

Wiegand, Karl Henry von

By [Norman Domeier](#)

Wiegand, *Karl* Henry von
American war correspondent in Germany
Born 11 September 1874 in Hesse, Germany
Died 07 June 1961 in Zürich, Switzerland

Summary

Karl Henry von Wiegand was the leading American foreign correspondent during the first half of the 20th century. His interviewees included Paul von Hindenburg, Adolf Hitler, Kemal Atatürk, Benito Mussolini, Mahatma Gandhi, Francisco Franco, and Konrad Adenauer. In 1917, Wiegand began working for William Randolph Hearst, and during the course of the 1920s he became a globally operating senior correspondent for the Hearst media company.

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During the First World War

Karl Henry von Wiegand (1874-1961) arrived in Berlin in 1911, at the height of the [Second Morocco Crisis](#). He obtained the patronage of [Maximilian Harden \(1861-1927\)](#). On 21 November 1914, Harden and the Centre-Party politician [Matthias Erzberger \(1875-1921\)](#) mediated an interview with [Wilhelm, Crown Prince of Germany \(1882-1951\)](#) in Stenay. Wiegand decided not to publish the prince's candid verdict: "We already have lost the war". But the interview did appear on 1 December 1914 in the *New York Herald* with the headline: "Crown Prince Interviewed on the War. Calls it Stupid".

Not least because of his strong sense of discretion, Wiegand was soon regarded by the German leadership as their confidant in the [American press](#). Interviews with [Cecilie, Crown Princess of Germany \(1886-1954\)](#), Reich Chancellor [Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg \(1856-1921\)](#), Count [Ferdinand von Zeppelin \(1838-1917\)](#), and Field Marshal [Paul von Hindenburg \(1847-1934\)](#) followed suit. The most controversial interview in terms of military policy was with Grand Admiral [Alfred von Tirpitz \(1849-1930\)](#), printed in the *New York World*

on 23 December 1914 with the headline “Tirpitz Suggests Sub Blockade to Starve out Great Britain”. Here, Tirpitz vented his plans for unrestricted [submarine warfare](#) against [Great Britain](#) to a global audience several months before the campaign actually began.

Wiegand attracted international attention when he interviewed [Pope Benedict XV \(1854-1922\)](#) on Easter Monday, 5 April 1915, in the Vatican. It was the first political interview that a pope had ever permitted a journalist to publish. Matthias Erzberger and the German Special Envoy to Rome, [Bernhard Prince von Bülow \(1849-1929\)](#), had arranged the interview. It was printed on the front page of the *New York World* on 11 April 1915, and in it, Benedict XV criticized the [USA](#) for its arms deliveries to the warring nations, as this prolonged the war unnecessarily.

Wiegand’s reputation with the German leadership lead to President [Woodrow Wilson \(1856-1924\)](#) special advisor, [Edward Mandell House \(1858-1938\)](#), choosing him as an unofficial contact person for a secret mission to Berlin. House and Wiegand had met during efforts to mend the relationship between President Wilson and [William Randolph Hearst \(1863-1951\)](#) and to bring Hearst’s media company, which had been preaching [George Washington \(1732-1799\)](#) warning of “foreign entanglements” for years, onto a war footing. Wiegand left the USA together with staff of the German embassy in 1917.

Early in 1918, as a consequence of the panic caused by [Erich Ludendorff \(1865-1937\) spring offensives](#) (“Operation Michael”) and the initial appearance that [Germany](#) might be about to win the war, Colonel House chose Wiegand as an emissary to negotiate a separate peace between Germany and the USA, should worst come to worst, in [neutral](#) Stockholm. The mission for a separate peace was launched, and Wiegand received a passport from the State Department. Once the German armies were stopped at [Amiens](#), however, the mission was cancelled and Wiegand stayed in New York. This aspect of the politics of 1918 has received little attention from historians of the First World War.

After the First World War

Wiegand was the first and last American journalist to interview [Adolf Hitler \(1889-1945\)](#): On 12/13 November 1922, the Hearst newspapers published the first interview with the “German Mussolini”. Wiegand’s last interview with Hitler took place on 9 June 1940 near the *Führer* headquarters “Wolfsschlucht 1”. It was printed in Hearst papers such as the *Los Angeles Examiner* and the *New York Journal American* on 14 June 1940, with the headline “Europe for the Europeans, America for the Americans”. The interview coincided with the *Wehrmacht’s* occupation of Paris and was intended to strengthen the isolationist movement in the USA in order to prevent an American intervention in the Second World War.

In his private papers, Wiegand mentions that after his interview on 9 June 1940 – similar to Colonel House in spring 1918 – Hitler wanted to send him to Britain as an unofficial peace negotiator, this time for the German side. Hitler hoped to make peace with Great Britain after his victory over France. Pointing to the very low chance of success of such a mission, Wiegand declined.

After the Second World War, Wiegand remained in touch with German politics. The young Federal Republic showed its appreciation for his journalistic support by awarding him the Cross of the Order of Merit on 28 September 1959.

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- [House, Edward Mandell: **Yale University Library, New Haven, Manuscripts and Archives, Edward Mandell House Papers \(MS 466\)**, 1912-1926.](#)
- [Wiegand, Karl Henry von: **Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, California, Karl Henry von Wiegand Papers**, 1907-2009.](#)

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External Links

- [Interview with von Wiegand, in: Albury Banner and Wodonga Express, 2 February 1917.](#)

[p. 20 \(Trove\) \(Article\)](#)

- [Letter of Ambassador William E. Dodd to President Roosevelt, Berlin, 20 March 1935 \(Confidential\), in: Great Britain/German Diplomatic Files, Box 32 \(FDR Presidential Library and Museum\) \(Primary Source\)](#)
- [Ordering Men to Death \(From Karl H. von Wiegand's Interview with von Hindenburg\), in: The Argus, 27 January 1917, p. 4 \(Trove\) \(Article\)](#)
- [The Somme Battle. Karl von Wiegand's Report. Admission of Allies' Successes, in: The Beaudesert Times, 22 September 1916, p. 4 \(Trove\) \(Article\)](#)
- [Wiegand, Karl Henry von: Current Misconceptions About the War, New York 1915 \(Internet Archive\) \(Book\)](#)
- [Wiegand, Karl Henry von: Report on the massacre at Wirballen, 8 October 1914 \(The Independent\) \(Article\)](#)
- [Wiegand, Karl H. von: Maximilian Harden. Who Told Germany the Truth?, in: Leader, 20 January 1919, p. 5 \(Trove\) \(Article\)](#)

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