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Research Article

General-leutnant Dr Karl Mauss (1898-1959)

Article

After it has invaded Poland, Germany will have to carry on paying the bills for Hitler's expansion projects. Thus, thousands of men will die on the battle fields. Many more will come back crippled. A lot of men abuse their power over the civilian populations of the occupied territories. Throughout these battles, true personalities got revealed and, although one might think that true courage would have been to resist and fight against the Nazi government, some of men have distinguished themselves on the battle fields. Dentists were no exception. The following story deals with one of them.

Karl Mauss [1] was born May the 17th, 1898, in Plön/Holstein. He joins the German army at age 16. He has not turned 17 yet when he receives the 2nd class silver cross at the battle of the Somme. At age 17, he is promoted second lieutenant for bravery against the enemy, becoming the youngest officer of the army. He receives the 1st class silver cross in the Carpathians. Mauss [2] is promoted first lieutenant at the end of World War One. He leaves the army in 1922. Then he decides to pass his high school diploma to learn dentistry. He receives his dental diploma in Hamburg, on the 14th of December, 1928. March the 1st, 1929, he receives the title of doctor in dentistry. Then, at age 30, he settles down in Lübeck.

When military service becomes compulsory again, he joins the *Wehrmacht*, on September the 1st, 1934. He is immediately promoted to the title of *Hauptmann* (captain). He becomes major on April the 1st, 1939. He fights in the Poland [3] campaign with the 20th motorized infantry division. With this division, he captures Brest-Litovsk fortress. He is then posted with the 19th armoured division, as the chief of battalion, under the direction of Guderian. Then comes the French campaign where he is the first to enter Calais. He is promoted lieutenant-colonel, April

the 1st, 1941, and he is sent to the Russian front. His unit will be stopped only 18 km from Moscow. On the 26 of November, 1941, he receives the iron cross knight medal, for holding his position on the Ugra river banks, under strong Russian attacks and unbearable temperatures. Mauss is promoted colonel on April the 1st, 1942 and assumes command of the 33rd grenadiers' armored regiment. He is seriously injured near Orel. On the 24th of November, 1943, he receives the oak leave medal. When his division gets surrounded in Kursk [4], he replaces his commandant and manages to lead his troops out of the pocket, loosing only a few of men, and saving all his equipment. His superior, Dietrich von Saucken says he is: « *a seasoned battle field man, a brilliant officer, and a fine tactician.* » On January the 31st, 1944, he takes command of the 7th armoured division. During the battles of Schitomir, Tarnapol, Brody and Minsk, his tanks destroy more than 800 Russian tanks. He spends his time around his men and never leaves them. Whoever offers him a decent housing always gets a negative answer. He impresses his superiors with his energy, self-control, and wit. Three months later, on April the 1st, 1944, he is promoted general-major. On August the 23rd, 1944, with his armoured division, he opens a way in the middle of soviet troops, for several divisions of infantry to reach a Lithuanian village. In Wilna, Libau, Doblen and Lida [5], in the Baltic States, his division resists the Russian attacks. He will receive the swords medal for this from Hitler himself. That very day, Hitler offers him to take some vacations. Mauss turns down the offer but asks for 40 more tanks.

After the retreat through oriental Prussia and a brief break, the 7th division is used in the spring of 1945 as back up in the Northern army group and is quoted in the *Wehrmacht* report for having efficiently held his positions. When they saw Mauss [6] and his men, the Russians would warn each other. A message was intercepted on the radio; it went: « *Watch out, Mauss is back. Great caution is recommended, he destroys everything!* »

He fights in the front line of his division near Zichenau. He does everything he can to slow down the enemy and manages to fight his way through the Vistula with all his troops and equipment. On October the 1st, 1944, he is promoted

general lieutenant. He leads his troops through enemy lines in Marienburg [7] and tries to join the 4th army to help it. On March 25th, 1945, his car is blown by a grenade explosion and he is seriously injured. Seriously enough to get his left leg amputated at the field hospital. He orders to be laid on a stretcher in order to go back to the battle field. After four days, he is in a state of complete exhaustion and he is transported to Copenhagen [8]. From his hospital bed, he sends orders to his troops who are caught in the net in occidental Prussia. They are evacuated by boat to Denmark, after he communicates with the general headquarters. On April the 15th, 1945, he receives the diamonds decoration [9].

Only 27 soldiers of the Third Reich received this distinction. He is the 26th.

The English transfer him from Copenhagen to Münster camp where he is treated by German doctors. He stays there until January the 28th, 1947. He registers each month with the local authorities. He signs his denazification file on April the 23rd, 1947.

While he is still in Münster camp, he learns about his wife's sudden death. British authorities do not allow him to attend the funerals.

After the war is over, he opens a dental practice, 3 Osterkamp Street, in Hambourg Wandsbek [10].

He re-maries in 1949 and gets a son named Dietrich. When he learns that an after-war German army is created (the *Bundeswehr*), he applies to contribute to the training of the soldiers but his application is refused for bad health.

He dies, February the 9th, 1959, of a coronary thrombosis.

Karl Mauss' story, as Günter Fraschka tells it, is totally verified by the denazification file written by the Allies in 1946 and registered in the archives of the city of Hamburg. This document includes the most important parts of Mauss' interrogatories when he was interned after the war ended, in



Dr Karl Mauss [12], late 1944, distributing food to his soldiers



Dr Karl Mauss [13] on the Eastern front in February 1945



Dr Karl Mauss [14] on the Eastern front in late February 1945



Generalleutnant Dr Karl Mauss [11] (1898-1959)



Dr Karl Mauss [15] shaking Adolf Hitler's hand



Dr Karl Mauss [16] in his dental surgery in Hamburg, after the war

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16. Private collection – all rights reserved

the camp of Münster. Although his military record is exemplary, he was still working for a totalitarian regime. He fought for it and defended it, which means that he supported the ideology. Therefore, although he was a charismatic soldier, the man cannot deserve this adjective. I think we should remain very cautious while talking about this character.

His son, Dietrich also became a dentist. He lives in Hamburg presently, but refused to answer my letters.