

# A History of the Diplomatic Archives of Belgium

By DANIEL H. THOMAS

*University of Rhode Island*

SUCH a complete change has occurred in the opportunities for research in foreign office archives that it is almost a revolution. The private scholar, sometimes denied the privilege of examining official diplomatic materials in the beginning of the twentieth century, is now welcome in most of the western European archives and tolerated in all those of the unoccupied countries. Furthermore, the authorities have become more and more generous in making the records available, some going so far as to open up those dated as late as 1914. Historians have been quick to seize the opportunity, and they are now filling the reading rooms as never before.

It is time that the postwar conditions for research be summarized for those who would use these diplomatic documents. Such a project is now under way; it is to be a handbook with each chapter devoted to the archives of a single state in western Europe. A cooperative work, with specialists writing the individual chapters, it is not yet sufficiently advanced to be described in detail.<sup>1</sup>

Each chapter in the handbook will contain, *inter alia*, a brief history of the national archives it covers. The foreign ministry records of the state of Belgium, a smaller power, date only from 1830, yet the history of these archives has a significance out of proportion to their age and numbers and in addition has all the elements of a dramatic biography. Having had a significant as well as a dramatic history, the Belgian diplomatic archives deserve a more detailed account than is possible in the allotted space in the handbook.

## ESTABLISHMENT AND EARLY HISTORY

The Service des Archives of the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs was not established until 1863, and for more than a decade thereafter it hardly deserved such formal designation. During this period a single archivist began a rudimentary system of classification, drew up memoranda, prepared historical studies, and served as a translator. Storage facilities were primitive, with no special

<sup>1</sup> The two editors are Lynn M. Case and the writer.

safeguards against destruction by fire or deterioration due to moisture.<sup>2</sup>

The establishment of an effective Service was undertaken in 1875, following a cabinet request for sufficient funds late in the preceding year. Instead of a simple bureau, a "division" was created, and Emile Banning became the first chief of the Service. Two years later he was given the grade of director and a staff of five. With experience as a journalist and as a librarian in the Bibliothèque Royale and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Banning was to become an honored archivist and historian.

If the first years of the Service were characterized by desuetude and inactivity, the succeeding period was one of striking achievement by the new division. It had a difficult task at best, for there were numerous lacunae in the materials, particularly in those of the 1830's and even of the following decade. To fill the gaps, Belgian legations in foreign capitals were asked to forward to Brussels certain archives and former diplomats or their families were requested to return other documents. Gradually all available records were collected or copied, and classified.<sup>3</sup> Most of the documents were classified and arranged chronologically, but some were collected in special dossiers on subjects of greatest interest, and were then placed in chronological order. Next the archivists went to the extraordinary length of analyzing and summarizing the individual pieces of certain categories. These summaries were drawn up by skillful analysts who were thorough in their work and who drew up pieces that are entirely trustworthy. Finally the documents were bound in attractive volumes. Catalogs or "tables chronologiques" were placed first in each volume; these contain the number assigned to each piece and the date, sender, recipient, and summary. By 1914 almost a thousand volumes had been prepared in this ideal manner. Thus the Belgian diplomatic materials were transformed from chaos to a condition that probably makes them easier to use than any other national collection.

In the meantime, in 1898 Charles Seeger had succeeded Banning as director. Among his achievements, Seeger was successful in obtaining the construction of a special room for the archives — one that was fireproof and protected from dampness. Until the archives

<sup>2</sup> A. Winandy, "Les Archives du Département des Affaires étrangères," pp. 3-4 of a reprint from an article in *Expansion belge, revue mensuelle illustrée* (Oct. 1913).

<sup>3</sup> Winandy, *op. cit.*, 5-6; special dossier, "Organisation de la direction des archives au Département des Affaires étrangères," Nov. 29, 1878, with addenda, Jan. 1880, Service des Archives, Ministère des Affaires étrangères, Brussels.

outgrew these quarters, they were as ideally housed as they were prepared for efficient use.

One decided error was made in the period. In their impatience to complete their work, the officials had the volumes bound too soon; that is, bound before all the documents had been collected. As a result, there had to be volumes of "compléments."<sup>4</sup>

As the war of 1914 approached, the history of the Service des Archives became more complicated. Alfred De Ridder, who succeeded Seeger, secured for it the initial deposit of the extensive "Correspondance politico-commerciale."<sup>5</sup> This addition, together with an increase in the amount of material in the other categories, created a heavy burden on the archivists who analyzed as well as classified the documents. This was the situation in 1914 when Belgium was overrun by the German army.

### THE WAR OF 1914

When the Belgian Government fled Brussels in August 1914, there was time to remove only 10 cases of documents. While the government was in exile, these were under the charge of A. Winandy, who moved them first to Antwerp, then early in October to Dover, and soon to Le Havre, the seat of the Belgian Government for the duration of the war.

The great bulk of the diplomatic archives had been left in Brussels, as had numerous materials of the military. Although the Germans looked into these records in the first month of the occupation, they had made no extensive plans for exploiting them. All this was changed when in the middle of September they discovered in the Ministry of War the now famous folder labeled "Conventions anglo-belges," which contained a report on conversations between the Belgian chief of staff and the British military attaché. These reports were studied by high military and diplomatic authorities, who decided to use the Belgian documents in a spirited propaganda campaign against the Allies. As early as October 13, 1914, the *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* of Berlin used the documents in a campaign of war propaganda that at times made preposterous claims. An article in the November 25 issue concluded with the

<sup>4</sup> Still other records of the early decades were discovered after the "compléments" were bound; so there are a few volumes of "suppléments."

<sup>5</sup> Winandy, *op. cit.*, p. 6. The principal collections were now: "Arrêtés royaux et ministériels," "Correspondance politique, consulats," "Correspondance politique, départements ministériels et autorités belges," "Correspondance politique, légations," "Correspondance politique, missions étrangères," as well as "Correspondance politico-commerciale."

statement that the material discovered in the Belgian archives revealed "that the Belgian Government was determined from the outset to join Germany's enemies and to make common cause with them."<sup>6</sup> In their milder tones, the German publications questioned Belgium's loyalty to its engagement of strict neutrality as well as Britain's respect for that neutrality. The two states, now allies, replied to the charges, and a polemic that lasted for a quarter of a century got under way.<sup>7</sup>

A more intensive and systematic examination of the documents by the Germans began in the spring of 1915, and this eventually led to the creation of Sektion VI of the Politischen Abteilung, in which a thorough evaluation and utilization of their finds could be made. Because most of the material was of a military and political nature, a military historian was brought in to head the new division. He was Bernhard Schwertfeger, who was released from the army to begin his duties in Brussels in February 1916.<sup>8</sup> When this thoroughgoing historian had had an opportunity to survey the Belgian military and diplomatic archives, he advised against continuation of the extreme propaganda line directed against Belgium. "It will not be possible," he reported, "to deduce from them a Belgian deviation from the precepts of neutrality."<sup>9</sup> Rather, he urged the publication of more extensive selections from the Belgian diplomatic records that would reveal the type of material used by many moderate revisionists in assessing war guilt. That is to say, he proposed (1) to change the propaganda line toward Belgium and to consider the reports of the Belgian ministers to their foreign office as the testimony of reliable, neutral, and conscientious observers; and (2) to publish a still larger number of their reports that described Ger-

<sup>6</sup> James Brown Scott, ed., *Diplomatic Documents Relating to the Outbreak of the World War* (London, 1916), Pt. II, p. 847. The Bavarian archivist, Pius Dirr, who claimed to have "discovered" the Belgian documents, wrote some of the propaganda pieces picturing Belgium in a prewar alliance against Germany. One of his best known works is *Belgien als französische Ostmark: Zur Vorgeschichte des Krieges* (Berlin, 1917).

<sup>7</sup> Perhaps the best single survey of the various views expressed through 1925 is found in Alfred De Ridder, *La violation de la neutralité belge et ses avocats* (Brussels, 1925).

<sup>8</sup> Oscar Freiherr von der Lancken Wakenitz, *Meine dreissig Dienstjahre, 1888-1918: Potsdam — Paris — Brussel* (Berlin, 1931), pp. 169-170.

<sup>9</sup> Schwertfeger to Governor General Bissing, Bethmann-Hollweg, and Moltke, May 26, 1916, as yet unpublished, but quoted in a letter to the writer, Nov. 20, 1950. The opinions of Schwertfeger were published on several occasions after the war. See *Der geistige Kampf um die Verletzung der belgischen Neutralität* [Berlin, 1919], pp. 44, 94, and *passim*; *Der Fehlspruch von Versailles: Deutschlands Freispruch aus belgischen Dokumenten, 1871-1914* [Berlin, 1921], pp. xi-xii; *Kriegsschuldfrage*, July 1929, pp. 665-691.

man prewar policy as peaceful and that criticized the policy of the Triple Entente. Because this proposal and Schwertfeger's moderation eventually proved unacceptable to certain of his superiors, he was transferred to the foreign office in Berlin in the spring of 1918.<sup>10</sup>

Several facts indicate that the publication of the Belgian archival material by the Germans may well have contributed indirectly to the postwar decision of the Wilhelmstrasse to initiate the publication of the monumental *Die grosse Politik*. The Belgian documents were published by the German Government not only during but also immediately after the war, with Schwertfeger finally being allowed to publish five volumes in 1919.<sup>11</sup> In addition, the publications were far more extensive than the usual white papers, the editors went back into the nineteenth century for some of their materials, and the results were considered worth while by the Germans.

When the Germans retreated from Brussels, the archives staff of Belgium returned to the rue de Louvain. The rooms were in disorder and the records, particularly the unbound collections, were in confusion. Nevertheless, only two of the bound volumes were missing, and when these were demanded they were returned by Germany.<sup>12</sup>

#### BETWEEN THE WARS

A very discouraging task awaited the staff of the Service des Archives upon liberation in 1918. There was the disarrangement in which unwelcome occupants usually leave premises they have occupied. The inability to classify, summarize, and bind documents during the 4 years of war and the first years following had created a tremendous backlog. There was a great increase of material from such new activities as the peace conference, occupation, and reparations. Although the library and translating were transferred to other divisions, additional staff had to be recruited and trained, and quarters had to be enlarged at a time when appropriations were

<sup>10</sup> Lancken Wakenitz, *op. cit.*, pp. 169-170. The reason given for the rejection of Schwertfeger's proposal was "economy"; in the summer of 1918, however, he was authorized to proceed. This was so late that the five volumes of *Zur europäischen Politik: 1897-1914* did not appear until after the war—1919 [Berlin]. In editing these volumes Schwertfeger may have been the first of the revisionist historians with extensive documents from Belgian archives to support his thesis.

<sup>11</sup> *Zur europäischen Politik, 1897-1914*. When Schwertfeger was asked for comments on this paragraph, he wrote (March 9, 1951) that "a certain connection" between the publication of the Brussels documents and the decision to edit the German collection "can hardly be rejected." In the same letter, he confirmed the account as related here of the role he played in the history of the archives.

<sup>12</sup> Information furnished in May and June 1949, in personal interviews with Director A. Henri Lambotte, chief of the Service des Archives.

most difficult to obtain. It was unfortunate but not surprising that it was now impossible to continue the practice of summarizing the documents.

Happily, the economy practiced did not prevent the acceptance of a bargain that was offered the officials by a former archivist in Vienna. H. Schlitter, who in imperial days had been Directeur des Archives de la Maison et la Cour Imperial et de l'État, found himself without a post. He wrote De Ridder, offering to supply the Belgian office with copies of the Austrian diplomatic correspondence of interest to Belgium.<sup>13</sup> The offer was accepted and from time to time Schlitter forwarded the copies he made; in addition, many of the despatches in German were translated into French and attached to the German copies.<sup>14</sup>

This Austrian correspondence covers the years from 1833 to 1902. In addition to copies of instructions to the Austrian envoy accredited to the Belgian Court and his reports to Vienna, the volumes contain an occasional copy of other despatches concerning Belgium and of letters passing between Belgian rulers and Viennese monarchs and statesmen. The copies, typewritten for the most part, have been arranged chronologically. They are bound through the year 1853 but are not cataloged.<sup>15</sup> The Austrian correspondence, so useful for the study of the foreign policies of Austria and Belgium and the domestic history of Belgium in the nineteenth century, is a valuable acquisition. It is available to the investigator under the same conditions as the Belgian documents.

Their cramped quarters did not cause the Belgian archivists to discard the numerous press clippings collected through the years. These had been considered essential by the successive Belgian ministers, who followed closely the public opinion of the great powers that had guaranteed Belgian neutrality. There is, in fact, an extensive collection of press articles in addition to those inclosed in the reports of diplomatic representatives.<sup>16</sup>

Those who have used the Belgian Service archives since the war

<sup>13</sup> One compensation the former archivist would receive was the use of a small office in the Department of Archives, a building that was heated in the cold months of postwar Vienna.

<sup>14</sup> Information furnished in May and June 1949, in interviews with A. Henri Lambotte, who had personal knowledge of the arrangement and consulted the correspondence with Schlitter.

<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately, some of the paper used is quite thin, and when the lines on each side of the sheet happen to coincide, these pages are almost illegible.

<sup>16</sup> For a description of these holdings, see the author's "The Value of the Belgian Foreign Office Archives to Students of Public Opinion," in *Public Opinion Quarterly*, XV (Spring, 1951), pp. 140-142.



of 1914 have noticed at once the peculiar arrangement of most of the volumes; they are not on shelves, as would be expected, but in boxes or cases. These wooden cases are about 4 feet long, a foot deep, and over a foot high. Plain in appearance, they are of stout construction, with hand-holds cut in each end and a catch on the front that can be opened easily or clamped tightly shut. The reason for this unconventional housing is logical and the action is typically Belgian. The officials were determined to retain possession of the documents during any future occupation of their country and so to prevent a repetition of their use by an enemy as in 1914-18. The problem was solved by placing most of the volumes in these cases, which could be quickly loaded into trucks and rushed to a place of safety after, or even before, any removal of the government.

Upon the invasion of Poland in 1939, certain further precautions and preliminary preparations were taken by the staff of the Service. The remaining dossiers were placed in the cases numbered according to the collections and were sealed. In addition many documents not under the immediate control of the Service were likewise prepared for quick removal. Next, certain *archives mortes* were sent to Ostend, and others were stored in Brussels, where they were less likely to be discovered (and they were not). The entire staff awaited with apprehension signs of any approaching invasion of their country.<sup>17</sup>

### THE WAR OF 1939

The precautions were well taken. The Germans, determined to seize and use the documents, had set up an organization in their foreign office and had assigned special military detachments for that very purpose. German documents show that on May 11, the day after the invasion of Belgium, Holland, and Luxemburg, these detachments were alerted and briefed as to their duties. They were to be ready either to occupy and hold various bureaus in these states or to rush the documents by the most rapid means possible to the Wilhelmstrasse, after taking precautions to conceal the identity of the contents of the carriers.<sup>18</sup> Perhaps the Nazi authorities real-

<sup>17</sup> A. Henri Lambotte, "Les Archives des Affaires étrangères pendant la guerre," pp. 3-4 of reprint from *Revue générale belge* (Apr. 1947). Director A. Winandy was chief of the Service preceding and during these preparations for a quick evacuation.

<sup>18</sup> Memorandum, Berlin, May 11, 1940, Ad. Protocol A. 8191. It is difficult to follow the usual method of citation or even to be certain of the proper citation of the recent German documents used here and below because they were photostated immediately after the war and before they were classified in the usual manner. These photostats are deposited in the Service des Archives.

ized that the imperial government had not anticipated the seizure and use of the Belgian documents in the preceding war and that their exploitation in the beginning of the propaganda campaign had been bungled. At any rate, before the fall of Brussels in 1940, the invaders had formulated detailed plans for the seizure of the records.

The Nazi official who was made responsible for the documents in Brussels appears to have been Baron von Künsberg, a secretary of legation.<sup>19</sup> Those delegated by the protocol service of the German foreign office to seize the documents of Belgium and Holland met at Düsseldorf on May 15. As Holland had fallen to German arms, most of the functionaries charged with these duties in the Netherlands now left for the Hague, Amsterdam, and Rotterdam, for they were interested as well in consular archives and commune records, especially evacuation plans. A Dr. Zeitschel<sup>20</sup> appears to have been in charge of the special group, the Sonderkommando, which was to go into Brussels with the vanguard of German troops and then to padlock and guard the offices housing the documents. He located the army corps that was expected to capture Brussels, and with men from the Geheimfeldpolizeigruppe and 10 well-armed motorcyclists at his disposal he awaited the entry into Brussels. On the afternoon of May 17 it was apparent that resistance was stronger than expected and that the Belgian capital would not fall before the following day. Although only 10 kilometers outside Brussels, Zeitschel and his Sonderkommando had about resigned themselves to the delay. While his group was discussing the matter, equally distressed propaganda officials arrived on the scene. They had reported to Berlin that Brussels would be occupied that afternoon; in fact, they knew that in 25 minutes the German radio would broadcast news of the entry. This was sufficient to bring a decision to combine forces and attempt to enter Brussels at once. The group that was interested in the documents, together with the propagandists who were determined to have their information proved correct, thereupon dashed for Brussels. On the way they encountered the Spanish embassy's chargé d'affaires, who gave them the latest information on conditions in Brussels. Arrived in the city, they occupied the offices of various ministries and the principal embassies and, to their "greatest joy," were just in time to hear the Berlin

<sup>19</sup> Telegram, Kordt to the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, May 17, 1940. Aogoor.

<sup>20</sup> This must have been Carl Theo Zeitschel, who had been employed in propaganda activities for the Wilhelmstrasse before the war and who became counsellor to the German Embassy in France after the French capitulation.



broadcast of the news of the German entry into Brussels. The main forces occupied Brussels the next evening, May 18.<sup>21</sup>

The joy and pleasure at the successful coup by these men was not shared by Künsberg after he had had time to investigate. This German official reported that the offices were in great disorder, with many documents missing. He had some 200 offices carefully searched, various safes and cases opened, and all material that might be of interest to the German foreign office loaded on trucks and sent to Berlin. In time the German ambassador in Brussels, Adolph von Moltke, was called in to make sure that there remained in the offices no material of interest to the Wilhelmstrasse. Papers from the home of Foreign Minister Henri Spaak were likewise taken.<sup>22</sup>

In the meantime the Nazis had turned detectives and had made a determined effort to follow and overtake the Belgians, who were thought to be fleeing with their archives. The invaders soon learned that the documents they sought had been transported in the direction of Ghent. With the first troops to enter that city, there went two of the Kommandos. Again they were too late, but they did learn that the archives had been transported to Ostend.<sup>23</sup>

The capture of Ostend and the search there must have been still more disappointing, and the Germans were now positive that preliminary preparations for evacuation had been made some months earlier. Hearing that a few hundred cases had been transported into France, they continued the search in that country.<sup>24</sup> At Poitiers, 1,500 cases were located; and, in the hope that they were the documents so long sought, the cases were forwarded to Berlin. When it was found that these, like those left in Brussels, were of slight value, it was finally realized that the significant papers had been sent to Britain.<sup>25</sup> The missing cases of documents were, indeed, on the northwest coast of Wales.

<sup>21</sup> Zeitschel to the Service of Protocol, German Embassy, Brussels, May 23, 1940, no. 16, D.511204-5-6.

<sup>22</sup> Künsberg to the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Brussels, May 30, 1940; note, Künsberg to Halem, Berlin, Oct. 8, 1940, Rgen I/4-179. In the former Künsberg errs in giving the date of occupation of the offices as May 18.

<sup>23</sup> Report, Künsberg to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Brussels, May 30, 1940; report of Schmidt, Feldpolizei Kommandant, May 22, 1940, D.511207.

<sup>24</sup> Telegram, Künsberg to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, May 29, 1940, apparently from Ostend, HNOX 906. A United Press dispatch of May 31, 1940, carried a report that the Belgian foreign office archives had been scattered, and "have been almost entirely located and continue to arrive at Poitiers by truck," (*New York Times*, June 1, 1940, p. 2, c. 2).

<sup>25</sup> Note, Künsberg to Halem, Oct. 8, 1940, Rgen I/4-179. See also a supplementary report on Belgium by Berswordt, May 15-June 14, 1940, 18.X11.40.

Hoping that the archives could be seized after the conquest of Great Britain, the Sonderkommando sought to compile a list of employees of the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs who had made their way across the channel.<sup>26</sup> As late as the end of January 1941, Baron von Künsberg was still seeking to learn the positions held by these foreign office employees, together with their new places of residence.<sup>27</sup>

It is surprising that the German authorities, who had planned so carefully for the seizure and use of the documents, were so poorly informed about Belgian precautions to prevent their seizure, especially since no effort had been made to keep the precautions a secret and those who asked had been given the reason for the use of cases rather than shelves.

As mentioned above, the *archives mortes* had been shipped to Ostend before Belgium was invaded. The evacuation of the remaining archives of the various ministries had been begun on May 12, 1940, 2 days after the invasion began and 5 days before the fall of Brussels. They were transported directly to Ostend, whence, if it proved necessary, they could be moved to either France or England. The timetable for the removal was 72 hours, but less than 27 were required.<sup>28</sup>

Several days later, as the Nazis swept through northern France, two packet ships were requisitioned and the loading of the cases began. One of the principal problems in transporting the archives during the hectic military crisis was to find the manpower needed to handle the cases. In Ostend the communal authorities cooperated by calling upon a number of men on the relief rolls, even including some with physical disabilities, to help load the ships. When 100 tons of service cases had been put aboard, German bombers appeared; and the ships put to sea without taking on the remaining cases. Those left on the dock were shipped to Poitiers and were the ones later found by the Nazis to be of so little interest, being neither political nor military archives. Director Charles Lecharlier, chief of the Service, left Ostend for Poitiers and Assistant Director Lambotte followed the other documents to Britain. One ship docked at

<sup>26</sup> Note, Künsberg to Lutter, Berlin, Sept. 4, 1940.

<sup>27</sup> Künsberg to Bergen, Berlin, Nov. 16, 1940, Rgen I/4-248; Künsberg to the delegation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at Brussels and intended for Bergen, counselor of the embassy, Berlin, Nov. 29, D.511170; Bergen to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for Künsberg, Brussels, Jan. 13, Rgen 7/4-248/Ang. II or D.511169; Künsberg to the Special Group in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Berlin, Jan 31, no. D.511168 or K/LG-153/42.

<sup>28</sup> Lambotte, "Les Archives des Affaires étrangères," p. 4 of a reprint from *Revue générale belge* (Apr. 1947).

Folkestone, and the cases in its cargo were removed to London and stored temporarily in the Public Record Office. The other anchored at Southampton, and its cargo was placed in the Bank of England's branch in that city.<sup>29</sup>

Even then, with heavy bombing and possible invasion, the documents were far from safe. The Belgian ambassador, Baron de Cartier de Marchienne, soon obtained the use of a tower of the ancient castle of Caernarvon on the northwestern coast of Wales, opposite the island of Anglesey. Again the problems of labor and transportation had to be solved, but during the middle of June the removal of the cases to the Queen's Tower of Caernarvon Castle was completed. This was no mean accomplishment, the transportation of the cases by truck coming as it did just after the fall of Dunkirk. The 2,000 cases were by this time completely disarranged and there was no opportunity to place them in their proper order. Nevertheless, Lambotte set up a tiny office in a space originally intended to house medieval archers, and he listed the cases and their new locations.<sup>30</sup> Soon he was able to serve the Belgian ministers in exile almost as if the government and documents were still in Brussels.<sup>31</sup>

The Belgian and British officials were even yet not completely satisfied as to the safety of the documents, and a concrete roof was constructed over the tower to protect them from incendiary bombs. When invasion of Great Britain seemed probable, they considered transporting the archives to America, despite the danger from German submarines.<sup>32</sup>

### THE POSTWAR PERIOD

Shortly after the liberation of Belgium and the return of the government, the archives were shipped back to Brussels. During the Nazi counterattack of December 1944, there were anxious hours in the rue de Louvain over the possibility of another evacuation. Since this was not necessary, the Service des Archives was soon reestab-

<sup>29</sup> Lambotte, *op. cit.*, p. 4. Jean Billens supervised the removal of cases from the several governmental services. Lecharlier, Lambotte, and Jean Balteaux, director of the foreign office library, were the men primarily responsible for this successful and rapid evacuation.

<sup>30</sup> Lambotte, *op. cit.*, pp. 4-5.

<sup>31</sup> Much credit should be given to A. Henri Lambotte for his encyclopedic knowledge of the documents, his ingenuity, and his devotion to duty as assistant director and later as acting director of the Service. During the time the archives were being transported, he was suffering from a painful illness.

<sup>32</sup> Information furnished in May and June 1949 in personal interviews with A. Henri Lambotte.

lished in quarters more extensive than before and with peace the staff was increased. By 1947 conditions for research in the foreign archives of Belgium were better than in prewar years, and more investigators are using them than ever before.

Visitors find that the present director, A. Henri Lambotte, and his very competent staff are unfailingly cordial, and their kindness is matched only by their knowledge of the materials in the archives. These more than make up for the plainness of the appointments of the reading room; for, since the Service outgrew the special facilities prepared about the turn of the century, it has been forced to adapt itself to the existing space of a conventional office building well in its second century of use.

The history of these archives illustrates the significance now attached to the protection of diplomatic documents from seizure by enemies who may consider them a first objective. Realizing fully this possible use by the enemy, the Belgian authorities were successful in keeping possession of their important documents during the war of 1939, in preserving them almost intact, and in experiencing only slight interruption in their use. The Belgian experience is in direct contrast to that of several other states. In The Hague, officials who wanted to prevent the possible use of Dutch records by the Nazis burned many of their foreign office prewar records in the few days preceding the Nazi occupation. After the fall of Paris, some of the French materials were taken to Germany (these have not been recovered); others were lost in the Quai d'Orsay fire, which started during the liberation and interrupted the service. Several Norwegian foreign office documents seized in Oslo make up a section of the German "White Book No. 4," and are used as the basis for the claim that "the Norwegian government had abandoned neutrality" before the Nazi attack.<sup>33</sup>

Although successfully eluding German seizure during the past war by the ingenious method described above, the archival officials in Belgium today doubt that the precautions that then proved successful would be so again, considering the ever-increasing speed of armies and the number of documents. Hence the diplomatic records are being microfilmed; in this form, it would be a relatively simple task to rush the copies to a place of safety and to destroy the originals. It remains to be seen whether the current Belgian authorities are being overcautious, or whether they are as foresighted as their predecessors of the 1920's.

<sup>33</sup> *British Designs on Norway, Documents Concerning the Anglo-French Policy of Extending the War* (German Library of Information, New York, 1940), pp. xii, 59-68.