

— ERWIN —
ROMMEL

A LIFE FROM BEGINNING TO END



HOURLY HISTORY

Photo

ERWIN ROMMEL

A Life from Beginning to End

Series Information: World War 2 Biographies Book 3

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Introduction

Johannes Erwin Eugene Rommel was born on November 15th, 1891 in the city of Ulm in southern Germany. Ulm has a rich history, and the settlement of the region itself can be traced all the way back to 7000 years ago when Neolithic pioneers roamed the countryside. The incarnation of this ancient European dreamscape that Rommel was born into was then known as the Second German Empire, or as it referred to in German, the “Deutsches Reich.”

The first German Empire or Reich was the Holy Roman Empire, a conglomeration of Central European states that lasted for nearly 1000 years before being dismantled by Napoleon Bonaparte in 1806. This Second German Empire, or Reich, on the other hand, only had a shelf life that lasted from 1871 to 1918, when it disintegrated at the closing of World War One.

This Second Reich would only last for a few decades, and its utter collapse was a humiliation for many German’s sense of pride. This was acutely the case with Erwin Rommel as well. At the close of World War One, he was a Captain of the German Army Corps, and, like many officers he felt betrayed by the leadership of the new German government, most especially the “Treaty of Versailles” that had, with the signing of a pen, reduced the once robust German army into a minuscule force of only 100,000 men.

This stripping of the military sent those in the profession into a state of complete shock and dismay. The younger generation of officers, such as Erwin Rommel, had a distinct feeling that they had somehow been betrayed or possibly even tricked into such a disastrous surrender. Many considered that if they had kept on fighting on into 1919 that the outcome would have been somehow different. This common sentiment of betrayal that Rommel and many of his fellow officers shared at the closing of World War One would one day be exploited to its fullest extent by yet another veteran of the conflict, Rommel’s future commander-in-chief, Adolf Hitler.

Chapter One

Building the Next War

“Don’t fight a battle if you don’t gain anything by winning.”

—Erwin Rommel

After the virtual implosion of German society at the end of World War One, many looked to the returning officer class to restore order from the chaos. Erwin Rommel was now just barely 27 years old, but he had acquired much more experience than his youthful face belied. Returning to Lucia Maria Mollin, the wife he had married in November 1916 during the height of the war, Rommel seemed at first to be content with a quiet civilian life, settling down in Stuttgart, Germany.

However, by the summer of 1919 Rommel was on the move again, sent to train a special internal security group in Friedrichshafen, an old industrial city located on the shore of Lake Constance in the south of Germany. Here, Rommel, the impeccable soldier, found men that were extremely undisciplined and with a seeming refusal to obey commands from their superior officers. Rommel was given the task to drill these unruly men into shape.

The men initially lambasted Rommel with insults and mockery, refusing to listen to reason. This prompted Rommel to hold an emergency meeting with the rambunctious recruits, in which he famously stood on top of a desk and yelled to the rabble rousers that he was there to “command soldiers, not criminals.” The next day, Rommel led the men some distance from their sleeping quarters when they once again began to give him trouble and refused to follow instructions, Rommel simply jumped on his horse and sped off, leaving them all behind.

After the group finally managed to walk back to their barracks, their will to disobey had been broken, allowing Rommel to mold them into the men he wanted them to be. The local Chief of Police came a few days later to check up on the job that Rommel was doing and is said to have been so impressed by the quick turnaround that he offered Rommel an official job with the police department.