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## The spy who knew too little UL's Tomas Schoonover writes about Hitler's not-so-effective eye in Latin America

by Cheré Coen

Heinz Lüning posed as a Jewish refugee and joined Hitler's Abwehr espionage agency in an effort to escape the German draft. Although he had mastered the Spanish language, Lüning's time spent in Cuba as a Nazi spy was uneventful and wrought with error. He failed at secret inks and building a radio, not to mention providing Germany with little useful information.

But his timing stunk.

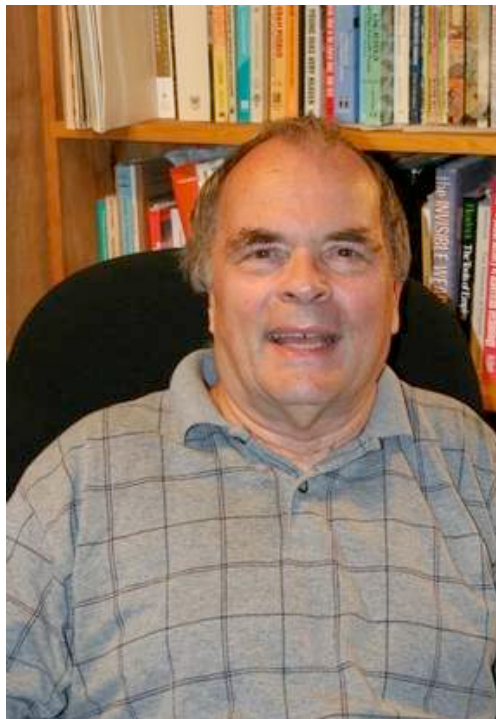
U-boats were terrorizing the Caribbean, sinking just under half of all Allied ships lost in 1942. Germany was making strides in Europe and "the Japanese were everywhere," explained UL professor emeritus of history Tomas D. Schoonover, who has written a book on the spy titled *Hitler's Man in Havana: Heinz Lüning and Nazi Espionage in Latin America* (University of Kentucky, \$29.95).

The time was ripe for U.S. intelligence to uncover the spies leaking information on Gulf and Caribbean commerce,

Schoonover explained. Most of the planes necessary for spotting U-boats were in the North Atlantic, while ships were being sunk almost daily in the Caribbean.

Allied leaders were tremendously concerned over the loss of ships and commerce — more than 600 vessels were sunk in a 10-month period of 1942 — and that a spy network might be operating in Latin America. In 1942, the bumbling agent was discovered and arrested by British postal censors and accused of being an important spy in a vast network.

"Lüning's capture around the 31st of August in 1942 — for the next 70 days, Lüning was like Michael Jackson," Schoonover said, adding that all the major newspapers, including *The (New Orleans) Times-Picayune*, reported daily on the case.



**Author Tomas Schoonover**

Lüning was packaged as a major player in a vast network of espionage to show an Allied success against the backdrop of the U-boat destruction, Schoonover explained.

Because of Lüning's notoriety, he was the only Nazi spy in Latin America executed. His life became the inspiration for Graham's Greene's *Our Man in Havana*, even though nothing U.S. intelligence discovered about Lüning added up to him being a master spy.

"When they caught him, he became important and then they didn't give up on that," Schoonover said. "(FBI Director J. Edgar) Hoover wouldn't give up even though Hoover's own people said he (Lüning) wasn't a master spy.

"They captured 44 out of 49 ink messages by Lüning, none of them that were particularly important. Two had some value but overall Lüning had little impact on the war."

Again, timing played a part. After Lüning's capture and execution, U-boat sinkings decreased, thus appearing that Lüning was a key component in the U-boat campaign. Schoonover credits the decrease in sinkings to more planes and ships focused on the Caribbean and better trained pilots.

Hoover, however, kept FBI agents on the case for years, placing agents all the way into Chile and Argentina, Schoonover said, trying to build credence for Lüning's execution because he had "publicly stated that 'We have the man.' "

Schoonover got the idea for the book from his old friend, Louis A. Perez Jr., a professor at the University of Chapel Hill, North Carolina, when Perez visited Lafayette in 2001. Schoonover researched and wrote the book because he speaks English, French, German and Spanish and was able to read archival material in Cuba and Germany.

Schoonover received a master's degree in history under T. Harry Williams at LSU, then spent four years learning languages in Europe. After obtaining a doctorate, he taught history at UL for more than 30 years.

*Hitler's Man in Havana* is his 10th book.

## Meet the author

Thomas D. Schoonover will be signing copies of *Hitler's Man in Havana* at the December Author's Alley from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 13, in the first-floor Browsing Room of the Lafayette Public Library, 301 W. Congress St. in downtown Lafayette. Authors signing books will be John Francois, author of *Carrier of Bones*; Bud Johnson, author of *The Perfect Season: LSU's Magic Year — 1958*; Dave Pierce, author of *Riding on the Ether Express* and Ann Justice, author of *Blooming Trees and Shrubs of the Coastal South*.

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