
The Round Tablette

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

Tonight's speaker is Stephen Harding, author of *The Last Battle*.

Austria's position in World War II proved to be a strangely dichotomous contrast between reality and illusion. Before the *Anschluss*, Austrian SS members, led by Ernst Kaltenbrunner and Arthur Seyss-Inquart were an underground group that subverted the legal government of dictator Kurt von Schuschnigg. Public opinion was favorable to annexation and in the 1938 *Anschluss*, the country was peacefully incorporated into the Reich. Known as *OstMark* rather than the sovereign *ÖsterReich*, the new province provided approximately 800,000 men for the Wehrmacht and approximately 150,000 Austrians joined the *Waffen SS*. About 13% of SS men were Austrians, who were about 8% of Das Reich's population. Worse, approximately 40% of the staff and 75% of the commanders of death camps were Austrian. Adolf Eichmann, Alois Brunner, Anton Göth, were notable leaders of the "final solution" and Mauthausen "labor" camp was one of the largest such in the SS death-complex.

Other notable Austrians in the Reich's service included Kurt Waldheim, United Nations Secretary General from 1972-1981. His service in the Wehrmacht in the Balkans became known when he ran for and was elected President of Austria, 1986-1992. It became clear that he was well aware of the massacres of Serbian civilians, but since he surrendered to British forces in Carinthia in

1945, he was never "de-Nazified" and instead returned to the University of Vienna and became a diplomat. In contrast, Georg von Trapp, the most successful submarine commander in the Austrian navy during the Great War (ships sunk and tonnage) and a more heroic Austrian, immortalized in the motion picture *The Sound of Music* as the vehement anti-Nazi who, in defiance of authority, flees with his family on foot over the Alps to freedom. In actuality, the von Trapps took the train to Italy, immigrated to the United States, and found fame as a singing group, but their story provided a partial basis for the myth of Austrian innocence during World War II.

Austria's amorphous status continued to be maintained by the Allied powers. In 1943, at the Moscow Conference the United Kingdom, the United States, and the Soviet Union all declared Austria the first victim of the Nazis and called for the re-establishment of a free and independent Austrian state. However, the Allies also held "*that she [Austria] has a responsibility, which she cannot evade, for participation in the war at the side of Hitlerite Germany, and that in the final settlement account will inevitably be taken of her own contribution to her liberation.*" How the Moscow Declaration would be implemented remained an open question until the end of the war.

In the spring of 1945, amid the chaos of the war's ending, Austria's place remained uncertain. Rumors flew among the Allied troops of an Alpine Redoubt where fanatical Nazis and Hitler would make their last stands. Instead, German and Austrian soldiers of the defeated *Heer* chose to make their way west, cooperate with the Western Allies, and save what they could. Some in authority cut deals with the Allies. The most famous example of this was *OPERATION COWBOY*, where General George Patton and other horse-loving

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

officers went to Hostau, Czechoslovakia and parts of Austria to save the famous Vienna Riding School's herd of Lipizzaner stallions and brood mares. Not wanting to see those beautiful horses slaughtered by hungry Russians or live under communist rule, the Austrians in charge of the horses worked with Americans to herd the 350 horses 160 miles to Mannsbach, Germany while under attack by *Waffen SS* fanatics.

The end of the war did not end Austria's vague status. Like Germany, Austria and its capital, Vienna, were divided into zones of occupation between the four Allied powers. De-Nazification efforts were limited by the notion of "good" Austrians coerced into Hitler's service. Austria's occupied status ended in 1955 with the Austrian State treaty that promised perpetual neutrality. The last Allied troops left the country in October of that year. Austria's ambiguous status saved it from two generations of occupation and provided it with a collective amnesia of its Nazi past.

FURTHER READINGS:

Stephen Harding, *The Last Battle: When US and German Soldiers Joined Forces in the Waning Hours of World War II in Europe* (Boston, MA: Da Capo Press, 2013).

Robert Citino, *The Wehrmacht's Last Stand: The German Campaigns of 1944 -1945* (Lawrence KS: University Press of Kansas, 2017).

Mark Felton, *Ghost Riders: When the US and German Soldiers Fought Together to Save The World's Most Beautiful Horses in the Last Days of World War II* (New York: Hachette Book Group, 2018).

John C. Ferguson, *Hellcats: The 12th Armored Division in World War II* (Abilene, TX: State House Press, 2004).

Patrick O'Donnell, *The Brenner Assignment: The Untold Story of the Most Daring Spy Mission of World War II* (Boston, MA: Da Capo Press, 2008)

Announcements:

Twin Cities Civil War Round Table – 17 May 2022 –*Lewis Armistead, CSA* – www.tccwrt.com - info@tccwrt.com
 St. Croix Valley Civil War Round Table – 26 May, 23 June, 28 July, 25 Aug. **contact** - 715-386-1268 - rossandhaines@comcast.net
 Military History Book Club, Har Mar Barnes &

Noble - TBD - sdaubenspeck52@gmail.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, 2nd & 4th 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 – 18 June 2022 - 320-564-6644 - <http://www.fagenfighterswwiimuseum.org>.
 Wings of the North Airshow - Eden Prairie – 22-24 July 2022 - 952-746-6100 - www.wotn.org
 Alliance Française 612-332-0436 - www.afmsp.org
 Selim Center for Lifelong Learning, UST, <https://www.stthomas.edu/selimcenter/>
 Western Naval Historical Association info@wnha.net
 Honor Flight - Jerry Kyser - 651-338-2717 - crazyjerry45@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 2022–2023

- 2022**
 13 Sept. Pacific Island War
 11 Oct. Vichy – Nazi Occupation
 24 Oct. 34th Division in North Africa
 8 Nov. Deutsch Lecture: Bretton Woods
 13 Dec. Corps of Engineers
2023
 10 Jan. Hitler & Stalin Collaborate
 14 Feb. Folly of Generals: Strategy in Europe
 14 Mar. Navies of World War II
 28 Mar. Patton & Victory in North Africa
 11 Apr. 3rd Division
 9 May 8th Air Force in Europe

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Cavalry vehicles, US & Heer Soldiers and Lipizzaner Horses (MHN.com)