WAR PLANNING AT THE WAR COLLEGE IN THE MID-1930s

by

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In the decades before the United States entered the Second World War, the country was deeply concerned with domestic issues and inclined to rely upon geography and disarmament agreements to insure its national security. A policy of avoiding conflict was manifest in the size of the Army maintained by the United States between the world wars. The active duty strength of the US Army reached its low point of 131,959 in 1923. In the decade from 1925 to 1935, Army strength ranged from about 134,000 to 138,000.[1] Events in the Far East and in Europe in the late 1930s, however, caused the American Commander-in-Chief to focus his attention on long-ignored military preparedness as direct or indirect American involvement in war became a distinct possibility.

On 28 January 1938 President Franklin D. Roosevelt informed the Congress, "Our national defense is inadequate for purposes of national security and requires increase."[2] Almost a year later the entire General Staff concurred in a War Plans Division study reporting that the United States had not a single complete division, while Germany had 90 and Italy 45; Japan had 50 actively employed on the China mainland alone.[3] Despite an increase to 166,000 men in 1936 and to 178,000 in 1937, when the President spoke in 1938 the United States was a third-rate military power.[4] Russell Weigley has described our interwar Army as a small school for soldiers and repeated General Peyton C. March's observation that the United States voluntarily rendered itself more impotent than Germany under the military restrictions of the Treaty of Versailles.[5] But, he might have added, that small school for soldiers did its planning well in the modest circumstances imposed upon it between the wars.

Even as events in the Far East, Africa, and Europe provided evidence of international instability in the form of Japanese and Italian aggression and German revisionism that became aggression, there was a generalized hope in the United States that somehow we could stay out of harm's way. While it can be argued, as Charles Beard did, that our undeclared war in the Atlantic would have resulted ultimately in a formal state of war between the United States and Germany, it was the Japanese bombs that fell on Pearl Harbor that drew the United States into the shooting war. In rapid succession the United States declared war on Japan, and Germany declared war on the United States.

Well before US entry into the war, the basic strategy of the United States in the event of a two-ocean war was to defeat Germany first before turning to the task of defeating

Japan. It is the background of this basic strategy that concerns us here. More particularly, an initial examination of US military planning at the Army War College during the 1930s suggests a gradual evolution in strategy rather than an abrupt switch from plan ORANGE—the plan that considered war between the United States and Japan, both without allies— to the RAINBOW plans that envisioned the United States as a member of an alliance at war with a coalition. More work needs to be done at both the Military History Institute and at the National Archives fully to document this contention. This article is but the beginning of a modest revision of a generally held thesis.

Mainstream historical interpretation emphasizes a precipitous change as the United States turned from the Pacific to a "Germany first" strategy between 1938 and 1941. That interpretation overlooks documentation of sound earlier planning that influenced key Army and Navy officers who were instrumental in the 1938-41 shift in strategy. Sufficient unpublished evidence suggests that while events in the late 1930s resulted in a shift in strategy in which Germany was identified as the chief foe, the roots of that shift can be traced to planning begun in the mid-1930s. The quiet planning by the small school of soldiers had to await events before it became visible, but classroom exercises became Allied World War II strategy.

Writing in 1953, Maurice Matloff gave full credit to the harried military planners of 1939-41 who raced against the clock to prepare the militarily weak United States for a war that by then seemed probable, but in so doing he underestimated the importance of solid and useful work that had been accomplished by earlier planners.[6] War planners at the US Army War College prepared the groundwork for the great strategic decisions of 1939-41 at least as early as 1934. These student planners enjoyed a close and direct working relationship with the War Plans Division of the War Department General Staff. In effect the connection between the college and the War Plans Division was so close that the college was virtually a planning agency of the War Department.

In fairness to Matloff, who did pioneer work soon after the events he described, he also said: "The full story must be sought in the archives of the Service, Inter-Service, and British-American staff agencies, which are still in the very early stages of being mined by professional scholars."[7] He was right.[8]

Referring to the color plans of the 1920s and 1930s, Matloff said:

> A characteristic of all these plans was their limited scope. Nothing in the way of a global or total war was envisaged. With the exceptions of ORANGE (signifying Japan), they bore little relation to contemporary developments in international affairs. Central in all was the concept—in accord with United States national policy—of the defense of the Continental United States and its interests by the United States alone against any foreign threat.[9]

Describing the frenetic activities of US military planners as war seemed inevitable, he continued:

> But during 1939-1941 the character of war planning underwent a change from the color plan period. They went considerably beyond the earlier abstract exercises. That change stemmed from the trend in strategic thinking which began in the fall of 1938 when the military and civilian leaders of the United States first began to work on the assumption that American security might be jeopardized by Axis aggression. At that time the American military staff began to extend the scope of war planning to take into account not only the rising danger of war with Japan but also the reassertion of German imperialist aims. The trend of events abroad obliged, and the President's concern licensed, the military planners to study the possible effect on American security of action resulting from concerted aggression by Germany and Italy, in conjunction with action by Japan. As a result of the exchange of ideas in May and June, 1939, between the Army and the Navy, the Joint Board, the

highest inter-Service agency, authorized the preparation of five new basic war plans. Unlike the earlier color plans, each providing for operations against one or another single power, the five new plans envisaged the probability of war against more than one enemy and in more than one theater. Hence the new plans received appropriate code names of Rainbows No. 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5.

The Rainbow plans represented an important step in the efforts of the planners to reestablish contact with reality in their war plans. They were the first joint plans which envisaged a possible global war.[10]

One takes no exception to Matloff's conclusion: "The principle that the first aim had to be the defeat of Germany—perhaps the single most important controlling decision in all British-American war policies in World War II—thus emerged [from the American Rainbow 5 and ABC 1]."[11] He is right about the decision, but he is wrong about earlier planning. As archives at the US Army War College now being "mined" reveal, planning from 1934 to 1937 was not of "limited scope"; did envisage global or total war; bore more than "little relation to contemporary developments in international affairs"; was concerned with more than defense of the continental United States; foresaw the US fighting "more than one enemy in more than one theater" as part of a coalition; involved US Navy and Marine Corps officers, thus making them joint plans; was in contact with reality; took simultaneous war with Germany and Japan into account; and recognized a threat in the German-Japanese-Italian Axis.

Matloff's characterization of pre-1934 military plans as abstract exercises lacking contact with reality may be accurate, but planning at the Army War College after 1934 reflects a keen awareness of contemporary international developments. Matloff's early incomplete interpretation, however, is pervasive and durable.[12]

USAWC PLANNING AND THE GENERAL STAFF

Planning at the War College was important to the War Department General Staff, especially to the War Plans Division. In his *Annual Report of the Secretary of War, 1899*, Elihu Root proposed the establishment of an Army War College that would, among other things, devise plans. He also proposed the establishment of a General Staff. To create a General Staff required congressional action, however, so while Root could and did create the War College by executive action, he was powerless to legislate a General Staff. Even before the formal creation of the General Staff, however, Root was using the War College Board as a General Staff.[13] The Army War College quickly proved its usefulness to the Army. It wasn't long before Generals Hugh L. Scott, then Chief of Staff of the Army, and John Pershing, Commander-in-Chief of the American Expeditionary Forces, praised graduates both for their preparation for war and for their conduct of war.[14]

During the interwar period at least two recurring issues arose and were variously addressed by succeeding commandants. One issue was whether students and faculty should give their attention to the great problems of national defense or to the narrower problem of military science, to strategy or operations.

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The other issue was the college's involvement with the General Staff, especially the War Plans Division, and the degree to which a coherent and autonomous curriculum should be followed at the college without General Staff meddling. Neither issue was resolved. Successive commandants decided those issues as their preference and experience dictated.[15] During the tenure of Commandant Hanson Ely (July 1923 to November 1927) a ten-week long "War Plans Period" dominated the curriculum, with Plans ORANGE, RED, and GREEN receiving prominence. Ties between the Army and Navy War Colleges were firmly established to facilitate joint planning.[16] Major General William D. Connor, later Superintendent at West Point, was Commandant from November 1927 to April 1932, a period characterized by an international crusade to outlaw war.[17] Isolationism prevailed as the nation rejected great military adventures, and the Army concerned itself chiefly with North American defense.

In 1932, George S. Simonds assumed command of the War College. He came to the college directly from his position as Chief of the War Plans Division, established a War Plans Division at the college, and introduced a course in coalition warfare. During his tenure the 1935 and 1936 plans concerned with simultaneous war with Germany and Japan were developed. When he left the War College in 1935, Simonds became Deputy Chief of Staff to Douglas MacArthur. His successor, Malin Craig, was Commandant of the college for less than a year before he replaced MacArthur as Chief of Staff of the Army. While Commandant, Craig introduced "Current Events" and later "Foreign News" under the G-2 Division of the college in order to insure that war planning would be realistic. The class was organized into five work groups, and each group closely followed developments in an assigned list of nations. Students were directed to ask how the policies of the specific nations affected the United States.[18] It is significant that commandants came from influential positions and went to key staff appointments as they left the War College.[19] The nexus between the college and the War Department was direct and constant.

Students were required to be keenly aware of developments around the world and to incorporate reality rather than abstractions into their war plans. One notes an increase in detailed map studies of the Canal Zone, Panama, and the Philippine Islands under Simonds, and in 1936 Alaska received renewed interest in plans as the defensive Alaska-Hawaii-Panama strategic triangle was stressed, reflecting widespread realization that the Philippines could not be successfully defended.[20] In 1938 Brazil and Argentina received attention. "Reflecting State Department concern that Hitler or Mussolini might attempt to exploit the situation of ethnic groups in South America, as Hitler had that of the Sudeten Germans in Czechoslovakia, Deputy Chief of Staff George C. Marshall directed the War College to determine the force required to protect Brazil from German and Italian machinations."[21] Within ten weeks a special War College committee produced a plan for a rapidly deployable Hemispheric Defense Force of 112,000 submitted at the end of March 1939.[22]

On 17 June 1940, one-third of the Class of 1940 received orders for duty on the War Department General Staff.[23] The remainder of the class was divided into five sections to conduct studies for the corresponding five sections of the General Staff (G-1, G-2, G-3, G-4, and the War Plans Division). In a letter from the Adjutant General dated 11 June 1940, the War Department announced that the Army War College course for 1940-41 was suspended, an announcement repeated throughout the war years.[24] The college, along with many other American peacetime activities, was closed for the duration. Mobilization from fewer than 200,000 soldiers before the war to more than eight million in 1945 required a professional core to organize, train, deploy, equip, and employ the vastly expanded US Army. Those who would have been students in earlier years were a part of that professional core. The college, an unaffordable luxury, would reopen when peace returned. Rather than

preparing for war, would-be students would conduct war.

Archival evidence shows that the connection between the War College and the "real world" was regular and intimate, not abstract. Each year the Chief of the War Plans Division lectured at the college, outlining the mission, tasks, and organization of that division of the General Staff. The actual process involved in developing plans in the War Plans Division was carefully explained before the students turned to their assigned plans. Plans on file at the Military History Institute illustrate shifts in emphasis from year to year as students addressed issues important to the General Staff. In addition to war planning developed by groups of student officers, individual student studies responded to General Staff requirements. The college routinely requested a list of topics to be addressed by students, and the War Plans Division provided the list. The topics were assigned, completed, and at least in some cases, graded, as an officer of War Plans Division would comment in a short paragraph concluding with a grade of unsatisfactory, satisfactory, good, very good, or excellent.[25] Sometimes a letter would be sent to a member of the class notifying him that his individual study was to be used by the War Department.[26] The close working relationship between the War College and the General Staff is clearly shown by the tasking of War College students and faculty to do studies and devise plans. Further, the sequence of assignments of commandants from the General Staff, especially from the War Plans Division, to the college and back to the very top positions in the Army put the Army War College in the mainstream of Army concerns in the 1930s. Finally, the students were prepared for General Staff work and, at the end of the course, either were recommended for duty on the General Staff—some for specific assignments and some with duties unassigned—or were not recommended for the General Staff.[27] From the inception of the Army War College to the outbreak of World War II, the college and the General Staff were two manifestations of a single idea: Elihu Root's desire to establish an American "brain of the Army."

PLANNING AT THE USAWC BEFORE 1938

A War Plan RAINBOW dated 14 May 1927 is on file at the Military History Institute.[28] Quaint and anachronistic in retrospect, it represents a clear departure from exclusive concern with ORANGE (Japan), GREEN (Mexico), RED (Great Britain), and various BLUE (United States) readiness plans, the kind of planning that could be regarded as technical exercises devoid of political reality. It departs from worst-case planning—war with Britain or Japan or both—and from purely local wars with neighbors. This plan is atypical of pre-1934 plans in that instead of the United States fighting alone against a foe without allies, the United States is posed in alliance with the League of Nations. RAINBOW is the League of Nations. For political reasons not made clear in the précis, the military plan called for the United States to seize Halifax and St. Johns, Newfoundland. Joint Plan RAINBOW was based on the assumption that the League was strong enough to enforce the provisions of its covenant, but the United States was primarily concerned with hemispheric defense. It is regrettable that the entire plan was not found in the archives, but the important fact remains that Joint Plan RAINBOW debuted in 1927.

More pertinent to our purpose here is a detailed plan for coalition warfare in the Pacific and Far East dated March 1934.[29] In that plan, ORANGE and CARNATION (Manchukuo) provoke war with PINK (Russia—note: Russia, not the Soviet Union). As the situation is developed, PINK is joined by YELLOW (China), RED (Britain plus Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and all British dependencies in the Far East minus India), and BLUE (United States). US and allied naval and ground forces are organized for combat, and the plan spells out coordination with allies. Clearly this plan bore more than little relation to contemporary

developments in international affairs as long-standing US concerns for ORANGE were modified to take into account the new Japanese-dominated status of Manchukuo.

Further, Admiral Bryant of the Office of Naval Operations brought the US Navy's perspective to the Army War College students before they addressed the design of the plan. A series of lectures and conferences was conducted to make the planners fully aware of political and military developments in the world and in the region. Brigadier General Charles E. Kilbourne, assistant Chief of Staff of the War Plans Division, War Department General Staff, lectured the student planners on "Relations of the War Plans Division with other Divisions of the General Staff."[30] The location of the Army War College in Washington made it convenient for key Army, Navy, and State Department officials to instruct and advise the student planners at the college, and this was done. Thus combined operations (operations with allies) and joint operations (those involving both the Army and Navy Departments) against more than one foe (Japan and Manchukuo) were planned in 1934. Further, as will be seen, speakers from universities, the Army and Navy staffs, and the press insured that planning was based upon sound understanding of contemporary international events.

One of the student officers in the War Plans Course taken by all War College students was a Captain William Halsey, USN, a member of the Class of 1934. One wonders if Admiral Halsey reflected upon the reality of the planning of 1934 as he steamed about the Pacific from 1942 to 1945.

The following year a planning group at the Army War College assessed the contemporary international situation before drawing a plan, "Subject: Participation with Allies," dated 17 April 1935.[31] The allies—France, Italy, Great Britain, and the United States—faced an enemy coalition called "the Nazi Confederation"—Germany, Austria, Hungary, and Yugoslavia. This 202-page document, not including maps and overlays, considers war in two theaters and is clearly responsive to events of the day.

In presenting the plan to the War College faculty, the chairman of the planning group made the following remark: "This situation was conceived by the Faculty some months ago and events of today outside the walls of this institution are in a fair way to substantiate the Faculty's flight of fancy to a degree most flattering to the perspicacity of that august body."

A review of the highlights of the plan illustrates a keen awareness of events on the international scene and military events in step with political developments.

The situation is developed as follows:

- January 1935: a coup d'etat puts Austrian Nazis in power; Austria enters into a political and economic pact with Germany.
- Italy, with the approval of France and Great Britain, seizes the Brenner and Reschen passes and occupies two Austrian towns; revolt in Italian Tyrol follows.
- War is declared on 10 January, with Italy on one side and Austria and Germany on the other.
- Italy sends troops to Albania on 20 January in order to control the Adriatic; Yugoslavia mobilizes and returns to Hungary certain of her former territory in consideration for a guaranty of Yugoslavia's northern border.
- Hungary casts her lot with Germany and Austria and demands territory from Czechoslovakia.
- In the middle of February a revolt in the Ukraine breaks out, financed by Germany.
- At the end of February, a Nazi Confederation is formed consisting of Germany, Austria, Hungary, and Yugoslavia; Yugoslavia is promised Albania and Fiume.
- France joins Italy.
- Czechoslovakia is overrun by Hungarian troops; France holds the west bank of the Rhine. *The French advance is limited to the Rhine due to the demand of French public opinion that war be limited.* (Emphasis added.)
- Russia closes her western frontier, reinforces her Far Eastern army, and engages in suppression of revolt in the Ukraine.

• Japan has a secret understanding with Germany and concentrates a large force in northwest Manchukuo; demands a free hand in China, cessation of further fortification of Singapore and Hongkong; notifies the United States that any movement of the US fleet west of the 180th meridian (roughly halfway between Hawaii and Wake Island) would be considered a hostile act; asserts right of sovereignty over mandated islands which she was fortifying.

• Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States adopt common policy in the Pacific and Far East as of 20 March.

• In Europe, Germans conduct unrestricted aerial warfare in February and March, including chemical warfare against French and Italian industrial centers and against shipping in the Mediterranean.

• In the United States,

> *The American people loudly demanded that the US not enter the conflict no matter what the cost.* Laws were passed withdrawing protection to nationals or property in the war zone and mindful of our World War debts forbidding the making of loans to belligerents . . . . The people sought for someone to blame, and Jewish and other anti-Nazi propaganda already active, seized on this opportunity to make Germany and her allies the scape goats [for the loss of trade with Europe] . . . then came the Japanese ultimatum denying to our fleet, movement west of the 180th meridian, which hurt the pride of Americans and opened their eyes to the real threat to our economic interests and indeed to our commercial future. [Emphasis added.]

• On 22 March, Japan closes the Sea of Japan and the China Sea to all foreign ships not licensed by the Japanese government.

• On 30 March, the United States and Britain declare a state of armed neutrality in the Pacific; this action is warmly received by the US public.

• Shortly thereafter, several American and British ships are destroyed in the ports of Le Havre and Cherbourg by Nazi aircraft.

• On 10 April, the United States and Britain declare war on the Nazi Confederation.

Proceeding from this scenario, the planning group, acting as Chief of Staff of the Army and President of the Joint (Army-Navy) Board, prepared memoranda of instructions for the American representative on the Inter-Allied War Council, for the commander of the expeditionary force to be sent to the European Theater, and for the commander of the US fleet, referred to by the planners as "the Mr. House, the General Pershing and the Admiral Mayo of today." The main decisions of the planning group were:

> (1) That the United States is committed to the War in Europe but sooner or later will have to deal with Japan.
>
> (2) Our war aims are to prevent the Nazi or any other Confederation becoming supreme in Europe, and Japan becoming all powerful in the Far East. *It will not suffice that our assistance be limited to money and supplies and it has been decided to send an expeditionary force to Europe* for moral effect and to strengthen our position at the peace table. Public opinion however, will support a war with Japan more heartily than one in Europe; moreover conditions now are different than when we entered hostilities in 1917 for the Allies already have a sufficient superiority not only in numbers but in training and supplies. Hence, all we need send to France is a respectable force—and *we can save our main effort for Japan* . . . . [Emphasis added.]
>
> (3) As for the Navy, at sea too our Allies need no help. However, for strategic and for both national and international political reasons, it is essential that a strong naval force be stationed in the Pacific.

The Nazi main objective was assessed as "that of regaining all territory lost by the member nations in the World War and of extending their territory in Europe to the southeast. This strategic time will probably be coincident with the entry of Japan into the war with the objective of neutralizing American and British effort in Europe."

This 1935 plan is sensitive to French and American public opinion and its constraining influence on the respective governments. It anticipates the "Sitzkrieg" of September 1939 to May 1940, and the reference to the insufficiency of money and supplies anticipates the vain hope that Lend-Lease would be enough to defeat the Axis Powers. The planning document refers to the "hesitation of the French people to endorse the plan of their high command to engage in offensive operations across the Rhine." The planners were prescient in tracing American attitudes from antipathy to war to grudging acquiescence in the recognition of risks to American interests, and perceptive in noting the preference among the American people to fight the Japanese rather than Europeans. The American alliance with Great Britain also receives attention: "The growing union with Great Britain, emphasized by the joint action in the Pacific, has been popular. The necessity of acting in concert with Great Britain in both the European and possible Pacific theaters grew to be generally appreciated."

Both the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and the success of the German blitzkrieg in the spring of 1940 lay in the future, so military planning in the spring of 1935 proceeded on the assumption of greater allied strength than would be the case as the United States entered the two-theater war. By the summer of 1940, Germany dominated West and Middle Europe, and British survival was in doubt. After 22 June 1941, the survival of the Soviet Union became a big question mark. Further, the Japanese would be clearly ascendant in the Far East and Western Pacific in late 1941. The American President would be forced to make hard choices about the priorities for scarce war materials as America converted to a war economy. His own total forces, long neglected, would grow from hundreds of thousands to 13 million in the course of the war. At the same time, it was necessary to provide weapons and equipment to Britain and the Soviet Union in order to sustain those allies in their war effort. Their crystal ball had flaws, but the 1935 planning group at the War College clearly anticipated the two-ocean war that lay six years in the future.

Variations of the 1935 plan received attention in succeeding years at the Army War College, and they continued to reflect events in Europe, Africa, and the Far East. In the 1936 war plans we find the German-Italian-Japanese combination in place as global war involving the United States continued to be viewed as a distinct possibility.

As was the case in 1935, thorough preparation preceded actual planning. Lectures and conferences on the missions and functions of the General Staff were conducted at the War College, and those of the War Plans Division were, as usual, highlighted.[32] The War Plans Division was proud to call itself *primus inter pares* as its spokesman explained the process—in excruciating detail—from inception of a plan through approval by the Secretaries of War and Navy to ultimate filing of the plan. A G-2 (Intelligence) course was conducted to provide the latest data on the contemporary international situation to planners. One report, "Subject: Strategical Survey—Germany," dated 14 December 1935, concluded: "Germany's rearmament program should be completed within three to five years. In a European War beginning prior to accomplishment of their rearmament effort, the Reich will endeavor to remain neutral. Failing this, she will join any coalition that will insure her expansion to the southeast."[33] This US Army estimate of German military readiness for war came very close to professional estimates by German planners who were concerned about Hitler's too-hasty buildup of forces.

Intense work to develop the student war plan, "Participation with Allies," took place at the Army War College from 19 March to 15 April 1936.[34] Italy, it will be recalled, was an ally of the United States in the 1935 plan. In 1936, probably not arbitrarily, Italy was found in the enemy camp along with Germany, Austria, and Hungary. While no evidence leaps out of the files, one could safely assume that the Italian adventure in Ethiopia and Hitler's moral support of that

enterprise relegated Italy to the enemy camp in 1936. This time the enemy was called "The Central Coalition." Allied to the United States were France, the British Commonwealth, Greece, and Turkey. Poland was neutral but "favored the enemy coalition." Again the planners drew Japan into the global picture. Russia was concerned with both her western and eastern frontiers. Russia mobilized "possibly in anticipation of German, Polish, or Hungarian expansion into the Ukraine, but definitely to reinforce Siberia against Japan. Japan, known to have a defensive alliance with Germany, has demanded recognition of an exclusive Japanese hegemony in the Far East."[35] The United States declared war on Germany on 5 March 1936 in reaction to attacks by coalition air forces and submarines on American shipping on the high seas and in allied ports. Interestingly, the plan has the United States declaring war on Germany just as—in the "real world"—German generals are receiving their marching orders to remilitarize the Rhineland. This is a coincidence, but it demonstrates that the War College planners were keenly aware that developments on the international stage could involve the United States in a European or Pacific war or both.

Both the 1935 and 1936 plans connect German and Japanese aggression as it affects the United States. The Soviet Union, concerned for its western frontier, seems even more absorbed in Japanese activities on the Soviet eastern frontier and in national movements within the Soviet Union. The United States, recalling the unrestricted submarine warfare conducted by Germany that most directly brought her into World War I, also looks ahead to the undeclared naval war in the Atlantic before the attack on Pearl Harbor resulted in declared war. The considerable attention to aerial warfare in both plans also links them to reality, making them more than "abstract exercises."

PROFESSOR LANGER'S LECTURES

Basing their estimates of the international situation on their own strategical survey of Germany and Europe, the 1935 Army planners came much closer to the mark than a distinguished Harvard historian did some three years later. On 6 January 1938, Professor William L. Langer addressed the Army War College. His theme was "The German Situation."[36] Langer began by calling *My Struggle*, Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, "that rather silly book"! He went on to say "I don't believe we can use that text as a starting point for a discussion of German policy." In a remarkable series of pronouncements, Langer was so consistently wrong that historians are well advised to note the danger in investing their professional reputations in predicting the future. Here is Langer on Russia and Germany:

> Let me say at this point, in the first place, that the Ukraine is a long way from Germany, that it would be most difficult for the Germans to get there, and it would be even more difficult for the Germans to stay there, if they once got there. I myself can put no stock whatever into these yarns about Germany's intentions of taking the Ukraine from Russia and I am impressed with the fact that between Germany and Russia lies Poland, a broad, substantial country as you can see on the map, with a pretty considerable population and a reasonably formidable army, I should say . . . as long as Poland remains reasonably strong, it seems to me that Poland will be a very effective barrier against any German attempt to advance into southern Russia.
>
> Perhaps I am losing too much time over this subject. I don't take it seriously, as I say, the whole business between Germany and Russia is a very obscure one.

Langer also presented a case for historic German-Russian friendship; he elaborated on binding treaties dating from 1922, 1926, and 1933 and highlighted shared economic interests. He concluded this portion of his lecture by saying: "As a practical proposition, I think neither of those two countries has any idea of aggression on the other, and I am therefore skeptical about any serious development in that direction."

He was equally skeptical regarding Czechoslovakia: "Here again I must express some skepticism with regard to Germany's aggressive purposes in this area . . . . I don't believe in any German attempt to conquer Czechoslovakia." And further: "I don't imagine anybody is expecting a clash between Germany and France in the near future . . . . I don't think that that is a very urgent matter at the present time."

He concluded his analysis:

> It is quite conceivable after all that they [Germans and French] may not strike anywhere. I have been told by people in an excellent position to know, among others by the Secretary of the German Embassy here in Washington, who was for years a personal aide of Hitler, that Hitler, of all people, is so tremendously impressed by his war experiences, which he talks about all the time, that the one uppermost thought in his mind is the desire to spare the German people an ordeal of that sort in the future. And when all is said and done, it is now five years since Hitler came into power. During that time we have been promised a German attack from week to week, you might say, and it hasn't come yet. I am at least willing to reserve judgement and see what happens in the future. In the interim, I think it would be well for all of us to be circumspect and reserve judgement.

Professor Langer forgot that a diplomat is a gentleman sent abroad to lie for his country!

One would like to report that during the question-and-answer period following his lecture, Professor Langer staged a miraculous recovery and was brilliant. Unfortunately it got worse.

> Question: (Lieutenant Colonel del Valle) To what do you ascribe our great misinformation and misconception in this country of the actual German situation? That is to say, all one hears is hostility for Hitler and for Germany, and then what you have shown us to be their ultimate ambitions?
>
> Answer: I think there are two reasons. In the first place, the Germans with all their tremendous endowment are terribly dumb, it seems to me, when it comes to dealing with the psychology of other peoples. They showed themselves almost heroic in that regard before the [first world] war, and after all such things as occurred during the war—the Zimmerman note and all that business—seemed to me to demonstrate a complete incapacity to see the thing as someone else might see it. That I think is one important reason. They are pure propagandists; they are rather elephantine in their efforts to persuade other peoples. The other reason is—I see no reason why it should not be stated here—is I think the Jewish influence has a great deal to do with it. You have to face the fact that some of our most important American newspapers are Jewish-controlled, and I suppose if I were a Jew I would feel about Nazi Germany as most Jews feel and it would be most inevitable that the coloring of the news takes on that tinge. As I read the *New York Times*, for example, it is perfectly clear that every little upset that occurs, (and after all many upsets occur in a country of 70 million people) is given a great deal of prominence. The other part of it is soft-pedalled or put off with a sneer. So that in a rather subtle way, the picture you get is that there is no good in the Germans whatever.

It is difficult to believe that the Army War College invited Professor Langer back the following year and even more difficult to believe that he accepted. Perhaps it was the college's non-attribution policy for remarks made there, or Professor Langer's knowledge that his audience of the year before, except for some of the faculty, had departed. In any event on 7 January 1939 Langer was back at the War College to lecture on "The German Situation."[37] He didn't get it right this time, either. In his introductory remarks, he said:

> I analyzed the German policy as I saw it at that time, and I find now that I guessed right on some things and guessed wrong on

> others, which is very apt to happen to almost everyone. Certainly, the last year has been such that no one could very well foresee it. In fact, I think you would have a hard time in finding a parallel to it, except in the career of the great Napoleon.

He continued: "The period of annexation has for the most part come to an end, and the Germans will content themselves with their economic domination and with a very extensive political influence all the way from Germany to the Black Sea." Further: "I don't imagine the Germans have even the vaguest idea of annexing the Ukraine." He repeated his opinion, enunciated the year before, regarding German caution in dealing with Poland. He also generalized about the Franco-German situation: "In short, I think there is a possibility of better relationship between France and Germany than there has been for a long time, and there certainly is a considerable body of opinion in France which favors a closer and friendly relationship." He seemed to welcome what he called the "general liquidation," meaning the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia. He explained the French and British positions in that matter by saying: "Having fought a war for self-determination, it was a little difficult to fight another one to prevent self-determination." From these observations flowed his optimistic conclusion:

> I don't think that the outlook in Europe is a very pleasant one. There are so many questions on the board that almost anything might lead to a crack-up. On the other hand, I am not inclined to be as pessimistic as some people. It seems to me there is always a possibility of some peaceful achievement and I certainly hope that in the long run some such arrangement can be devised.

In the question-and-answer period after his lecture, the polite questions of the military officers suggested that they were less sanguine about German aggression than Professor Langer was. He seemed to be an apologist for German bad behavior. This is not to suggest that Langer was pro-Nazi. His generation of historians generally admired Germany, and many had studied there. It is suggested, rather, that one loses objectivity by being too close to one's subject.

The Langer lectures of 1938 and 1939 were cited at some length less to punish him than to demonstrate that the military pragmatists observing what was taking place in Europe came closer to getting it right than a man steeped in European history and culture. Further, the pragmatists had been getting it right since 1934.

IN CONCLUSION

Sometimes the plausibility of readily apparent cause seems to make further inquiry unnecessary. That the US Army was so neglected—even ignored—in the 1920s and 1930s is widely known. The feverish activity and success of US military planners as the world slid into the war of 1939-45 is also widely known. Focus has been, not unnaturally, on the herculean efforts of those who transformed the United States from third-rate to superpower status between 1938 and 1945. Generally overlooked in the telling of this story has been the quiet planning that had been going on at the Army War College in the mid-1930s. That neglected planning was the springboard that allowed wartime planners to launch existing concepts. It would appear that the soundness of that planning has not been examined because the interwar US Army was written off as a small provincial subculture whose petty concerns were unworthy of careful examination. It has been dismissed as being irrelevant, a kind of backwater, and understandably so when one considers the drama and vastness of events from 1939 to 1945 and the years that followed.

The Army War College did not provide the War Plans Division of the General Staff with plans that could be dusted off as war came to America. The fact is, however, that officers attending the War College, especially from 1934 onward, were conditioned to think in global terms totally out of proportion to the contemporary capabilities of the small services that sent them to reflect on war and

to plan for it for a year as students. The majority of these officers were assigned to key positions on the General Staff when they completed the course. Interaction between the General Staff, the Navy, and the State Department characterized the War College experience from at least 1932. A succession of commandants came from important and influential positions to the college and frequently moved on to even more important and influential assignments. The Chief of the War Plans Division and regional specialists came to the college each year to set the tone for planning and to integrate reality into the course. In brief, the planning was not abstract and out of touch with events on the world stage. Many graduates of the War College achieved fame as wartime leaders,[38] but even more of them remained anonymous as they plied their trade as planners and staff officers during World War II, using skills honed in peacetime at the War College. The college thus made a major contribution both to the growth of an Army of fewer than 200,000 scattered about in small garrisons to an Army of over eight million soldiers, and to the broadness of vision usually ascribed to our wartime planners. The modest circumstances of the US Army between the wars did not prevent planning on the grand scale. Realistic planning, including the planning for a two-ocean war, did not await the events of the late 1930s. It can be traced to at least 1934.

NOTES

1. Marvin A. Kreidberg and Merton G. Henry, *History of Military Mobilization in the United States Army, 1775-1945* (Washington: Department of the Army, 1955), p. 547.

2. Franklin D. Roosevelt, *The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt*, 13 volumes (New York: Macmillan, 1941-50), VII, 66-71.

3. Kreidberg and Henry, p. 547.

4. It should be noted that the National Defense Act of 1920 contemplated a Regular Army of 18,000 officers and 280,000 enlisted men. Congress chose not to provide the funds to reach those levels. See *The Progress of the War Department In Compliance with the National Defense Act of 1920* (Washington: GPO, 1922), pp. 1-6.

5. Russell F. Weigley, *History of the United States Army* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), p. 403.

6. Maurice Matloff, "Prewar Military Plans and Preparations, 1939-41," *United States Naval Institute Proceedings*, 79 (July 1953), 741-48; see also, Maurice Matloff, "The American Approach to War, 1919-1945," in Michael Howard, ed., *The Theory and Practice of War* (London: Cassell, 1965), pp. 213-43. Matloff had not changed his interpretation in 1965. See especially p. 218. "Limited in scope, the plans envisaged neither global nor total war."

7. Matloff, "Prewar Military Plans," p. 742.

8. Sources preceded by the abbreviation AWC (Army War College) in these notes can be found in the archives located at the US Army Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, Pa. Some related sources can be found at the National Defense University archives in Fort McNair, Washington, D.C., and in the National Archives Record Service (NARS), Washington, D.C. The AWC sources are, for the most part, not yet mined by scholars.

9. Matloff, "Prewar Military Plans," p. 741.

10. Ibid., pp. 743-44.

11. Ibid., p. 744.

12. Matloff's dismissal of pre-1938 war planning as abstract and out of touch with realities persists to the present.

13. George S. Pappas, *Prudens Futuri: The US Army War College, 1901-1967* (Carlisle Barracks, Pa.: Alumni Association of the US Army War College, 1973), pp. 13, 22-28. See also, National Archives Record Service, *Introduction to NARS Microfilm 912*, War College Division Index. The War College performed the general staff functions from 1901 to 1903 and from 1910 to 1918. From 1920 to 1940 the college responded to the needs of the General Staff. After 9 February 1918 the War College Division was known as the War Plans Division.

14. Pappas, pp. 87-88.

15. Harry P. Ball, *Of Responsible Command: A History of the United States Army War College*, an unpublished manuscript planned for 1984 publication by the US Army War College Alumni Association, ch. IX, p. 31, and ch. X, p. 25.

16. Ibid., ch. X, pp. 19-20.

17. Ibid., ch. XI, pp. 1-13.

18. Ibid., ch. XII, pp. 1-12.

19. For example, William D. Connor, Commandant from 1927 to 1932, had been G-4; George S. Simonds, Commandant from 1932 to 1935, had been Chief, War Plans Division and would become Deputy Chief of Staff; Malin Craig, Commandant in 1935, had been Chief of Cavalry and G-3 and would become Chief of Staff of the Army. James E. Hewes, Jr., *From Root to McNamara: Army Organization and Administration, 1900-1963* (Washington: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1975), appendix B, pp. 384-90.

20. Growing doubts among American professional soldiers regarding their ability to defend the Philippines can be traced from 1905 to the 1930s. Especially good on the subject is Ronald Schaffer, "General Stanley D. Embick: Military Dissenter," *Military Affairs*, 37 (October 1973). See also: Fred Greene, "The Military View of American National Policy, 1904-1940," *American Historical Review*, 2 January 1961; Louis Morton, "War Plan ORANGE: Evolution of a Strategy," *World Politics*, 2 January 1959; Mark A. Stoler, "The Pacific-First Alternative in American World War II Strategy," *The International History Review*, 3 July 1980; Roy K. Flint, "The United States Army On The Pacific Frontier, 1899-1939," in *The American Military and the Far East*, proceedings of the Ninth Military History Symposium (Colorado Springs, Colo.: US Air Force Academy, 1980).

21. Ball, ch. XII, p. 12.

22. Concern for long-range aerial bombing launched from Dakar to Brazil was real. After all, our B-17 posed the possibility that an enemy could develop a bomber capable of bombing the Western Hemisphere from bases in Africa.

23. *Chronicle of the Army War College*, 1933/34 to 1946, vol. 3, pencil date: 1941, entry for 1939-40, p. 10. They are named on p. 11. They were "engaged in formulating certain parts of a war plan, the rapid completion of which was considered vital." This should not have been a surprise. General Walter Krueger repeated the following statement in 1937 and 1938 in lectures at the War College. "Additional officers that may be needed [in the War Plans Division of the General Staff] will be drawn from the student body of the Army War College." AWC WP#5, 1937, and AWC WP#5, 1938. (*Chronicles* are in the reference room of the AWC library.)

24. Ibid., entry for 1940-41, p. 39. The letter itself is misfiled but can be found at the end of the entry for 1925-26.

25. AWC, flat dated February 1934. A large envelope marked "Correspondence re: Individual Staff Memoranda, 1933-1934, Subject Matter for individual studies" with miscellaneous memos and letters. See correspondence from C. E. Kilbourne, Chief of War Plans, to Commandant of USAWC regarding subjects for individual student studies, dated 22 March 1934.

26. AWC, Forrest E. Williford Papers, letter dated 12 May 1930 in which Williford is informed that his study was to be used by the War Department.

27. *AWC Chronicles, 1899-1946*. Practice varied between 1920 and 1940. For periods of time specific recommendations for future assignments were made. At other times the only comment was pass or fail. At still other times distinguished graduates were identified.

28. AWC, WPD, DCCS, Nos. 12-14. Title: Course at the Army War College, 1926-1927, WPD (War Plan Period), Report of Committee No. 12, Subject: WAR PLAN RAINBOW, 16 April 1927-12 May 1927.

29. AWC, 241-50. Course 1933-1934, Vol. VII, War Plans, Docs. Nos. 1-23, especially Doc. 14 dated March 1934.

30. Ibid., see index.

31. AWC, 5-1935-20. Course at the Army War College, 1934-1935, Report of Group No. 4, Subject: Participation With Allies, 17 April 1935. See also, same subject, 1936-1937 Course, reported 10 April 1937.

32. AWC, 5-1936-0, describes duties and organization of the War Plans Division. See also AWC WP#2 1935 and AWC WP#7 1935 on the same subject.

33. AWC, 2-1936-5. G-2 Report, Subject: Strategical Survey-Germany, 14 December 1935.

34. AWC, 5-1936-21. Course at the Army War College 1935-1936, Preparations for War Course, 2d Part, War Plans Period, Report of War Plans Group No. 4, Subject: Participation with Allies, April 15, 1936.

35. Ibid., p. 3.

36. AWC, G-2, #10, 1937-1938: Dr. William L. Langer lecture to class, January 6, 1938.

37. AWC G-2, #8, 1938-1939: Dr. William L. Langer lecture to class, January 7, 1939.

38. *Directory, Present and Former Staff and Faculty, Graduates, and Students By Class Alphabetical Listing of All Personnel, 1905-1982*, which is brought up to date each year by the US Army War College, reads like a Who's Who of distinguished (and not so distinguished) military leaders: Eisenhower, Bradley, Halsey, Clark, Patton, et al.