

The Round Tablette

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Welcome to the November meeting of the Dr. Harold C. Deutsch World War Two History Roundtable. As is our usual practice, tonight is the annual Dr. Deutsch lecture. Tonight's guest speaker is author Carl Boyd. His topic is: The Relations Between Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan.

The following overview is taken from material provided by Mr. Boyd.

Relations Between Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan.

What could possibly enable such two decidedly different societies as Japan and Germany to come together in an axis alliance and fight on the same side during the Second World War? They were, after all, on opposite sides of the globe; furthermore, they were separated by racial differences, major religious differences, vast cultural differences, striking linguistic differences as well as significant political differences. However, the chief thing the two societies had in common in the 1930's was an overwhelming hatred for communism and the Soviet Russians. This became the bedrock for relations between the German and Japanese governments. Most significant, however, was the catalyst who precipitated the German-Japanese alignment, one man, Oshima Hiroshi, first Japanese military attaché in Berlin since 1934, and then from 1938 the ambassador for most of the time until the last days of the war in Europe.

Oshima impressed the Nazis. His father had been war minister for most of Japan's participation in World War One. The German military attaché in Tokyo gave

a glowing report to his government after meeting Oshima, the designated military attaché to Germany, in March 1934. Colonel Oshima "belongs to the inner circle of Japan's military...and therefore is very well informed about everything connected with the militarists and their plans for the future." Oshima arrived in Berlin in May 1934 to take up his post.

Oshima initially started working with Wilhelm Canaris, head of the German central military intelligence service, but soon exceeded his military orders by becoming secretly engaged in political discussions leading to the highest levels in the German government. These discussions included Joachim von Ribbentrop, Hitler's personal ambassador at large, in the spring of 1935, and Hitler himself in the autumn of 1935, by which point Oshima was a major general.

The growing military climate in Japan was eroding the influence of civilian forces in government. Top Japanese foreign ministry officials learned in detail of Oshima's political negotiations only some 8 months after the enterprising military attaché had met privately with Hitler. Foreign Minister Hachiro instructed Japanese Ambassador Kintomo to take over negotiations in Berlin. Kintomo's instructions were ambiguous and there was now a question of how to proceed in Berlin where Oshima had long enjoyed the upper hand. Oshima continued as Japan's key negotiator while the ambassador's role was largely ceremonial. No mention of Oshima or the negotiations was made during the ambassador's courtesy visit. The ranking Nazis regarded Ambassador Kintomo persona non grata.

Oshima was clearly a member of Hitler's inner circle. In July, Oshima and Hitler personally edited the draft treaty in the Wagner family residence at Bayreuth, where every summer the Japanese military attaché, like Hitler, attended the Wagner Festival. (Oshima sometimes flew from Berlin to Bayreuth in Hitler's personal airplane.) The so-called Bayreuth draft "read like a Nazi manifesto," a high-ranking Japanese foreign ministry official said.

In 1935, Hitler told Oshima that "it was Germany's intention to split up the Soviet Union into several small states..." Two years later Hitler outlined his plans for German expansion to key government officials. Hitler's haste to conquer had the result of leaving Oshima behind. The Japanese militarists were reluctant to be as aggressive against the Soviet Union as Hitler wanted. Hitler concluded a nonaggression pact with the Soviet Union a little over a week before his invasion of Poland, the country that he divided with Stalin beforehand. Oshima and his plans for a close military alliance with Germany were weakened and temporarily discredited by Hitler's sudden about face concerning the Soviet Union. Ambassador Oshima was recalled from Berlin. A year later the Japanese were immensely impressed by the German victories and sent Oshima back to Berlin to be part of the Axis powers. Oshima quickly reestablished contact with Hitler in February of 1941. During this time Oshima's key position became more important to the Americans and British. This became especially true after the attack on Pearl Harbor and the German declaration of war on the US. The US Army's Signal Intelligence Service had succeeded in breaking Japan's most secret codes and ciphers, including the Japanese diplomatic codes used by Oshima. As Oshima radioed secret messages back to Tokyo with details of conversations, high level meetings, German troop movements, indeed all aspects of his host warring society. American and British

cryptographers were waiting to intercept and decipher his reports. They obtained information that only a member of Hitler's inner circle could obtain. Oshima's work in Berlin since 1934 uniquely qualified him to become probably the most valued inadvertent "agent" for Allied intelligence.

Further Reading on Tonight's Topic:
The Extraordinary Envoy: General Hiroshi Oshima and Diplomacy in the Third Reich

By Carl Boyd
University Press of America
Washington, D.C. 1982

Hitler's Japanese Confidant: General Oshima and MAGIC Intelligence

By Carl Boyd
University Press of Kansas
Lawrence, KS 1993

German-Japanese Relations, 1936-1940

By Frank William Ikle
Bookman Associates
New York, NY 1956

Japan and Germany in the Modern World

By Bernd Martin
Berghahn Books
Providence, RI 1995

Hitler and Japan: The Hollow Alliance

By Johanna Menzel Meskill
Atherton Press
New York, NY 1966

Civil War Roundtables:

Twin Cities Civil War Roundtable
November 21 Pamplin Civil War Park
Officer's Club Ft. Snelling 6:00PM

St. Croix Valley Civil War Roundtable
November 27

Ft. Snelling in the Civil War by Steve Osman

Ray J's Restaurant in Woodbury
5:30 PM Dinner 7:00 PM Program

