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Bronsart von Schellendorf, Friedrich

By [Oliver Stein](#)

Bronsart von Schellendorf, *Friedrich* (Fritz) Heinrich Bruno Julius
Officer
Born 16 June 1864 in Berlin, Germany
Died 13 or 23 January 1950 in Kühlungsborn, Germany

Friedrich Bronsart von Schellendorf was a Prussian-German lieutenant general. As Chief of Staff of the Ottoman Army, he was one of the closest collaborators of Enver Pasha during the First World War. In this role, he was also involved in the Ottoman measures against the Armenians, which resulted in a genocide.

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Military Career Before the Outbreak of War in 1914

Friedrich Bronsart von Schellendorf (1864-1950) came from an East Prussian officer family. His father [Paul Bronsart von Schellendorf \(1832-1891\)](#) officiated between 1883-1889 as Prussian Minister of War and his uncle [Walter Bronsart von Schellendorf \(1833-1914\)](#) held this office between 1893-1896. Educated in the cadet corps, Friedrich Bronsart Schellendorf began his military career in 1882 in the Potsdam 1st Garde Regiment zu Fuß. After graduating from the War Academy, he was employed in several general staff positions. He gained experience in war and abroad during the [Russo-Japanese War of 1904/05](#), when he accompanied the Japanese army as a military observer

during the campaign in [Manchuria](#) for half a year. From 1908 to 1912, he served as a department chief in the General Staff, where he was promoted to colonel in 1911. From October 1912 to December 8, 1913, he was commander of the prestigious Grenadier Regiment "Königin Olga" (1st Württembergisches) No. 119 in Stuttgart.

In the Ottoman Empire (1913-1917)

Already in 1911, Bronsart von Schellendorf had been in the [Ottoman Empire](#) for a short time. In April 1913, [Hans von Wangenheim \(1859-1915\)](#), the German ambassador in Constantinople, promoted him as candidate for the leadership of the planned new [military mission in Turkey](#). In December 1913, however, [Otto Liman von Sanders \(1855-1929\)](#) took over this function, while Bronsart von Schellendorf was henceforth considered the second man in the mission. In February 1914, the [Sultan](#) appointed him as one of the two sous chiefs of the General Staff of the [Ottoman Army](#). In this position, he was closely associated with the Ottoman Minister of War, [Enver Pasha \(1888-1921\)](#), with whom he co-ordinated the operational planning of the Ottoman army. At the end of 1914, contrary to the advice of Liman von Sanders, Bronsart von Schellendorf approved Enver Pasha's campaign in the [Caucasus](#), which ended in the winter of 1914/15 in a military catastrophe. After this defeat, Liman von Sanders tried to have him dismissed, but he did not prevail, as both Enver and Wangenheim insisted on holding on to him. A deep animosity remained between Liman of Sanders and Bronsart von Schellendorf. As Enver's chief of staff, Bronsart von Schellendorf was also involved in further operations of the Ottoman army. In 1917 he came into conflict with [Erich von Falkenhayn \(1861-1922\)](#), who, as commander in chief of Army Group F, finally successfully carried out his recall from the Ottoman Empire. In December 1917, [Hans Seeckt \(1866-1936\)](#) took over his position. Following this, Bronsart von Schellendorf remained until he became commander of a replacement division on the [Western Front](#) in September 1918.

Role during the Armenian Genocide

Because of the question of his involvement in the [genocide of the Armenians](#), Bronsart von Schellendorf attracted increased attention in recent [historiography](#). In his controversial study of the role of German officers in the Armenian genocide, Vahakn Dadrian identified Bronsart von Schellendorf's direct complicity, even seeing him as an instigator. Recent research has questioned this accusation. Bronsart von Schellendorf was willing to accept the Turkish measures of violence against the [Armenians](#) and took the anti-Armenian view of the [Young Turks](#). But, as Isabel Hull has pointed out, he was primarily guided by "military necessity". Under this premise, he agreed to the deportation of Armenians from the border areas to [Russia](#), focusing solely on his military responsibilities. Behind the phrase "military necessity" was the strong mistrust of the Armenian population in the hinterland of the front. Fearing a possible Armenian uprising, German officers like Bronsart von Schellendorf, and [Colmar Freiherr von der Goltz \(1843-1916\)](#), supported a deportation of the Armenian population. At the same time, Bronsart von Schellendorf did not intend to destroy the

Armenians. Nevertheless, by supporting the deportation plan he accepted the risk of Armenians being killed in the deportation. Thus, he was involved in the genocide planned and undertaken by the Young Turks. But even when the genocidal intention of the Turks became unmistakable, Bronsart von Schellendorf was not willing to distance himself from their actions or even to intervene, as other German officers such as Colmar von der Goltz or Otto Liman von Sanders did. Moreover, after the First World War, he repeatedly defended the Young Turk leadership in newspaper articles. In an article in the *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* of July 24, 1921, on the occasion of the trial of the [Talat Pasha \(1874-1921\)](#) murderer, he attempted to justify the Turks and himself by explaining that the death of the Armenians was only the effect of the inability of the Turks to carry out an orderly deportation. In doing so, he not only drew on widespread images of well-organised Germans and disorganised Orientals, but also denied the Young Turks' intention of destroying the Armenians. Thus, together with a number of other former German officers (including [Hans Humann \(1878-1933\)](#)), he contributed towards the denial of the murder of the Armenians. The motive for this behavior was partly due to a continued loyalty to the Turks and partly to a fundamentally defensive attitude against all allegations of the Entente regarding German involvement. In the case of Bronsart von Schellendorf, there was direct personal involvement as Ottoman chief of staff.

Post-war Years

After the war, Bronsart von Schellendorf became division commander in Frankfurt/Oder, and retired in September 1919 as a lieutenant general. From 1926, he worked as chairman of the [Tannenbergbund](#), an umbrella organisation of *völkisch*-nationalist associations, which was aligned to the allegiance of [Erich Ludendorff \(1865-1937\)](#). Bronsart von Schellendorf's unpublished memoirs, written in 1934-1938, reflect his affinity to National Socialism and his [antisemitism](#) at that time. His papers are in the Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv in Freiburg im Breisgau.

Oliver Stein, Bayerisches Armeemuseum

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