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# The Round Tablette

*Founding Editor: James W. Gerber, MD (1951–2009)*

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**Welcome to the November meeting of the Harold C. Deutsch World War II History Round Table.** Tonight, Douglas Waller, author of *Wild Bill Donovan*, is presenting the annual Dr. Harold C. Deutsch Lecture, speaking on General Donovan's life and impact on the American intelligence community.

For those of you who are unfamiliar with this annual event, we offer a word of explanation. It was Dr. Deutsch's custom to speak on a topic of his choosing at the November meeting. These lectures were always well attended due to his renowned scholarly reputation. His knowledge on virtually any World War II topic was second to none. Many of his former students from the University of Minnesota came to this lecture. With his death, it was decided to remember him through, not only this Round Table, but also a lecture series named after him.

In the post-9/11 world the idea of not having an extensive intelligence network seems quaint and naïve, but prior to World War II the United States lacked the capability to really assess the actions of other countries. The military intelligence units were often the dumping ground for under-performing officers. Into this information vacuum stepped William Donovan. A successful Republican lawyer, he had traveled extensively in Europe before the outbreak of war, and positioned himself to be a confidant of President Franklin Roosevelt (FDR).

Though both men went to Columbia University law school, they did not move in the same social circles. FDR was a wealthy patrician Democrat while Donovan was a poor Irish Republican. The two men shared several traits in common. Both were "spy buffs" interested in espionage, back door dealings, and fantastic special operations. Both were internationalists, who believed that the United States could, would, and should play a vital military role in a future European war. Both men also had a "charm" about them where they could, as the saying goes "sell ice to Eskimos".

In early 1940, FDR sent Donovan to England to meet with Prime Minister Winston Churchill to find out if England could survive the war. When Donovan arrived there, he was given access to British intelligence agents who encouraged him to set up his own agency. When he reported this back to FDR, the President was intrigued by the idea of an independent intelligence agency. On July 1941, FDR signed the executive order for a Coordinator of Information to collect intelligence. The Office of Information when it began had one employee, Donovan. Within two years this agency, known as the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), would have over 10,000 people working under Donovan.

Through the OSS, Donovan not only became the father of America's modern intelligence agency (the CIA) but also the father of our special operations and information warfare (what is now called psychological operations or "psy-ops") forces.

Playing on FDR's interests in espionage, Donovan would bounce operational ideas off FDR and the President would do the same to Donovan. One idea of the President's was the idea that had been given to Eleanor by a citizen, that of "incendiary bats". That small incendiary bombs could be attached to bats that would then be dropped by bombers and which would then fly into the wooden houses of the Japanese and set them on fire. One of Donovan's assistants Stanley Lovell, who built "spy" gadgets for the OSS, like small cameras, found that the bats just dropped like rocks out of the airplanes. As for psychological operations, Donovan proposed and did use "morale operations" such as spreading rumors, radio broadcasts, and dropping leaflets. Donovan came up with the idea of injecting Adolf Hitler's vegetables with female hormones to make his moustache fall off and make his voice higher. Neither man particularly minded failures; both were willing to try anything to end the war faster.

The intrigues involved in espionage were minor compared to the political intrigues that went on within the US government over the new OSS. Donovan commented that this battle

**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](mailto:coldpatton@yahoo.com)

was “as fierce as the one against Hitler’s Army” The military intelligence organizations did not like Donovan, even as the OSS came under the umbrella of military operations. Donovan, a World War I veteran with the Medal of Honor, held the rank of Brigadier and then Major General during the war. When Donovan met with the generals and flag officers, he wore his uniform with the Medal of Honor ribbon, because even with all the ribbons the other officers had, he had the one that mattered. General George Marshall eventually accepted Donovan, but underlings continued trying to destroy him. J. Edgar Hoover, head of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, was Donovan’s greatest enemy. Donovan and Hoover each had spies in each other’s organizations, and Hoover was just a likely to go to FDR to complain about Donovan as Donovan complained about Hoover.

FDR’s death and the end of the war put Donovan and the OSS on the path to destruction. FDR protected Donovan from the political warfare of Washington, but when Harry Truman took over he had no such compulsion. Donovan had drafted a plan for a post-war OSS, which was leaked to the press, which stated that Donovan wanted to “set up a Gestapo type organization”, and sunk the plans. Hoover spread rumors that Donovan was having an affair with his daughter-in-law and made sure that Truman knew about Donovan’s philandering. While Donovan did cheat on his wife, he never had an affair with this daughter-in-law. On September 25, 1945, President Truman signed the order that shut down the OSS, and the different sections of the organization were parceled out to the State Department (OSS research & analysis) and the Pentagon (secret intelligence and counter-intelligence, renamed the Special Services Unit).

In January of 1946, Truman created the Central Intelligence Group, which absorbed the SSU. In the 1947 National Security Act, the Central Intelligence Agency was formed. Donovan had no involvement with these organizations. During the Eisenhower Administration, he became Ambassador to Thailand in 1953, and served one tumultuous year raising trouble in Southeast Asia. Returning home, he died at Walter Reed Medical Center, in 1959.

#### **Further Readings:**

Douglas Waller, *Wild Bill Donovan: The Spymaster Who Created the OSS and Modern American Espionage* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011).

Richard Harris Smith, *OSS: The Secret History of America’s First Central Intelligence Agency* (Guilford, CT: Globe Pequot Press, 2005).

Patrick O’Donnell, *Operatives, Spies, and Saboteurs: The Unknown Story of World War II’s OSS* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004).

Elizabeth P. McIntosh, *Sisterhood of Spies: The Women of the OSS* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2009).

Robin Winks, *Cloak and Gown: Scholars in the Secret War, 1939-1945* (Hartford CT: Yale University Press, 1996).

#### **Announcements:**

Twin Cities Civil War Round Table -

Nov. 13, 2014 – *Civil War Music* -

[www.tccwrt.com](http://www.tccwrt.com) - [info@tccwrt.com](mailto:info@tccwrt.com)

St Croix Valley Civil War Round Table - Nov. 24, 2014 – *Civil War Bugling* - 715-386-1268 –

[rossandhaines@comcast.net](mailto:rossandhaines@comcast.net)

Rochester WWII History Round Table –507-280-

9970; [www.ww2roundtable-rochester.org](http://www.ww2roundtable-rochester.org)

Minnesota Military Museum, Camp Ripley, 15000

Hwy 115, Little Falls, MN 56345, 320-616-6050,

<http://www.mnmilitarymuseum.org/>

Honor Flight - Jerry Kyser -

[crazyjerry45@hotmail.com](mailto:crazyjerry45@hotmail.com) - 651-338-2717

CAF - Commemorative Air Force -

[www.cafmn.org](http://www.cafmn.org) 651-455-6942

Minnesota Air Guard Museum -

[www.mnangmuseum.org](http://www.mnangmuseum.org) 612-713-2523

Friends of Ft. Snelling, [www.fortsnelling.org](http://www.fortsnelling.org)

Fagen Fighters WWII Museum, Granite Falls, MN,

320-564-6644, <http://www.fagenfighterswwiimuseum.org>.

World Without Genocide, 651-695-7621,

<http://www.worldwithoutgenocide.org/>

Airshow - Eden Prairie - 11/12 July 2015

[www.wotn.org](http://www.wotn.org) 952-746-6100

**We need volunteers to drive our veterans to and from meetings. Please contact Don Patton at cell 612-867-5144 or [coldpatton@yahoo.com](mailto:coldpatton@yahoo.com)**

#### **Round Table Schedule 2014 - 2015**

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|---------|-------------------------------------|
| 11 Dec. | Christmas at Bastogne               |
| 8 Jan.  | Myth of the German Offensive        |
| 12 Feb. | Italian Struggle                    |
| 12 Mar. | Logistics of War                    |
| 26 Mar. | Return to the Philippines           |
| 9 Apr.  | Air War in the Mediterranean        |
| 14 May  | Retrospective: Goals of WW2 Leaders |



**LTC Donovan (42ID) WWI**



**MG Donovan (OSS) WWII**



**Germany**

**OSS propaganda stamp dropped in**