

Our responsibility remains, research continues

The scientific results of "Expansion at all costs" not only contribute to the reappraisal of Wintershall's history under National Socialism, but also allow closer scrutiny of the behaviour of the entire oil and gas industry during the Nazi period, serving as a reminder today that economic action is always political action.

SEPARATE PROJECT ON DEA'S HISTORY

And what about DEA? DEA brought out a publication to mark its 100th anniversary back in 1999 and it contained an initial account of the company's history. However, it leaves many questions unanswered, especially about the company's role and the actions of its leading figures in the 1930s and 1940s.



In order to also learn more about the history of its second predecessor company during the National Socialist period, Wintershall Dea commissioned the Business History Society (Gesellschaft für Unternehmensgeschichte/GUG) with a follow-up project: since February 2022, Professor Dr Manfred Grieger and Dr Rainer Karlsch have been researching in various archives throughout Europe and tapping into new sources. Wintershall Dea is making its own historical archive available without restriction to enable open and critical research into DEA's history.

Above: The DEA also took part in the events commemorating the National Holiday of the German People: On May 1, 1937, DEA executives march behind a swastika banner at the Wietze site.

Below: In 1936, the company designs a float with the theme „German Oil, German Power“ for the same occasion in Wietze.

You can find more detailed information on the [history of Wintershall Dea](#), a video presenting the research results so far, and current developments and news relating to the subject of corporate history at Wintershall Dea on our website:



Cover page: Spectators of the parade on the occasion of the National Holiday of the German people on May 1, 1937, at the DEA site in Wietze witness the traditional black miners' uniforms and symbols of the NSDAP side by side.

Do you have any questions about our company's history? Or suggestions for further topics and sources? Would you like to conduct research in the Wintershall Dea Corporate Archive?

Then write to us at:

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www.wintershalldea.com

Photos: German Oil Museum (Deutsches Erdölmuseum), Wietze
Bernd Schoelzchen for Wintershall Dea



wintershall dea



THE COMPANY'S HISTORY IS BEING REAPPRAISED

Wintershall and DEA during the National Socialist period

Right: Recreation room with swastika symbols at the DEA drilling facility in Wietze (1935).

Left: The study on Wintershall AG's history under National Socialism



A critical look at our own past under the National Socialist regime

Two German companies steeped in tradition – **Wintershall Holding GmbH** (founded in 1894) and **DEA – Deutsche Erdoel AG** (founded in 1899) – merged in 2019 to create one of the leading independent gas and oil companies in Europe. Together, we can look back on a more than **125-year history in the natural resources and energy industry**: on economic successes, the art of engineering and pioneering spirit. However, the two predecessor companies were also deeply embroiled with the National Socialist regime in Germany in the 1930s and 1940s. Thus we asked professional historians to reappraise this troubling phase of the company's history critically, comprehensively and independently. We see this as an important part of our social responsibility to stand up for democratic values.

WINTERSHALL: EXPANSION AT ALL COSTS

In 2017, we began searching our in-house archives for detailed information about our past. To mark the 125th anniversary of Wintershall in 2019, we also commissioned the Business History Society (Gesellschaft für Unternehmensgeschichte/GUG) to conduct independent, scientific research into the company's history during the National Socialist period. The renowned economic historians Professor Dr Manfred Grieger, Dr Rainer Karlsch and Adjunct Professor Dr Ingo Köhler presented their results to the public in 2020 in a book entitled "Expansion at All Costs. Studies on Wintershall AG between Crisis and War, 1929–1945".



DEA managers in Wietze in 1936: Right: Günther Schlicht (member of the Mineral Oil Technical Brigade from 1942 and Chief Executive Officer of DEA from 1955). Second from right: Karl Große (General Director of Karpathen Öl AG from 1942).

Topical research questions on DEA's history under National Socialism are:

- > How did DEA benefit from the National Socialist economic system and the Reich Drilling Programme?
- > How did it build up its business in Austria, which was incorporated into the German Empire in 1938?
- > What were DEA's relations with the army and navy?
- > How did DEA's individual plant locations act during the Nazi period – and was there any resistance there?
- > To what extent and under what conditions did DEA and its consortia use forced labour?
- > How was DEA involved in exploiting the occupied territories in what is now Ukraine and Poland?
- > What room for manoeuvre did DEA's managers have in the Nazi system and how did they use it, for example to protect forced labourers from deportation to the extermination camps?
- > How was DEA involved in "Aryanisation" and how did it treat Jewish members of its Management Board and Supervisory Board?
- > How did DEA deal with the burden of its legacy in the post-war period?

Wintershall AG under National Socialism

- > **Beginnings with potash and entry into oil business:** Wintershall AG was the largest German potash company in 1920. When earnings declined in the 1920s, General Director August Rosterg (1870-1945) did all he could to put the company on a broader footing: Wintershall entered the mineral oil business from 1931, investing millions.
- > **Early rapprochement with the National Socialists:** The power-conscious Rosterg sought close ties with the National Socialists at an early stage, guided by his reactionary, anti-democratic convictions, the hope for a new economic order and commercial opportunism. As early as 1931 – in other words, **before** Hitler came to power in 1933 – he and other industrialists pledged millions in financial aid to the NSDAP in the event that civil unrest occurred. In a game of "you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours", Rosterg, who himself never joined the NSDAP, actively and calculatingly cooperated with leading National Socialists, especially with Heinrich Himmler, the commander of the SS, whose favour he bought by making large donations to the SS.
- > **Active in the armaments industry and war economy:** Wintershall AG cooperated with military authorities at an early stage. From 1934 onwards, it made potash shafts available as secret munitions plants and produced nitric acid for the armaments industry. In addition, it supported the National Socialists' drive for self-sufficiency and the war economy by investing in magnesium production in Heringen and building a large refinery in Lützkendorf. In the expansion of its oil exploration activities, the company benefited from government subsidies through the Reich Drilling Programme.
- > **Beneficiary of the economic persecution of Jews:** Wintershall AG was a willing profiteer from the persecution of Jews, for example as part of the expropriation of companies with Jewish owners (so-called "Aryanisation"). A prominent example is the takeover of parts of the Julius Petschek Group, which operated several lignite collieries and a large open-cast mine at the Wintershall location in Lützkendorf (now Saxony-Anhalt).
- > **Submission to state doctrine in occupied territories:** From the beginning of the war, Wintershall AG participated with other German mineral oil companies in consortia such as Kontinentale Öl AG and Karpathen Öl AG, to exploit oil deposits in the occupied territories in Central and Eastern Europe.

- > **Occupational welfare in the spirit of National Socialism:** Wintershall offered occupational welfare benefits for employees at its locations, yet was also guilty of dehumanised exploitation. For example, the company's management tried to retain its regular German workforce not only by providing urgently needed jobs, but also by bearing the cost of trips with NSDAP organisations and offering building loans or leisure activities. Working for Wintershall was equated with serving the National Socialist utopia of a "people's community", to which everything had to be subordinated. Evidence of oppositional behaviour by communists, Social Democrats and trade unions, however, indicates that not all workers wanted to be a part of that.
- > **Forced labour and exploitation:** At the same time, Wintershall AG exploited tens of thousands of forced labourers, prisoners of war and concentration camp inmates at various locations in Germany and Eastern and Central Europe – and actively requested further workers when needed. At the Lützkendorf plant, for example, foreign workers made up two-thirds of the workforce in mid-1944. In many places the plant managers cooperated closely with the local SS and Gestapo offices. Hunger, illness, harassment and death were part of everyday life for the forced labourers at the company. How they were treated was the responsibility of the individual locations – no instructions on this subject from the Group's top management have been found so far. Consequently, the decision-makers at headquarters could claim in the post-war period that they "personally had nothing to do with the foreign workers".
- > **Belated change of heart and false myths:** When August Rosterg saw the German defeat coming from the autumn of 1943 on, he supported the Allies in spying on German petrol and oil hydration plants and absconded to Stockholm in 1944. Shortly before he died in November 1945, he made the company an heir to his private estate in his will. This was one of the reasons why his colleagues on the board later cast their long-serving General Director and chief in as favourable a light as possible and avoided a critical discussion of Rosterg's closeness to the National Socialist regime. In Kassel, he was idealised for decades as the Group's "creator and driving force", for example, at the inauguration of the new company headquarters in 1957, which were named after him for a long time.
- Wintershall AG, which was integrated more and more closely in the war economy by the National Socialists, styled itself as a victim of the Nazi system after the war – even though it had actively offered its services and contributed to the regime from very early on.

ENABLING ACCESS AND RESEARCH

The Wintershall Dea Corporate Archive

Since 2017, we have been actively facing up to our responsibility and dealing transparently with this guilt-ridden chapter of our company's history. That is why our research continues: our Corporate History team will trace individual biographies of victims and perpetrators as well as of people who put up resistance at the company's locations. We will also take up the topic of a culture of remembrance and delve more deeply into aspects that could only be touched on in the two major research projects on the history of Wintershall and DEA under National Socialism. In addition, we will also examine our corporate history even more closely beyond the National Socialist period and enable interested persons to form their own picture of our company – from the founding years of 1894 and 1899 to the present day.

GET TO KNOW OUR HISTORICAL MEMORY!

The basis for the research work is the Wintershall Dea Corporate Archive, the company's central historical memory. Based at headquarters in Kassel, it collects and saves tens of thousands of files, photos, audio and film recordings, publications, advertising material and other objects from the various areas of the company. The focus is on the history of the two predecessor companies Wintershall Holding GmbH and DEA Deutsche Erdoel AG, which merged in 2019, from the end

of the 19th century to the present day. In addition, documents from associated enterprises and subsidiaries in Germany and abroad as well as a largish portfolio of historical industry journals are archived, which also makes the archive an important point of contact for general research on the German oil and gas industry.

Researchers, media representatives and other interested persons may use the Corporate Archive in Kassel upon written request and by prior appointment. We hope that we can take lessons for the future from our changeful history with and from you.