Welcome to the second March session of the Dr. Harold C. Deutsch World War II History Round Table.

Tonight’s speaker is Brian Crim, author of *Our Germans*. He will discuss the postwar transfer of German scientists and technology that advanced the U.S. weapons of war and eventually led to our advances in the Space Race of the 1960s.

The dark side of science and technology, developing innovative and devastating tools of destruction in World War I (poison gas, submarines, tanks, radios, aircraft, and strategic bombing, …), was vastly exceeded in World War II. The stunning development of nuclear weapons most particularly stands out. The Third Reich was the greatest innovator in a large number of modern weapons (ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, and jet aircraft). Both the Soviet Union and the United States made capturing and exploiting the German scientists and engineers responsible for such advanced weapons a major priority as the European war ended. The advent of the Cold War lent impetus to the rival powers capturing as many personnel and materiel as possible. The US was actively preparing for the next war and seemed perfectly willing to promote the captured Germans over the American scientists who had just delivered results. The US was willing to overlook Nazi connections for the sake of winning.

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One thing both proponents and critics of Project Paperclip could agree upon was that Wernher von Braun’s transactional worldview. Whether he wore an SS uniform or bore NASA credentials, von Braun’s agenda was transparent when it came to developing rockets: “We felt no moral scruples about the possible future use of our brainchild. We were interested solely in exploring space. It was simply a question with us of how the golden cow could be milked most successfully.” The emerging U.S. National Security State showered the rocket team with the unlimited resources the Third Reich could never sustain during total war. Fortunately, for von Braun, the U.S. military was willing to overlook Nazi connections for the sake of winning.

The decade between the end of Project Paperclip’s acquisition phase in September 1947 and the launching of Sputnik in October 1957 seemed to vindicate the German scientists program. The contentious immigration issue and parade of embarrassing revelations related to Paperclip dissipated in the wake of increased Soviet aggressiveness in Europe, the testing of a Soviet bomb, and, most significantly, the surprise invasion of South Korea in June 1950. As the National Security State mushroomed, exemplified by the return of limitless defense spending, the cadre of German scientists working across the spectrum of scientific endeavor assumed enormously influential positions in both the private and public sectors. Now citizens of their adoptive country, the Paperclippers skillfully negotiated the confines of the National Security State armed with security clearances, civil service contracts, and highly paid positions in the burgeoning defense industries.
The Round Tablette

Von Braun’s rocket team is certainly emblematic of this trend, but hundreds of other Paperclippers capitalized on their unprecedented access courtesy of forgiving and generous clients. No longer “Prisoners of Peace” living in a state of glorified military custody, the Paperclippers spent the first decade of the Cold War overseeing advanced research and development projects and cultivating the role of the scientist as advocate, a position many found familiar after performing similar functions in the Third Reich. Von Braun’s obsession with space exploration required accommodation with both the Wehrmacht and later the U.S. Army. Von Braun excelled at promoting himself, his team, and a space program capable of both expanding humanity’s horizons and guaranteeing American military supremacy over a technologically advanced foe.

The justification of US National Security facilitating a blind eye towards research “tainted” by having taken place in an atmosphere of war crimes is a sensitive issue in the present day. Some scientists the US worked with, like Imperial Japan’s Lt. General Shirō Ishii the notorious leader of Unit 731 in China, clearly had blood on their hands. The V-2 scientists, while not directly operating Nazi concentration camps like KZ-Dora, nonetheless are tainted by association with Nazi forced labor camps. Conversely are the scientists of the Manhattan Project correctly viewed as accessories to mass murder? The moral conundrums of these events lack clear resolution.

Further Readings:
Monique Laney, German Rocketeers in the Heart of Dixie: Making Sense of the Nazi Past During the Civil Rights Era, Yale University Press, 2015.
Annie Jacobsen, Operation Paperclip The Secret Intelligence Program That Brought Nazi Scientists to America, Little, Brown, 2014.

Announcements:
Vietnam War Roundtable – Fall of Saigon (zoom) – May 2021 –
World War I Roundtable (zoom) – 14 Apr. 2021 –
Post-9/11 Roundtable (zoom) – 26 Apr. 2021 –
All: – rdietrich@mmmilitarymuseum.org
Twin Cities Civil War Roundtable – 18 May 2021 –
The State of Civil War Roundtables - www.tccwrt.com
- info@tccwrt.com
St. Croix Civil War 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 - 3 Apr. 2021 - info@tccwrt.com
Minnesota Air Guard Museum - 612-713-2523 - www.minnangmuseum.org
8th AF Historical Society of MN, KC Hall Bloomington, Wednesdays at 1130 - https://www.8thmn.org
Friends of Ft. Snelling - www.fortsnelling.org
Winston Churchill Book Club - lin.hopkins@hotmail.com
Alliance Francaise 612-332-0436 - www.afmsp.org
Honor Flight - Jerry Kyser - 651-338-2717 - crazyjer65@hotmail.com
CAF - Commemorative Air Force - 651-455-6942 - www.cafm.org
Selim Center for Life Long Learning, UST - www.stthomas.edu/selimcenter/
Western Naval Historical Association info@wnha.net

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 2021
13Apr The Tragedy of Poland: Nazis; Soviets 11 May The “Mighty Eighth” and Victory in Europe

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See our programs on YouTube at http://youtube.com/ww2hr.