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Henry G. Gole, *Exposing the Third Reich: Colonel Truman Smith in Hitler's Germany*.  
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Truman Smith lived through five major US wars and more than a few foreign “incursions”; one is tempted to say it was the “golden age” of the American military. Smith was a born soldier, coming into the world at West Point in 1893, where his father was a mathematics instructor later killed during the Philippines insurrection. Soldiering was an important part of his family’s legacy of public service. The Smiths could boast of voluntary military service all the way back to the continental army, a few US senators and congressmen in the nineteenth century, and a couple of prominent clergymen as well.

So it is no surprise that, after graduating from Yale in 1915, Smith attended the Plattsburg military camp and the next year joined the New York National Guard as a second lieutenant, just in time to be federalized for the border expedition against Pancho Villa. At the time, the officers in his infantry regiment “constituted a sort of club”; “almost all,” he noted, belonged “to well-known New York clubs.” Smith was right at home. In *Exposing the Third Reich*, Henry Gole approvingly writes that he was “an American aristocrat comfortable in every way among Europeans of that class, with its style and values.... Manners, social grace, personal cultivation and easy conversation in several languages characterized that elite. [Smith] personified the American version of the Old World nobleman or the ideal English gentleman” (320–22). Despite its rough and tumble character, the pre-World War I American army had a place for such men. Smith could therefore look forward to a rising military career, especially with US participation in the Great War less than a year away.

And rise he did. He was first sent to Fort Leavenworth for training as a provisional officer. Then, on the same July day in 1917, he was promoted to captain and married to Katherine Alling Hollister, the daughter of a wealthy Wall Street banker. Gole describes her as a society debutante, who was “gifted at languages ... [and] knew a great deal about art, music, literature, and botany” (17). But “Kay” was a lot more than ornamental; she was both a loyal supporter and a very ambitious partner throughout her husband’s career. In any case, the First World War provided a sterling opportunity for Smith. In the only combat experience of his career, he successfully led his battalion in the fierce Meuse-Argonne battle of 1918, and was awarded the Silver Star for bravery in the capture of Bois de Forêt. During that campaign, he lost forty pounds, eventually requiring hospitalization for “fatigue.” In the spring of 1919, he was promoted to major, the rank he held for the next twenty years.

Because of his self-taught ability in the German language and his first-rate education, Smith was posted to the small Rhenish city of Koblenz in January 1919, as political advisor to the American officer in charge of civil affairs. At the time, the Ruhr was a tinderbox of Franco-German resentments. Increasingly, Smith sided with Germany and found that he was “attracted to all things German.”<sup>2</sup> He passed a year and a half in Koblenz before moving on to Berlin, where he was assistant military attaché for nearly three years (1922–24). Little had Smith realized in 1919 that he would eventually spend a third of all his active duty as the US military representative in Germany. His ten years of residence in Berlin gave him the time to form a network of lasting friendships with such high-ranking Wehrmacht officers as Werner von Blomberg, Adolf von Schell, Hans Speidel, Walter von Reichenau, and Friedrich Carl Rabe von Pappenheim, among others. Those social and professional contacts proved very useful to him in the years leading up to World War II; some of them persisted even into the 1960s.

1. *Berlin Alert: The Memoirs and Reports of Truman Smith*, ed. Robert Hessen (Stanford: Hoover Inst Pr, 1984) 8.

2. See Matt Miller’s interview with Gole: “In ‘Exposing the Third Reich,’ Author Henry G. Gole Reveals Lost History of a Military Attaché in Nazi Germany,” PennLive.com (14 Nov 2013) – [www.miwsr.com/rd/1420.htm](http://www.miwsr.com/rd/1420.htm).

In 1922, Smith was given another valuable opportunity. As part of his duties, he was the first American to interview the pre-putsch Adolf Hitler. “[A] marvelous demagogue,” he reported back to the American ambassador. “I have rarely listened to such a logical and fanatical man. His power over the mob must be immense.”<sup>3</sup> Before anyone else, then, Smith brought a trained historian’s eye to the nascent Bavarian Nazi movement and correctly sensed Hitler’s peculiar ability to tap into a resurgent German nationalism.

After Smith’s first stint in Germany came a hiatus during which he carried out routine assignments at Fort Hamilton, New York, and Schofield Barracks, Hawaii. These years did, however, consolidate his reputation as a talented “comer” in the army. He was groomed for leadership by means of a series of postings to the army’s prestige schools. At the Infantry School at Fort Benning (1927), he first encountered the man he most admired, George C. Marshall. He next served at the Command and General Staff School at Fort Leavenworth (1928) and then returned to the Infantry School as an instructor for four years (1928–32), during which he became a “Marshall man,” that is, a protégé of the future Army Chief of Staff. Finally, he taught at the US Army War College (1933). He was now ready for the most exciting post of his career—military attaché in Berlin (1935–39).

The highlight of those eventful years was an extraordinary coup for Smith: he persuaded Charles Lindbergh to visit Germany in 1936 for an inspection tour of the Luftwaffe’s rapidly growing air fleet and facilities. At the time, the Nazis were keeping their newest fighter and bomber airplanes under wraps, away from the prying eyes of all resident military attachés. Smith surmised that a visit by the most renowned aviator of the day—if not the most renowned man in the world—would so flatter the Nazis, especially Herman Göring, air minister and former World War I pilot, that they might grant unrestricted access to Lindbergh, and to Smith. The scheme worked like a charm. Göring was delighted to host his celebrated visitor, who also attended the opening day of the Berlin Olympics. Lindbergh, for his part, was exhilarated by what he saw in the revived Germany and impressed by the technological achievements of the Luftwaffe, while Smith got the information he wanted.

Indeed, the visit was so successful that Lindbergh repeated it every year through 1939; he and his wife stayed with the Smiths each time and became their fast friends. Supposedly, only Smith and Lindbergh knew that they were sending confidential reports on the Luftwaffe back to Smith’s superiors in Washington. Just how valuable those reports were, particularly the General Air Estimate of 1937, is still a matter of controversy. Suffice it to say that they alerted the US military, though no immediate use was made of them, and they likely overestimated German air power capabilities. In any case, Lindbergh and Smith thenceforth became lifelong confidants, comrades in all things military, diplomatic, and political. Smith actually regarded Lindbergh as “a genius.”<sup>4</sup> Later on, he was accused of ghostwriting some of Lindbergh’s speeches in the 1940–41 debate over intervention.

Smith’s star appeared to be ascendant by 1939, primarily through the halo effect of his closeness to George Marshall, Charles Lindbergh, and others in his network of “insiders.” But his star unexpectedly dimmed when he was diagnosed with diabetes that same year and forced to retire. Marshall, however, thought Smith’s intelligence reports were “most remarkable”<sup>5</sup> and considered him an invaluable expert on Germany, so much so that he ignored army regulations, appointing him as a special advisor for the duration of the war and promoting him to lieutenant colonel.

Smith did finally retire in June 1946, but not from an active life in the public sphere. He wrote briefly a newspaper column, advised the newly-formed West German Bundeswehr, composed testimonials for his “old German friends,” and ran unsuccessfully in the Republican primary to succeed Clare Booth Luce in Connecticut’s fourth congressional district (not far from Lindbergh’s home). Smith died in 1970, still an admirer of German dynamism and know-how, but certainly not of National Socialism. He had been a sec-

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3. *Berlin Alert* 60.

4. *Ibid.* 28.

5. Joseph W. Bendersky, *The “Jewish Threat”: Anti-Semitic Politics of the U.S. Army* (NY: Basic Books, 2000) 277.

ond-tier military figure whose luster seemed to emanate from the reflected glory of friends like Luce, Herbert Hoover, Allen Dulles, Albert Wedemeyer, Hanson Baldwin, and myriad others.

So what does Gole, a retired colonel, Green Beret veteran, and former military attaché in Bonn (1973–77), make of Smith? In a nutshell, too much and not enough. His assessment of Smith is heavily seasoned with laudatory adjectives—“To the very end of his life [he] was an astute analyst, a lucid writer, a responsible and decent man of integrity, who added a noteworthy chapter to his family’s distinguished history” (327). That is one of his more modest and accurate claims for Smith. He often goes still further in his adulation, for instance, endorsing General Wedemeyer’s assertion that, but for the diagnosis of diabetes in 1939, Smith’s name would be as familiar today as Eisenhower’s!<sup>6</sup>

Gole admits to no blemishes on Smith’s record and never mentions some of his and his wife’s less admirable traits in a book completely devoid of negative criticism. For example, he writes that Kay Smith was witty and fun to read; in fact, she was waspish and acid-tongued. To give but one instance: upon hearing of FDR’s death in April 1945, she expressed “exultation” and “fierce delight” in the president’s passing: “The evil man is dead!”<sup>7</sup> Major Smith’s opinion of FDR was no better, though, as usual, he was more circumspect than his wife. It is surely possible to believe—as Smith and Lindbergh did in 1940–41—that American participation in the Second World War was a mistake, but Gole’s constant praise of Smith’s “prescience,” inherent in his book’s title, is overstated. Smith cannot be greatly faulted for believing in 1922 that Hitler was “probably not ... big enough to take the lead in a German national movement.”<sup>8</sup> He was not clairvoyant. Still, in the matter of air intelligence, he showed almost no interest in the Luftwaffe’s bombing capabilities, which would be amply demonstrated in the Blitz. Even after the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1939, Smith insisted that Hitler posed no threat to the West: “Hitlerian Germany is pursuing a ‘100% Eastern Policy’ ... [and] has given up totally the plan, if she ever had had such a plan since 1919, of attacking France, Great Britain, South America, Australia, or Mars.”<sup>9</sup> Smith was a charter member of an anti-Semitic, anti-intervention military group that included generals Wedemeyer and Stanley Dunbar Embick, Maj. Percy Black, and Col. Raymond Lee (military attaché in London). After the war, Smith associated himself with Merwin K. Hart and Joseph McCarthy. Apparently, he also doubted the Holocaust, referring instead to the “exodus” and “disappearance” of German Jews.<sup>10</sup> Finally, Smith was more obtuse than prescient in advocating a war against the USSR rather than Nazi Germany in 1939. Like Lindbergh, he believed Germany was an integral part of the white, western family of nations, to which Russian communism posed an existential threat. We ought to let Germany and Russia fight it out, Smith argued, while we rearm ourselves against any potential attack.

None of this, however, impugns Smith’s “dedicated service to this country” (xi) or his keenly observant eye. But despite Gole’s condescending and reluctant references to other opinions about Smith, this detailed biography, focused as it is on its subject’s years as an attaché, is not the last word about him. Smith could be self-promoting and prejudiced, overly concerned about class and hierarchy, and a literate and accomplished writer, too. His published memoirs are unusually insightful. But he was not an infallible guide or prophet, just a complex man and soldier.

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6. *Berlin Alert* viii.

7. *The “Jewish Threat”* 213.

8. *Berlin Alert* 48.

9. *The “Jewish Threat”* 239.

10. *Ibid.* 414.