
The Round Tablette

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Welcome to the November meeting of the Dr. Harold C. Deutsch World War II History Round Table.

Our speaker tonight is William T. Johnsen, Professor of Military History and Strategy in the Department of National Security at the US Army War College, and the author of *The Origins of the Grand Alliance*. He will discuss the partnership between Roosevelt and Churchill that defeated the Axis.

Tonight is the annual Dr. Harold C. Deutsch Lecture. Dr. Deutsch customarily spoke on a topic of his choosing at the November meeting. His expansive expertise drew a large audience no matter the subject. He is memorialized through this Round Table, and with this lecture series named after him.

The Anglo-American alliance during the Second World War did not begin with the United States entry into the war in December 1941, but had been developing in secret since the 1937. During World War I, the United States fought on the same side as the United Kingdom, although as an “Associated Power” and not as an “Allied Power” and this reflected the differences in war goals of the two countries. Indeed, the Paris Peace Conference highlighted the different ambitions of the two victors, with the UK striving to maintain its Empire and the US seeking to create a world free of war and dedicated to Wilson’s Fourteen Points. Throughout the 1920s, American and British interests did not really coincide, and there were many points of tension between the two. American reticence, not to say resentment, towards the British Empire, and reluctance to serve as the enforcer of British Imperial interests would often be in the background of the diplomatic relations between the two, both before and during World War II. The differences between UK and US seen in the 1920s would make future cooperation difficult, and required much work to make productive.

The perception of common dangers helped bring the US and UK into a new relationship, following the Japanese invasions of Manchuria in 1931 and China in 1937, but this relationship was difficult and complicated. The rise of Hitler

and his revision of the Versailles Treaty, and open rearmament created another major threat to both US and UK interests, and further complicated the international scene. Weakness, both in military strength and in political will, prompted British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain to pursue a policy of appeasement in Europe while looking for help from the United States to cover the exposed British territories in the East. Still mired in the Great Depression and facing a strong isolationist sentiment in the US, President Franklin Roosevelt (FDR) was also concerned by the aggressive actions of the European dictators and the Japanese. Limited by popular opinion to keep the United States out of another war, FDR could only call for a diplomatic quarantine of Japan in October 1937. Behind the scenes, though, FDR approached the British about bilateral naval talks to deal with Japan but was rebuffed. The collapse of British power in the interwar period, and lack of trust between the two democracies would lead to a period of stalled initiatives and half-hearted attempts to co-operate. The US was determined to not be drawn into a war to serve British interests, and the UK was trying to hold together a huge empire with limited resources and willpower after the nation’s exhaustion of both in World War I.

In December 1937, on China’s Yangtze River, Japanese aircraft sank the gunboat *USS Panay* and attacked three Standard oil tankers while artillery units fired on the British gunboat *HMS Ladybird*. Again FDR proposed talks between the British and US navies to coordinate a possible blockade of the Japanese. This time the British agreed and “conversations” began, and although no concrete action or coalition came from these talks, they were a building block of communication between the two countries and a realization of common interests.

Military talks between the two countries sputtered on even as the war began in Europe and the Japanese made more incursions in the Far East. A major turning point for the Anglo-American alliance came on May 10, 1940, when Winston Churchill replaced Neville Chamberlain as Prime Minister. Chamberlain’s distrust of Americans was transformed overnight by the new Prime Minister. FDR and Churchill had corresponded since September

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

1939, when Churchill became first Lord of the Admiralty. Even though national interests cemented the bonds between them, the two leaders shared a mutual trust and admiration of each other, and loved their navies. Thus, the personal relationship of the two leaders would help facilitate a much broader diplomatic cooperation of the two nations.

Still a secret to the broader American public, the Anglo-American alliance took shape during the American-British Conversations (ABC-1) that went on from January through March 1941. During ABC-1, a grand strategy was formulated between the two countries' military leaders with the approval of the heads of state, which included a 'Germany first' strategy with a defensive posture towards Japan, an air offensive against Germany, and the early elimination of Italy. The two parties also agreed on a global division of geographic responsibilities, liaison machinery and procedures, but disagreed on how to strategically defend the Far East, notably Singapore. The British believed that the US should allocate a large number of capital ships to defend the fortress, but this was rejected out of hand by the Americans. The UK withdrew the proposal, allowing the agreement to go forward.

Myths abound about the "special relationship" between Great Britain and the United States. First was the idea that the British were the senior partner in the alliance (which likely came from Churchill's postwar writings), but in reality it was the Americans who were the leaders in military strength, economic resources, and therefore political direction. The US military agreed with the "Germany first" strategy and, but refused to reinforce Singapore which caused the British to revise their strategy for the Far East. Eventually the US fostered a convergence of grand strategic visions so that broad strokes of policy could be agreed to. In addition, the British believed that they could take the lead in the Atlantic and Europe while the US could focus on the Far East, but that would prove impossible by the time the US formally entered the war. Overall, the relatively far greater strength of the US compared to the UK meant that the US would get its way over most issues. The United States also dominated on an economic level with hard bargaining in the destroyers-for-bases deal, the demand for cash payments before the passage of Lend-Lease, and the end of Britain's imperial trade preferences to the benefit of US businesses. Politically, FDR held all the face cards in the hand he played with Churchill.

The origins of the alliance reflected the relative power of the two countries. The US was

superior in every respect to the UK save the vast land area, population, and resources of the Empire, and the Empire imposed significant defense vulnerabilities on the UK. Reflecting this power imbalance, as US entry into the war became almost a certainty, FDR was the master of the alliance, and Britain, compelled by necessity, was the reluctant junior partner.

FURTHER READINGS:

William T. Johnsen, *The Origins of the Grand Alliance* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2016).
 Warren F. Kimball, *Forged in War* (New York: William Morrow, 1997).
 David Stafford, *Roosevelt and Churchill: Men of Secrets* (New York: The Overlook Press, 2011)
 Jonathan Fenby *Alliance* (San Francisco, CA: MacAdam/Cage, 2007).
 Simon Berton & Joanna Potts *Warlords* (Boston, MA: Da Capo Press, 2007).
 David Kaiser, *No End Save Victory: How FDR Led the Nation into War* (New York: Basic Books, 2014).

Announcements:

- Twin Cities Civil War Round Table - 21 Nov. 2017 – *Three Paths to Glory: 2nd & 5th MN, 1st TN* - www.tccwrt.com - info@tccwrt.com
- St. Croix Valley Civil War Round Table - 27 Nov. 2017 – *2nd Minnesota Battery* - 715-386-1268 - rossandhaines@comcast.net
- Fort Snelling Civil War Symposium - 7 Apr. 2018 - 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 - www.mnangmuseum.org 612-713-2523
- Friends of Ft. Snelling, www.fortsnelling.org
- World Without Genocide, 651-695-7621, <http://www.worldwithoutgenocide.org/>
- Fagen Fighters WWII Museum, Granite Falls, MN, 320-564-6644, Air show - 16 June 2018. <http://www.fagenfighterswwiimuseum.org>.
- Airshow - Eden Prairie - 14-15 July 2018 www.wotn.org 952-746-6100
- Military History Book Club, Har Mar Barnes & Noble: - Fussel, *Great War in Modern Memory* - 29 Nov. - sdaubenspeck52@gmail.com
- Honor Flight - Jerry Kyser - crazyjerry45@hotmail.com - 651-338-2717
- CAF - Commemorative Air Force - www.cafmn.org 651-455-6942

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 2017-2018

- 2017**
- 14 Dec. Battle of the Bulge
- 2018**
- 11 Jan. Eastern Front: Stalingrad
- 8 Feb. Berlin Airlift
- 8 Mar. American Airpower in World War II
- 22 Mar. OSS Woman v. Imperial Japan
- 12 Apr. Lucian Truscott: Greatest Field CO
- 10 May Marshall Plan: Saving Victory