

GAMELIN — GENERALISSIMO OF FRANCE

By far the most outstanding War-trained officer now in high command is Maurice Gustave Gamelin. At 66 he is the head of what, by almost unanimous acclaim, is today the world's finest military machine, one which he did much to create. His responsibilities are not only national but international. Supreme Commander of all French armed forces, a title not held by any soldier of France since Napoleon I, he is also slated to become commander-in-chief of the armies of France, Great Britain and their allies in the event of war with Germany and Italy.

General Gamelin is a world authority on Napoleon's movements. It is his quiet boast that he can recite every Army order Napoleon issued—and to whom. Since he took charge of her armies, France has acquired a possible new border to defend or cross, the border between France and Spain. Having vainly urged former Prime Minister Leon Blum to pitch in with the Loyalists and lick Francisco Franco in 1936, General Gamelin was now doing the next best thing.

He was inspecting the 250,000 interned Loyalist troops quartered in French concentration camps. If Generalissimo Franco should squeeze and attack France from the south, Generalissimo Gamelin would undoubtedly arm his 250,000 Loyalist guests and turn them loose on their former enemies. Like most of his countrymen, Maurice Gamelin hopes this may never be necessary. But the terse little (5 ft. 4 in.) general has a terse little motto: "Optimism is a luxury."

Both ancestry and environment made Maurice Gamelin a soldier. He was born in 1872 (the year after the Franco-Prussian War) in Paris. On his father's side he was descended from at least five generals, one of whom served under Louis XVI. His father, Zephirin Auguste Joseph Gamelin, became Controller General of the French Army after he had been gravely wounded at Solferino, during Napoleon III's fight against the Austrians.

Maurice first went to the College Stanislas, a strict and scholar-

ly Catholic school with considerable social standing and a military flavor. One of his teachers was Mgr. Henri Marie Alfred Baudrillart, now Cardinal Baudrillart, who still remains one of General Gamelin's best friends. At Stanislas, methodical Maurice further disciplined his mind by memorizing ten lines of prose at night (because it was harder than poetry) and reading a book of philosophy a week. After Stanislas he entered St. Cyr, French West Point, where in 1893 he finished first in a class of 449.

There followed three years of service with the 3rd Regiment of the *Tirailleurs Algériens*, because he wanted to see some rough service, and three years with the Army's Geographical Service, because he liked to paint landscapes in water color, survey and map. In 1899 he was admitted to the War College, where he studied tactics under Lieut. Colonel later Marshal Foch, who particularly notice his qualities. He graduated in 1902 with the commendation of "*trés bien*."

During the next four years he had various field commands and in 1905 he became orderly officer to General Joffre, then commander of the Infantry Division in Paris. In

1912, when Joffre was promoted to the Supreme War Council, Gamelin was chosen as Joffre's *chef de cabinet*, or military secretary. During this time the French General Staff was discussing (but only discussing) the possibility of a German violation of Belgian neutrality to attack France. Gamelin made a study of it and wrote out a defense of such an attack.

During those critical days General Joffre, who had called Gamelin "one of my red blood corpuscles," came to admire his little aide's unfailing composure as well as his swift and incisive tactical foresight. Paraphrasing Abraham Lincoln, he observed: "If this is philosophy, it is time all generals were philosophers."

The secret of Gamelin's military success lay largely in his old mapmaker's and landscapist's instinct for geography. Not only was he able to take the maximum advantage of terrain so as to conserve manpower, but his shrewd disposition of fire power constantly enhanced the offensive quality of his command. His many citations praised his "highest qualities of method and of inspection" and his ability to carry his objectives "in the course of a general offensive

at the cost of minimum losses." The French soldier did not like him less for that and the present French Army does not forget this quality in its Commander-in-Chief. "Very much all there," was the way one British general characterized Gamelin in the War years. He appears, during the entire War, to have made no major error in judgment.

In 1919 General Gamelin headed the French military mission to Brazil a job requiring the greatest tact since the old German pre-War influence in the Brazilian Army was still strong. In 1925 he was recalled and soon sent to Syria to help put down the Druse revolt, a suppression which he later succeeded in accomplishing alone with considerable bloodshed on the part of the Druses. Three years later he became Chief of Staff and in 1935 achieved what was then the biggest French military job, that of Vice President of the Supreme War Council (the president is the War Minister).

As France's No. 1 Soldier, Gamelin has continued the Maginot Line to the sea, mechanized the Army to a point below Germany's but at which he thinks it can be most effective, extended the con-

script period from a year first to 18 months, and then to two years—this over the bitter opposition of most French politicians. He has confidence in the Army he has built. During the Munich crisis he believed the French Army was ready to fight, and General Gamelin quietly went to London to tell the statesmen so. He got about the same attention that he got in 1936 from short-lived Premier Sarraut when he told the Government he could chase the Germans out of the Rhineland if they wanted him to. The thoroughgoing General would not agree to shove off, however, without ordering a general mobilization and M. Sarraut feared it was too close to the general election to risk it. The history of Adolf Hitler's aggressions dates from there.

Maurice Gamelin is generally characterized as colorless. That, however, is the way the French have learned to like their generals best. Nowadays no French soldier votes and on the subject of politics the Army is known as *la grande muette* (the big dumb woman). Particularly in these times, France wants her soldiers mute and professional, and the mutest and most professional is Maurice Gamelin.

General Gamelin is very easily approached, his voice is quiet and he is always calm. His well-trained memory is still prodigious. He is said not only to know every road near any French frontier, but also to know by name and sight every French officer down through the rank of Colonel. He is not chummy with his staff, but treats them with what they call "benevolent formality."

He likes to go out evenings, to hear opera and ancient music. If he stays home he reads. His library is stocked principally with philosophy, folklore, political and military history, and treatises on his other old favorite: map making. He has few friends, but one of his best, oddly enough, is that other able professional, Marshal Pietro Badoglio of Italy. On his 55th birthday General Gamelin married.—*Condensed from Time.*

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STOLEN FROM HER STOCKING

A YOUNG girl who had not been in this country very long ran suddenly and loudly after a man as he was leaving a moving-picture theater in Yorkville, in New York, and, proclaiming to the world that he had stolen her purse, asked to have him arrested.

When the case came up in court the next day the girl told, through an interpreter, how the defendant had taken a seat next to her, how they had quickly become acquainted, and how, when the defendant excused himself for a few moments, she missed her purse.

The magistrate turned to the witness at this point and asked, "but where did you keep your purse?"

"In my stocking," was her answer.

"But how, if you kept it in your stocking, could the defendant take it without you knowing it? Didn't you feel his hand when he took it?"

She looked puzzled for an instant, as the interpreter explained the question, but when she grasped it she exclaimed, "Naturally, but I thought his intentions were honorable."—*Harry Hibschan in "Off the Record."*