



No Sense in Dwelling on the Past? The Fate of the US Air Force's German Air Force Monograph Project, 1952-69

First Lieutenant, USAF, Ryan Shaughnessy

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This book examines the German air force (GAF) monograph project, also known as the Karlsruhe project, through which the US Air Force employed former Luftwaffe generals to record the history of World War II from the German perspective. Historians have explored parallel programs in the US Army and Navy, but the Karlsruhe project has received little attention. However, the Air Force monographs have proven useful to historians because of their high quality. This book attributes the Karlsruhe monographs' strength as works of history primarily to the Air Force's limited interest in them, which insulated the writers from outside pressure to produce studies of immediate utility to the military. Whereas policy needs drove the Army and Navy programs and often caused them to search for convenient tactical "lessons" in German history, the GAF monograph project was effectively autonomous. This was a mixed blessing. Chronically undermanned and inadequately funded, the project ended with most studies still unfinished. The Air Force ignored the monographs and failed to benefit from the experience of the Luftwaffe. This book illustrates the inherent tensions in writing official military history and utilizes the Karlsruhe project as a lens to examine problems plaguing the Air Force during the early Cold War. Still, cooperative historical work proved to be an inexpensive and unexpected way of cementing the critical West German–American military alliance, and both air forces came to value this aspect of the project more than the historical studies it produced.

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