
The Round Table

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Welcome to the second October session of the Dr. Harold C. Deutsch World War II History Round Table. Tonight's speaker is Andrew Nagorski, author of *1941: The Year Germany Lost the War*. He argues that strategic mistakes and the miscalculation of capabilities in 1941 doomed the Nazi cause though no one realized it at the time.

Hindsight, since we know how the story ends, is always much clearer than our view of current events. The Historian is uniquely situated to discern the consequential from the inconsequential in ways that those who lived during World War II might never have considered. Thus, many of the decisions and choices made by the Third Reich in 1941 were both catastrophically poor and part of the cause of Germany's ultimate defeat.

In the Spring of 1941, Germany was master of Western Europe (save the devastated United Kingdom - UK) and had alliances or at least good relations with the rest of Europe. Successful on a level that even Napoleon might have envied, Hitler repeated Napoleon's error in expecting a fast victory over Russia. Possessed (as he himself put it) of a "sleep-walkers confidence," Hitler's totalistic racial world view compelled him to launch the greatest and most destructive campaign in history: *OPERATION BARBAROSSA*. Part racist arrogance, part overconfidence, and partly drunk with success, Hitler's decision to wage such a merciless and cruel struggle in the East created the circumstances that ended his Reich.

Hitler gambled on a fast decisive *blitzkrieg* on a titanic scale. But despite stunning early successes against the Soviet behemoth, German forces ruefully discovered that as rapidly as they destroyed Soviet units, more appeared, and their resistance became ever more tenacious. Stalin's ruthless determination to fight at all costs was the precise opposite of the paralysis the French leadership had shown under the Nazi onslaught. Hitler's micro-management of German forces in time-consuming troop re-deployments (e.g., the Kiev encirclement) would lead to failure at the gates of Moscow (*OPERATION TYPHOON*).

The German Army was generally unprepared for protracted warfare - - logistics were a nightmare on the Eastern Front and lack of coordinated strategic planning (due to Hitler's mercurial goal setting) would prove a fatal handicap. Failure to capitalize on the deeply rooted hatred of the murderous Communist regime felt by many of the Soviet peoples would only serve to weaken Germany. The Nazis were among the cruelest conquerors in history. This compelled most people under their control to resent (at the very least) or actively work against German occupation. This also provided Stalin with the valuable propaganda role as defender and liberator (in contrast to his pre-war role as overseer of the Great Terror).

The self-inflicted errors that Nazi war fighting and occupation policies suffered from reached an apotheosis with Hitler's hubristic declaration of war against the United States in December 1941. Despite Franklin Roosevelt's clear pro-British stance, and flagrant violation of the Neutrality Acts, Germany exercised significant restraint in its U-Boat operations against shipping to the UK. By 1941, the U-Boats were more aggressive and fostered a swelling anti-Nazi sentiment in the United States. Nevertheless, Roosevelt would have had a hard time persuading the American public, outraged at Japan's perfidy at Pearl Harbor, that fighting Germany should be America's first priority. Hitler's declaration of war rendered the question moot. Furthermore, British - American strategic cooperation, while rocky, worked far more effectively than the German High Command at structuring a coherent strategic posture and while the two democracies' relationship with the Communist dictatorship could scarcely be described as cordial it nonetheless began to take shape in the last days of 1941.

On the one hand, it simplifies analysis to blame Hitler personally for the German errors of 1941. On the other hand, the gaps in German strategic capacity, such as poor strategic intelligence, inept economic policies, lack of a strategic bombing ability, underdeveloped logistic support, and overemphasis on purely offensive tactical operations can be attributed to the failures of the General Staff. Nonetheless, it is appropriate to blame Hitler for the Nazi mentality which permeated all aspects of German behavior. Had the Germans exploited

If you are a veteran, or know a veteran, of one of these campaigns – contact Don Patton at cell 612-867-5144 or coldpatton@yahoo.com

the anti-Soviet feeling of the conquered peoples, they would have found a huge manpower reserve begging to fight. To do so, however, would have meant ceasing to be Nazis. The nightmare of the Holocaust and the deliberate enslavement of the Slavs not only were horribly immoral and criminal policies - - they created a wave of hatred that prevented Germany from stabilizing her empire. Hitler created such an atmosphere of fear that only a very few non-Germans had any interest in being part of the Greater Reich and they mostly set aside for the duration their social, cultural, and political antagonisms to end tyranny of the Third Reich. Even Churchill (the British imperialist) Roosevelt (the American millionaire) and Stalin (the Communist mass-murderer) could and did find ways to work together to smash the National Socialist regime to oblivion.

To many Germans and others in Europe, the Third Reich in 1941, having unleashed unprecedented violence and destruction, was all powerful and undefeated. The contemporary view was bleak. From our vantage point, however, we can see that the decision to invade Russia, the sheer brutality of Nazi occupation of the East, and the declaration of war against the United States (all decisions made in 1941 and the products of Nazi certainty in their own supremacy), ultimately proved fatal to the Third Reich. It also fostered the unity of the Allied powers, if only towards one objective: To drive a stake in the heart of National Socialism and destroy it forever.

FURTHER READINGS:

Andrew Nagorski, *1941: The Year Germany Lost the War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2019).

David M. Glantz, *Operation Barbarossa: Hitler's Invasion of Russia, 1941* (Cheltenham, UK: The History Press, 2011).

Evan Mawdsley, *December 1941: Twelve Days that began a World War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011).

Adam Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction: The Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006).

Christopher Browning, *The Origins of the Final Solution: The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939 – March 1943* (Lincoln and Jerusalem: University of Nebraska Press and Yad Vashem, 2004).

William T. Johnson, *The Origins of the Grand Alliance: Anglo-American Military Cooperation from the Panay Incident to Pearl Harbor* (Lexington KY: University of Kentucky Press, 2016).

Announcements:

Vietnam War Roundtable - TBD - rldietrich@mnmilitary-museum.org

Twin Cities Civil War Round Table - 17 Nov. 2020 - *Gen. Grant at the Battle of Belmont* - www.tccwrt.com - info@tccwrt.com

St. Croix Valley Civil War Round Table - TBD - 715-386-1268 - rossandhaines@comcast.net

Military History Book Club, Har Mar Barnes & Noble - TBD - sdaubenspeck52@gmail.com

Civil War Symposium -TBD - info@tccwrt.com

Minnesota Military Museum, Camp Ripley, 15000 Hwy 115, Little Falls, MN 56345 - 320-616-6050 - <http://www.mnmilitarymuseum.org/>

Minnesota Air Guard Museum - 612-713-2523 - www.mnangmuseum.org

8th AF Historical Society of MN, KC Hall Bloomington, Wednesdays at 1130 - <https://www.8thmn.org>.

Friends of Ft. Snelling - www.fortsnelling.org

World Without Genocide - 651-695-7621 - <http://www.worldwithoutgenocide.org/>

Fagen Fighters WWII Museum, Granite Falls, MN - Air show - TBD - 320-564-6644 - <http://www.fagenfighter-swwiimuseum.org>.

Wings of the North Airshow - Eden Prairie - TBD - 952-746-6100 - www.wotn.org

Winston Churchill Book Club - lin.hopkins@hotmail.com

Alliance Francaise 612-332-0436 - www.afmsp.org -

Honor Flight - Jerry Kyser - 651-338-2717 - crazyjer-ry45@hotmail.com

CAF - Commemorative Air Force - 651-455-6942 - www.cafmn.org

We need volunteers to drive our veterans to and from meetings. Please contact Don Patton at cell 612-867-5144 or coldpatton@yahoo.com

Round Table Schedule 2020-2021

10 Nov Deutsch Lecture on Walter Bedell Smith

8 Dec Origins of the Great Pacific War

2021

19 Jan Aerial Intelligence in Europe's Air War

9 Feb Struggle for Middle East Oil and War

9 Mar Nazi Art

23 Mar Nazi Scientists in the US Space Program

13 Apr The Tragedy of Poland: Nazis; Soviets

11 May The "Mighty Eighth" and Victory in Europe

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