

wintershall dea

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### “FUELING THE SECOND WORLD WAR”: STUDIES ON DEA’S HISTORY UNDER NATIONAL SOCIALISM PUBLISHED

- Book presentation in Hamburg: Economic historians present comprehensive analysis of DEA’s activities between 1933 and 1945
- Wintershall Dea archive material to be handed over to the Hessian Economic Archive in Darmstadt
- Stefan Schnell: “The company Wintershall Dea may disappear. Responsibility for its history remains.”

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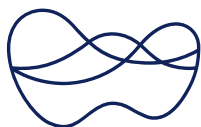
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Opportunism and an impassive pursuit of profit characterised the actions of Deutsche Erdöl Aktiengesellschaft (DEA) during the National Socialist period. The company began expanding its heating oil and diesel production for the navy as early as autumn 1933. In the following years it benefited from the “Aryanisation” of Jewish companies as well as from government rearmament programmes.

After the annexation of Austria, DEA became the most important German oil company and participated in capitalising on oil deposits in the occupied countries. As part of that, the company’s management condoned the exploitation of forced labourers. This is the harrowing conclusion of the book “Fueling the Second World War. Deutsche Erdöl AG, 1933-1945,” which has now (14 November) been presented in Hamburg.

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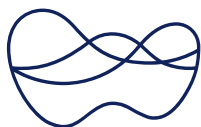
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The scientific research project on DEA was commissioned by what is now Wintershall Dea GmbH as a follow-up to the reappraisal of Wintershall Dea's company history during the Nazi period. This process began in 2018, and was conducted by the Business History Society ("Gesellschaft für Unternehmensgeschichte" (GUG)) starting in February 2022. The renowned corporate historians Dr. Rainer Karlsch (Berlin) and Professor Dr. Manfred Grieger (Georg August University of Göttingen) carried out the research for GUG over the past three years.

The two scientists have now publicly presented the most important results of their studies to around 60 interested guests at Wintershall Dea's Hamburg location. Afterwards, they discussed the reappraisal of the company's history during the Nazi era and the responsibility of German business for today's culture of remembrance together with Maria Wilke (Head of the EVZ Academy of the Foundation "Remembrance, Responsibility and Future") and Professor Dr. Detlef Garbe (former Director of the Foundation of Hamburg Memorials and Learning Centres), under the moderation of the economic historian Professor Dr. Walter Iber (University of Graz).

### **DEA benefited from the policy of rearmament**

In their book "Fueling the Second World War," Rainer Karlsch and Manfred Grieger show in detail how strongly the former DEA profited from the Nazi war economy. Among other things, Deutsche Erdöl AG produced large quantities of synthetic fuel from lignite tar for the navy,



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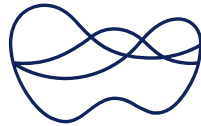
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whose large orders, together with government loans, played a vital part in enabling DEA to expand its locations in the central German lignite mining district. The authors also demonstrated how, spearheaded by Hans Gröber from DEA's Management Board, the company participated in the "Aryanisation" of Jewish businesses and how it dismissed the Jewish board member Fritz Haußmann and several Jewish Supervisory Board members up to 1938. Another key aspect of the study is the use of tens of thousands of forced labourers, who were exploited by DEA both in the German Reich and in the occupied territories and who made up more than a third of the workforce in 1944.

### **Already the second historical reappraisal project**

To mark Wintershall's 125th anniversary, Wintershall Dea had already commissioned a team of experts from GUG at the beginning of 2019 to research the history of the company under National Socialism. The results of this investigation were published in 2020 in the book "Expansion at All Costs. Studies on Wintershall AG between Crisis and War, 1929-1945." They prove, for instance, that the management of the then Wintershall AG under General Director August Rosterg was closely entwined with the NSDAP party, and especially with Heinrich Himmler, the commander of the SS, and actively supported the National Socialists with donations, among other things.

The follow-up study on the history of DEA shows that, compared to Wintershall, DEA's management did not sympathise so openly with the



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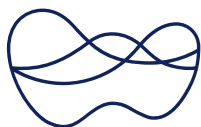
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National Socialists. However, neither did it oppose their policies, as Stefan Schnell, CEO of Wintershall Dea, emphasises. "The managers kept silent and opportunistically took advantage of the commercial opportunities that presented themselves," says Schnell. Both predecessor companies had profited from business opportunities arising from the Nazis' rearmament and war policy. For example, DEA received loans to develop new crude oil sources as part of the Reich Drilling Programme, from which the company continued to benefit even after the end of the Second World War.

"With the study on the role of DEA and its significance in producing fuel for the Second World War, the company is living up to its historical responsibility," says Dr. Andrea H. Schneider-Braunberger, CEO of GUG. "Because its economic success was due not least to the use of forced labourers, as shown in the study with reference to individual locations."

### **Extensive source research in Germany and abroad**

For their analysis, Rainer Karlsch and Manfred Grieger evaluated files from 26 archives in Germany and abroad. Wintershall Dea also made its files available without restriction. While most of Wintershall AG's business documents were destroyed during air raids in the Second World War, a large number of files from the National Socialist period were preserved at DEA. This made it possible to gain a deep insight into the actions of the protagonists. These historical documents from DEA are part of Wintershall Dea's Corporate Archive, which has been



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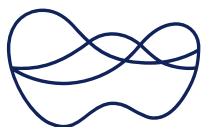
systematically built up at the Kassel location since 2021 alongside the research project.

In September 2024, the majority of the company's activities were sold and transferred to Harbour Energy. The remaining parts of Wintershall Dea are now to be closed. As part of this process, Wintershall Dea's Corporate Archive will be handed over to the Hessian Economic Archive ("Hessisches Wirtschaftsarchiv") in Darmstadt at the end of the first quarter of 2025. "That means Wintershall Dea's archive material will still be available for research," says Schnell. "For us it is clear: The company Wintershall Dea may disappear. Responsibility for its history remains."

### **Both studies are available from bookstores**

The detailed study "Fueling the Second World War. Deutsche Erdöl AG, 1933-1945" by Rainer Karlsch and Manfred Grieger has been published as a hardcover book (445 pages, ISBN 978-3-95542-526-5) in German and English by the publishing house Societäts-Verlag. It is available from today (15 November) and costs 20 euros.

The predecessor analysis "Expansion at All Costs – Studies on Wintershall AG between Crisis and War, 1929-1945" by Manfred Grieger, Rainer Karlsch and Ingo Köhler (hardcover, 258 pages, ISBN 978-3-95542-391-9) can still be obtained from regular bookstores.



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### *Note for media:*

*A recording of the event will be available shortly [on our homepage](#). We would be happy to send you a review copy of "Fueling the Second World War. Deutsche Erdöl AG, 1933-1945" or put you in contact with the authors for an interview. Please get in touch with Friederike Steensen using the contact details provided.*

### **About Wintershall Dea**

The energy company Wintershall Dea can look back on a long history. Its final chapter is now being written. With effect from 3 September 2024, the majority of the company's former E&P and CCS assets and licences were sold and transferred to Harbour Energy. The remaining assets of Wintershall Dea include the stakes in the joint ventures Wintershall AG in Libya and Wintershall Noordzee BV in the Southern North Sea as well as the shares in Nord Stream and the joint ventures in Russia. Wintershall Dea's tasks now include restructuring the company, managing and disposing of the remaining assets and responsibly implementing the company's final closure. Wintershall Dea is owned by BASF and LetterOne.

More information on the Internet at [www.wintershalldea.com](http://www.wintershalldea.com) or follow us on [LinkedIn](#).