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Vienna, December 30, 1936.

Dear Dunn:

You have doubtless seen the press despatches reporting the death of General von Seeckt in Berlin a few days ago. With his death there passes from the German scene a really great and constructive figure and I lose a good friend. General von Seeckt was not only a military genius who had shown real qualities as a strategist during the war, but a man who had unusual administrative and constructive capacities, which found their highest expression in the building up of the Reichswehr during the period 1920-26. In addition he was one of those German generals who have shown real political genius.

I first learned to know General von Seeckt when I was assigned to Berlin some seven years ago. He was then already retired from all active duty with the army and the Government and was living there quietly with his wife. His most intimate friend happened also to be one of my best friends in Berlin, and we saw each other continuously during the four years I was stationed in Berlin. I have seen him in the home of my friend almost every time that I have been in Berlin on brief visits since my assignment to Vienna. I learned to have not only very real respect but very deep esteem for him as a man and as a moderate, patriotic and considered German. Conversation with him was always stimulating and he had a fine cultivated spirit.

General von Seeckt performed very valuable services as a strategist with the German army during the war. An ardent monarchist, he nevertheless consented to serve the Weimar Republic in 1920 when he undertook the difficult task of re-organizing the German army under a Social Democratic régime which was basically hostile to a career army. His task was an extremely

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difficult one, because even within the limits of the restriction placed upon Germany by the treaty, further difficulties were placed in his way by the Allied control. He nevertheless succeeded in building up what was probably the best organized, best disciplined and best selected army in Europe, and kept it strictly within the limit of 100,000 men prescribed by the Treaty. In 1926 he was obliged to resign, as he had permitted the oldest son of the Crown Prince to serve temporarily with one of the regiments during the annual manoeuvres without having taken the full oath of allegiance prescribed by the German law. The Minister of War, Cessler, who was basically friendly to Von Seeckt, was nevertheless obliged to accept his resignation in order to avoid a Reichstag debate.

General von Seeckt then retired to private life, from which he emerged only several years ago when on the invitation of the Chinese Government he made a trip there to give expert advice on the reorganization of the Chinese Army. He did not stay long, for his health and years did not make these exacting duties advisable.

In Berlin General von Seeckt lived very quietly and went out very little, but his home was always frequented by higher officers of the German Army, and he was looked upon in military circles as undoubtedly the greatest military man in Germany. He commanded very general respect throughout the country, and before the accession of the National Socialist Government in 1933 was one of the three men spoken of in inner circles as the successor of President Hindenburg. The other two being Schacht and Eckener. In case of the death or incapacity of Hindenburg, it is almost certain that von Seeckt would have been the President. Frau von Seeckt, who survives him, was never a very great help to him, for while she could be a very pleasant person and was known to her intimate friends as Dodo, she had a very sharp tongue, which she made no effort to restrain, and she was particularly caustic and free in the remarks which she made about the English and French as well as German contemporaries.

In personal appearance General von Seeckt was certainly one of the finest figures in Germany, well over six feet, slender, always well groomed, and the best type of German aristocrat. He was in addition a man of fine bearing. He always wore a monocle and in many ways typified more the English lord than the German aristocrat. His father had been a general in the German army, and while he was above all a military man, he had an unusual grasp of political and social problems. He could not have any sympathy with the National Socialist régime and its works, and when because of his prestige the National Socialist leaders sought to draw him out of his retirement, he remained cold and distant and was one of the few Germans who did not hesitate to let his complete disapproval be known by his aloofness. On reaching his seventieth birthday he was made the honorary commander of a well known regiment and was obliged to take the honors in public, but immediately thereafter withdrew to his retirement. Only three weeks ago Hitler himself endeavored to get von Seeckt to use his influence with the army, and called him to him and in a long conversation endeavored to convince him that he should use his influence with the higher command of the army so that they might overcome their well known aversion to any military plans which involved action against Russia. Von Seeckt listened patiently to Hitler's arguments without replying, and finally in reply to Hitler's direct question as to whether he had convinced him, Von Seeckt lifted his monocle in his characteristic way, peered at Hitler with that cynical and direct stare which he had, and said, "Mr. Chancellor, all these things which have been happening in Germany in the last few years and these things of which you speak to me I don't understand and they leave me cold."

Von Seeckt's creed may be summed up in very few words. He believed first in a small, well trained, well disciplined, well selected and well officered army, being convinced that such an army was much more effective than a large one. He believed in cooperation with Russia and that under no circumstances must Germany follow a foreign policy which would involve her in trouble with Russia. While a patriotic German and ambitious for his country, he believed that she must follow a foreign policy which would not bring

her into conflict with her neighbors but develop her internal life and resources, which he felt would eventually give her a position of moral and political superiority in Europe without involving conquest.

The cause of his death is not clear, and the accounts in the press simply mention that he died after an illness of a few days. This leads to a good deal of speculation, for although he had passed his seventieth birthday and had in recent years not been robust, he did not seem to suffer from any organic trouble. He was a man as moderate in his habits as he was in his thought, always eating and drinking sparingly and discriminatingly. He led such a quiet and retired life that there was no reason to believe that he would not have many more years to live. In the last few years he lived under the constant fear that the policy of the National Socialist Government would lead Germany into war, and he was convinced that this war would only bring disaster. Private advices which I have from Germany are to the effect that within the last two weeks there has been in inner circles the very real fear that Hitler in view of the threatened isolation of Germany would take the decision of provoking a struggle over Spain while there was still chance of a German success. Knowing General von Seeckt as I do, I can conceive the possibility that the inner disturbance brought about by the fear of the consequences of such a decision by Hitler for Germany may have caused his unexpected end.

In any event, Germany has lost one of her best citizens and I have lost a friend who in my opinion I considered as one of the best Germans I have known.

Cordially yours,

George S. Messersmith

P.S. The reports of the funeral of General von Seeckt are quite interesting, as they indicate that the Chancellor was present at the funeral, as was Göring. This, of course, was all for effect, for General von Seeckt in his lifetime had no use for either the Chancellor or for Göring and did not hide his active dislike of them and of all their works. The presence at the funeral was, therefore, more dust in the eyes of the German people, for whom von Seeckt had stood for so much.