looked on Adolf von Schell as one of my closer friends, one of the dozen trusted comrades who stood by me in good and bad times. Ours was not a causal friendship.

I first encountered Adolph at Fort Benning, Georgia. (Whether it was in 1929 or 1930 I can no longer remember.) I think that I was the first American officer to greet him at Benning, and Kay and I were the first to entertain him in our home. Adolf had come to Georgia as one of a group of German American officers who studied for a year in the other nation's military schools. It was, in view of what subsequently occurred, a rather curious arrangement.

For that subsequent happy year, we had numerous joyous days together. We rode many days each week. Sometimes we galloped through the Georgian pinewood, chasing fox and wildcats. Sometimes we rode on paper chases. More often we picniced in large groups. Occasionally we motored off on excursions to neighboring towns. One such trip I remember distinctly. It was to Albany, Georgia to locate and photograph a legendary, huge, 14 foot alligator, who was reported as liking to bask on a sandbank in the local river which I think was the Appalachicola. We were successful. I am sure that you will find the resulting photograph somewhere in one of Adolf's scrapbooks or files. I too had never seen an alligator before outside a zoo. We both were very excited.

From his first week in Fort Benning, Colonel George C. Marshall, later our famous Chief of Staff took to the young German Captain. Marshall both liked and admired Adolf. At this time, Marshall was trying to revolutionize the school system of the American army. He felt that our training methods were ultra-formalized. Adolf, after a month or so at Fort Benning thought so too. Schell had very strong ideas of his own as to how tactical training of young officers ought to be conducted. Marshall liked those ideas. So Marshall asked our War Department in Washington to ask Berlin to leave von Schell at Fort Benning a further year. Both Washington and Berlin acceded to Marshall's request and so, Adolf stayed on with us for another twelve months.

I think this second year at Benning was one of the happiest of Adolf's life. America was no longer strange to him. He felt at home with us. The Marshall-von Shell relationship became still closer. Between them was mutual admiration. In a score of ways, Adolf helped the development of the American Infantry school and assisted Marshall especially in revolutionizing the teaching of tactics.

Meanwhile the Kay, Elena, Adolf and Truman foursome continued. Eventually even Elena took to horseback riding, although I sense, with some fear and reluctance. However,

she loved, as everyone did, the riding picnics.

For Kay and I these Benning years loom in our memories as among the happiest of our lives. I suspect that they did also in Adolf's memory. As one grows older, he tries to forget the tragedies of the Hitler years, the savageness of the second world war, and the misery of Germany's post war years. So all of us try to forget the age of the holocaust and tend to relive in our memories those far happier pre-war years.

I shall miss being with Adolf when we come once again to Germany this coming summer. Far too many of my close German friends have gone. A few still remain. Sometimes I wonder whether in my case it is not too tragic to cross the ocean again.

Adolf, my friend gave me an understanding, a loyalty and a devotion which I have encountered only very rarely in my life. I am now of an age when I can no longer find a new friend of Adolf's character and understanding.

Adolf von Schell was of course a great soldier, though an unfortunate one. Better than that, he was a great man.

I thank you, Brigitta for making the last two decades of his life, such happy years for him. Kay and I took to you immediately in 1955, when we met you in Gehrden. We liked you still better when we spent such happy hours with you in your charming Heidelberg apartment.

Far away in America, Kay and I can do little but extend our sympathies. How we regret that we could not honor Adolf on September 19th at the Gehrden ceremony.

May God bless Brigitta, Adolf, Joachin, the grandchildren, and your three daughters, all of whom helped to make Adolf von Schell so happy in his last years.

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