Allen Dulles, the OSS, and Nazi War Criminals

This book examines the circumstances surrounding SS-Obergruppenführer Karl Wolff’s escape from prosecution for war crimes in 1945. Wolff avoided prosecution because of his role in “Operation Sunrise,” negotiations conducted by high-ranking U.S., Swiss, and British officials – in violation of the Casablanca agreements with the Soviet Union – for the surrender of German forces in Italy that enabled the Anglo-American forces to take Trieste. After 1945, Allied officials, Allen Dulles among them, in a move that later helped him ascend to the head of the CIA, shielded Wolff from prosecution to maintain secrecy about the negotiations, “Operation Sunrise” thus relates to the early origins of the Cold War in Europe and had wide-ranging implications, even in the field of justice: New evidence suggests that the Western Allies not only failed to ensure cooperation between their respective national war crimes prosecution organizations, but in certain cases even obstructed justice by withholding evidence from the prosecution.

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The translation of this work was funded by Geisteswissenschaften International – Translation Funding for Humanities and Social Sciences from Germany, a joint initiative of the Fritz Thyssen Foundation, the German Federal Foreign Office, the collecting society VG WORT, and the Boersenverein des Deutschen Buchhandels (German Publishers and Booksellers Association).
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The Dynamics of Selective Prosecution

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Acknowledgments

What reasons could there be to grant immunity to one of the highest-ranking representatives of the inner circle of SS leadership? How could such a person be successfully protected from prosecution for years and by various military and political authorities without making the promise of immunity known to a large group of people? Dieter Langewiesche and my colleagues from the Collaborative Research Center for “War Experiences: War and Society in the Modern Age” at Tuebingen University – my academic home for ten years – encouraged me to pursue these questions and to write this book on the tacit agreement between Karl Wolff and Allen Dulles.

I had the opportunity to present the results of my research in colloquia at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC, in 2006, at Salford University in Manchester in 2007, and at the German Historical Institute in Rome in 2009, and the study certainly profited from each of the ensuing discussions. My stay at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in the summer of 2006 for a workshop on “Intelligence at War” proved crucial for the development of a plausible thesis and for the collection of important archival material.

Starting in 2003, my work on the legal dimension of protecting alleged war criminals was enriched by the collaboration with Michael Salter (Sheffield). My consultancy work for a television documentary produced by WDR (West German Broadcasting) on Operation Sunrise in 2004 intensified my archival research and brought me into contact with important witnesses of the time, whose assessments and memories complemented this book where written sources were no longer available. Two people were very important in supporting my archival research: Jan Lambertz was amazing in finding relevant source material at the National Archives in Washington,
Acknowledgments

DC, and also in the Dulles Papers at the Mudd Library in Princeton and at Columbia University in New York. Stephen Tyas directed my attention to important sources, particularly from the collections of the British intelligence service in National Archives in London. I am very grateful to both of them. During the months of intensive writing, I received much-needed understanding and strong encouragement from my family, particularly my husband, David, and my children, Anastassia and Constantin.

My thanks also go to the colleagues who accompanied me through the various stages of this book and were generous with their suggestions and constructive criticism: Elena Agarossi (Rome), Norbert Frei (Jena), Christof Mauch (Washington/Munich), Bernd Wegner (Hamburg), Anselm Doering-Manteuffel (Tübingen), Filippo Focardi (Padua), Lutz Klinkhammer (GHI Rome), Georg Meyer (Freiburg), Carlo Gentile (Cologne), Wolfgang Form (Marburg), Krisztián Ungváry (Budapest), Oxana Nagornaja (Chelyabinsk), Gerald Steinacher (Bozen/Lincoln, NE), and Heinz Höhne (Großhansdorf). The progress of this study was accelerated considerably by the suggestions on the role of the OSS offered by Richard Breitman (Washington), Gerhard Weinberg (Chapel Hill), Jan T. Gross (Princeton), and István Deák (New York).

Last but not least, I am grateful for the support I have received from two decisive sources throughout this scholarly endeavor. Without the generous financial backing of the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG), I would have never written this book. I also wish to express my gratitude to the Börsenverein des Deutschen Buchhandels (Association of German Booksellers) for the substantial translation grant that made the English edition of this book possible.

The translation of this book was a major project that was started on the initiative of Eric Crahan, then senior editor at Cambridge University Press, to whom I am quite grateful. The process of translation and publishing was greatly facilitated by the congenial cooperation and professional support of the editorial staff of Senior Editor Deborah Gershenowitz and Abigail Zorbaugh at Cambridge University Press. I am also indebted to the copy editor Andrea Wright, project manager Sumitha Nithyanandan, and the technical staff of Cambridge University Press who greatly facilitated this book. My greatest thanks with regard to this project go to the woman who helped me express my thoughts and arguments in English: Dona Geyer. I consider myself fortunate to have found such a splendid translator!

While examining the protection from prosecution provided to Karl Wolff, I became distinctly aware yet again of where it all began, namely with Operation Sunrise in all its facets. Negotiations on surrendering the
Acknowledgments

European southern front started on March 8, 1945, in an effort to end the war as quickly as possible. However, the agreement could not go into force until nine weeks later, on May 2, 1945, thus wiping out, as it were, the positive effect that had originally been intended by ending the war early. The guns did not fall silent on the southern front until weeks after the Allies began their spring offensive on March 20, 1945, with a heavy death toll on both sides. This book is dedicated to all of those individuals for whom Operation Sunrise came too late.

Heidelberg, September 2012

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