

HITLER'S FATAL MISCALCULATION

Hitler's decision to declare war on the United States has baffled generations of historians. In this revisionist new history of those fateful months, Klaus Schmider seeks to uncover the chain of events which would incite the German leader to declare war on the United States in December 1941. He provides new insights not just on the problems afflicting German strategy, foreign policy and war production but, crucially, how they were perceived at the time at the top levels of the Third Reich. Schmider sees the declaration of war on the United States not as an admission of defeat or a gesture of solidarity with Japan, but as an opportunistic gamble by the German leader. This move may have appeared an excellent bet at the time, but would ultimately doom the Third Reich.

KLAUS H. SCHMIDER has been with the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst since May 1999. He is the co-author of Volume 8 of the official German history of World War II, *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg* (2007).

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Why Germany Declared War on the United States
Klaus H. Schmider
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Why Germany Declared War on the United States

KLAUS H. SCHMIDER
Royal Military Academy Sandhurst



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Days before he was due to leave Berlin for the United States, CBS correspondent William Shirer reflected on the odds of a US–German war breaking out in the near future:

‘The clash is as inevitable as that of two planets hurtling inexorably through the heavens towards each other. As a matter of fact, it may come sooner than almost all Americans at home imagine. An officer of the High Command somewhat shocked me the other day while we were discussing the matter. He said: “You think Roosevelt can pick the moment most advantageous to America and Britain for coming into the war. Did you ever stop to think that Hitler, a master at timing, may choose the moment for war with America – a moment which he thinks will give him the advantage?”

‘I must admit I never did.’

—William L. Shirer, *Berlin Diary: The Journal of a Foreign Correspondent, 1934–1941*, entry for 1 December 1940¹

¹ London: Hamish Hamilton 1941, pp 463–4. Excerpt reprinted by permission of Don Congdon Associates, Inc. © 1941, renewed 1968 by William L. Shirer. My thanks to my colleague Ed Yorke for bringing this source to my attention.

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PREFACE

The seed for this book was arguably planted on a weekend about forty years ago. My father and I were out walking the family dog, when conversation turned to the circumstances surrounding the recent fall of South Vietnam. At the time, though only a precocious ten- or eleven-year-old, I had already started to take a serious interest in the general subject area that would eventually become my profession. When I made a rather critical comment about the supposedly meddling nature of US foreign policy, my father challenged me to come up with an example. I found myself struggling at first, then hit on one that seemed to be the perfect fit: 'The American declaration of war on Germany in 1941,' I volunteered.

To this day I can still remember the expression on my father's face. Confusion, bafflement, irritation and horror were visibly vying for control over his features – in light of the fact that he was wearing shades, no small feat. After regaining his composure he told me calmly and deliberately: 'Son – we declared war on them.' Even though I did not realise it at the time, I had just had my first lesson as a baby historian: always make sure you check your sources before you go on to deliver a lecture. Over the years, I came to realise that my gaffe that day was rendered more understandable by what appeared to be the unique nature of the episode in question: to a far greater extent than any other event that has decisively shaped history in recent times, this one appeared to defy any attempts at rationalisation. Over the years, quite a few of my students have expressed astonishment when they learnt in seminar that it was Germany who declared war on the USA in December 1941, rather than the other way around. Even film directors and novelists have occasionally introduced this event into the narrative when they needed to confront their protagonists with a development which was sure to leave them utterly bemused, baffled or even horrified.²

As for my father, he went on to teach me many things besides who initiated the German–American war in 1941. Together with my mother, he continued

² For example, see *Des Teufels General*, directed by Helmut Käutner (Real-Film, 1954), and Robert Harris, *The Ghost* (London: Hutchinson 2007), p 78.

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to encourage my interest in the past in all sorts of ways and encouraged me to take up this career at a critical juncture in my life. When the time came to write this book, his constant enquiries about its progress were one of the key factors in convincing me that I had hooked something big. For this, and many other things besides, this book is dedicated to both my parents.

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Truman Anderson, Pier Paolo Battistelli, Joseph Blandino, Lutz Budrass, Christopher Duffy, Marcus Faulkner, Ed Flint, Paul Fröhlich, Christian Hartmann, Jörg Hillmann, Johannes Hürter, Gerhard Krebs, Takuma Melber, Axel Niestle, Berthold Sander-Nagashima, Nobuo Tajima, Simon Trew and Ed Yorke selflessly shared the fruits of their research with me or drew my attention to sources I would otherwise have overlooked. Matthias Strohn and Peter Lieb provided priceless assistance in decrypting handwritten sources, as did Tim Bean in the search for the ever-elusive MOMP. Particular thanks to Professor Ellen Gibbels, Dr Tamer Farghal and Dr Irina Tavlaridou for assisting a clueless humanities graduate in understanding the pathology of Parkinson's disease and the effects of assorted prescription drugs from the 1940s.

At the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, the library staff repeatedly went above and beyond the call of duty to make sure this ship finally reached a safe port. Thanks to Andrew and John for signing off on those exotic-sounding inter-library loans, time and again breathing life into that steam-driven reader-printer and shoring up my will power at critical moments with generous helpings of the library's sherry (cream). I am equally grateful to Mel for keeping me up to date on incoming journals and to Ken for rescuing from a pile of cardboard a collection of microfiches to which they had been consigned by Dr Schmider in a moment of true academic absent-mindedness. Thanks also to Margaret and her team at Graphics for putting up with those countless last-minute requests for scans and binding. The author is also indebted to the staff of the library of the German Historical Institute for their selfless assistance rendered over the years.

At the War Studies department, Sarina, Alisa, Duncan, Peter, Simon, Tim, Chris, Claus, Alex, Stewart, James, Ed, Greg, as well as the two Pauls and two Steves, not only supported this endeavour with valuable suggestions and ideas;

even more importantly, the tolerance and good humour with which they regarded the process, which saw the author, while physically present at the department, increasingly removed from more and more aspects of its day-to-day running because he was away commuting between the Berghof and the Neue Reichskanzlei, is proof of the uniqueness of the central corridor of the Faraday Hall's first floor as a work place in academe.

The Schmider family provided a truly unique setting in researching and writing this monograph. My brother in true selfless fashion found ways to relieve me of tasks which, while not rooted in the history of the Third Reich, were nevertheless important and even urgent. My wife actually kept tabs on my working hours and on more than a few occasions would actually scold me when she felt I had not spent enough time on the PC. I am reliably informed by my colleagues that such behavioural patterns are not standard issue among historian's spouses. Our son again and again provided a helping hand (or rather, hand, arm and leg) in IT-related matters and thus played a key role in preparing this manuscript for publication in the world of the twenty-first century.

ABBREVIATIONS AND GERMAN AND RUSSIAN TERMS

AA	Auswärtiges Amt (German foreign ministry)
ADAP	<i>Akten zur deutschen auswärtigen Politik</i> (post-war edition of German diplomatic communications)
AEF	American Expeditionary Force (the US Army command deployed in France in 1917–18)
AHA	<i>Allgemeines Heeresamt</i> (General Army Office of the OKH)
AK	<i>Armeekorps</i> (higher command formation of the German field army encompassing between two and five divisions)
BA/MA	Bundesarchiv/Militärarchiv, Freiburg (central archive for Prussian/German military records since 1867)
BA-Kobl.	Bundesarchiv/Koblenz
BA-Lichterf.	Bundesarchiv/Lichterfelde, Berlin (central archive for NSDAP records)
Bd.	Band (volume)
BdE	<i>Befehlshaber des Ersatzheeres</i> (commanding officer of the Replacement Army)
BdU	<i>Befehlshaber der Unterseeboote</i> (commanding officer of the U-boat arm)
Buna	name of the synthetic rubber produced between 1936 and 1945 by IG Farben. Made up of the first two letters of butadiene and natrium (German for sodium)
CHJ	<i>The Cambridge History of Japan</i> (history of Japan, published in seven volumes between 1989 and 2001)
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CUP	Cambridge University Press
DDI	<i>I Documenti Diplomatici Italiani</i> (post-war edition of Italian diplomatic communications)
DM	Deutsches Museum München
DRZW	<i>Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg</i> (semi-official history of Germany in World War II published in thirteen volumes between 1979 and 2008)
FHO	<i>Fremde Heere Ost</i> (OKH department tasked with collecting intelligence on the Red Army)
<i>Geschwader</i>	Luftwaffe unit made up of three Gruppen and comprising 120 aircraft

xvi	LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND GERMAN AND RUSSIAN TERMS
GRT	Gross Register Tonnage (measure of the internal volume of a merchant ship)
GRU	Glavnoje Rzvedyvatel'noje Upravlenije (Fourth [Intelligence] Directorate of the Red Army Staff), foreign intelligence service of the Red Army
<i>Gruppe</i>	Luftwaffe unit with a paper strength of forty aircraft
HGr	<i>Heeresgruppe</i> (army group)
IFZ	Institut für Zeitgeschichte, München (Institute for Contemporary History)
IJA	Imperial Japanese Army
IJN	Imperial Japanese Navy
IWM	Imperial War Museum
JG	<i>Jagdgeschwader</i> (single-engine fighter wing)
KG	<i>Kampfgeschwader</i> (bomber wing)
KTB Halder	<i>Kriegstagebuch</i> (personal office diary) of German Army chief of staff <i>Generaloberst</i> Franz Halder
KTB OKW	<i>Kriegstagebuch</i> (official war diary) of the German armed forces' high command
KTB Seekriegsleitung	<i>Kriegstagebuch</i> (official war diary) of the German admiralty
MBPH	' <i>Magic</i> ' background of Pearl Harbor (edition of decrypted Japanese diplomatic traffic)
MOMP	Mid-Ocean Meeting Point
n.d.	no date
NSDAP	Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei
OKH	Oberkommando des Heeres (German Army high command)
OKW	Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (German armed forces' high command)
<i>Ostheer</i>	German term for the Army in the East (term used for the totality of ground units fighting under army command in Russia)
OUP	Oxford University Press
PA/AA	Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes (archive of the German foreign ministry)
pb	paperback edition
RAM	<i>Reichsaußenminister</i> (the German foreign minister)
RLM	Reichluftfahrtministerium (German air ministry)
RSA	<i>Hitler. Reden. Schriften. Anordnungen</i> (edition of Adolf Hitler's speeches, letters and articles from 1925 to 1933, published in twelve volumes between 1991 and 2000)
SD	Sicherheitsdienst der SS (foreign intelligence service of the SS)
SkI	Seekriegsleitung (German admiralty)
Stavka	Stavka Verkhovonogo Glavnokomandovaniya (wartime Supreme Headquarters of the Soviet armed forces)

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND GERMAN AND RUSSIAN TERMS xvii

StS	<i>Staatssekretär</i> (German equivalent of permanent secretary in the civil service structure)
TB Bock	<i>Tagebuch</i> (personal diary) of <i>Generalfeldmarschall</i> Fedor von Bock (Army Group Centre)
TB Goebbels	<i>Tagebuch</i> (personal diary) of <i>Reichspropagandaminister</i> Joseph Goebbels
TB Leeb	<i>Tagebuch</i> (personal diary) of <i>Generalfeldmarschall</i> Ritter von Leeb (Army Group North)
TMWC	Trial of the Major War Criminals (multi-volume transcript of the record of the 1945–6 Nürnberg trial)
UP	University Press
USNIP	United States Naval Institute Press
WFSt	<i>Wehrmachtführungsstab</i> (OKW's headquarter staff for the operational direction of the war)
WiRüAmt	<i>Wehrwirtschafts- und Rüstungsamt</i> (OKW office for economic coordination)
ZG	<i>Zerstörergeschwader</i> (heavy fighter wing)