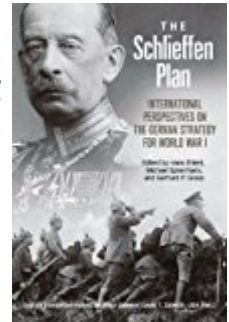


**Hans Gotthard Ehlert, Michael Epkenhans, Gerhard Paul Gross, David T. Zabecki, eds..** *The Schlieffen Plan: International Perspectives on the German Strategy for World War I.* Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2014. 592 pp. \$75.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8131-4746-8.



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The book under review is a translation of a 2006 volume, published in German (*Der Schlieffenplan. Analysen und Dokumente*), that emerged from an international conference organized by the Military History Research Office (Militärgeschichtliche Forschungsamt) in Potsdam. The book is quite long, with nearly a third of its pages dedicated to translations of German operational plans from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. There are also, remarkably, several large fold-out maps, printed in color. The University Press of Kentucky deserves some kudos for producing such a relatively lavish volume.

The ostensible purpose of this work is to contribute to a debate over the Schlieffen Plan, generally believed to have been the operational concept with which Germany went to war in 1914. Beginning with a 1999 essay in *War in History*, the German-trained American historian Terence Zuber has provocatively argued that such a plan did not actually exist. Rather, it was a post-1918 myth, created by German officers eager to absolve themselves of blame for Germany's de-

feat. Zuber and his critics have generated a number of books and journal articles. Zuber took part in the conference from which this volume emerged and published a piece in the German original. However, he declined to include his essay in the translated version, and described the conference as an “ambush” in the *Journal of Military History*. Without a contribution from Zuber, this book represents a rather one-sided debate.

At the heart of debates about the Schlieffen Plan is a gap in the archival record. Schlieffen's writings on German war plans, crystallized in a 1905-06 memorandum (*Denkschrift*), exist in fragmentary form and in summaries written by others. The documents used by Gerhard Ritter in his seminal 1956 *Der Schlieffenplan. Kritik eines Mythos*, survived because Schlieffen's papers ended the Second World War in American hands. As anyone who has done archival work on Germany's First World War knows, many of the relevant documents either burned in the bombing of Potsdam in 1944 or were seized by the Soviets. Many of the documents that Zuber con-

sulted in the 1990s had only recently re-emerged at the end of the Cold War.

This gap matters, in part because the Schlieffen Plan matters. As the authors here note, the plan played a role in debates over the culpability of the German army in Germany's defeat, in international arguments about "war guilt," and, in the wake of World War II, in discussions of continuities between Wilhelmine and Nazi Germany. For almost a century, the Schlieffen Plan has represented far more than a set of operational guidelines.

This book's introduction and three essays (by Annika Mombauer, Robert T. Foley, and Gerhard P. Gross) directly address the Zuber debate. All are well written and informative, but the essay by Gerhard Gross is probably the highlight of the book. Regardless of how the reader feels about the terms of the debate, Gross offers a master class in historical provenance. As befits one of the world's most highly regarded historians of the German military, Gross carefully explores the production, distribution, and sometimes destruction of documents. He reminds us of the importance of archivists and the role they play as gatekeepers of historical inquiry, while meticulously demonstrating the intersection of institutional history-writing, politics, and personal connections. Intriguingly, he suggests that there might yet be more documents out there, hidden in an archive, that would help us to better understand German war planning before 1914 (p. 91).

The rest of the volume looks at other European states and their mobilization plans, including Britain (Hew Strachan), France (Stefan Schmidt), Austria-Hungary (Günther Kronenbitter), and Russia (Jan Kusber). Contributions by Luc de Vos on Belgium and Hans Rudolf Fuhrer and Michael Olsansky on Switzerland pair particularly well, since both deal with the strategic dilemmas faced by states that tried to maintain neutrality

despite sharing borders with several possible antagonists.

There is also a very good essay by Dieter Storz on the fighting in Lorraine and the Vosges during the first months of the war. Storz helpfully reminds readers that the German Empire went to war with a hybrid military, including substantial forces from polities within the empire, like Bavaria. This generated tension over command and sometimes considerable inefficiency. The essay also points to the importance of records kept in military archives in places like Munich, which can help to compensate for the loss of archival material in Potsdam during World War II.

Overall, this is a useful volume for specialists. Some of the essays could be used in a graduate or advanced undergraduate course. The book will not settle the Schlieffen Plan debate, but it does offer a salutary reminder that such disputes can advance historical scholarship by making participants focus on sources and reexamine old orthodoxies.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at <https://networks.h-net.org/h-war>

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