

Microfilming of German Records in the National Archives

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SELDOM are historians suddenly given access to documentary material covering all aspects of a nation's life during a whole era. Yet this is the opportunity now afforded to historians in America. Within a short time they will have available documents of the Hitler era in Germany reflecting its origins, causes, administrative system, philosophy, policies, military system, propaganda, and almost every other imaginable feature of significance or interest. For in the National Archives, every month, hundreds of rolls of microfilm are added to the growing collection of material pertaining to Nazi rule.

Nor is the material concerned with Germany alone. Vast numbers of the documents relate to military operations of the Germans outside their borders and to the civilian and military exploitation of conquered and occupied nations. Not only historians concentrating on Germany, therefore, but also those whose primary interests are Russia, Southeastern Europe, France, Italy, Scandinavia, and other Western European countries, as well as the Near and Far East, will find valuable material in the collection of microfilm now being assembled at the National Archives. That this wealth of documentation will be available on microfilm, which scholars can either use in the National Archives or purchase for reading in the comfort of their own libraries, is the result of a joint enterprise of the American Historical Association and the United States Government. They have joined forces in a project designed to organize, catalog, and preserve on microfilm this documentation, most of which is to stay only temporarily in this country.

Bushels, tons, and truckloads of documents were collected by the Allied military forces in Germany during World War II. They were divided among France, Great Britain, and the United States. The documents that went to the two last countries remained under joint control insofar as declassification and eventual disposition were

* Dr. Perman was director of the American Historical Association's microfilming project, at Alexandria, Va., for the American Committee for the Study of War Documents, from Sept. 1957 to Sept. 1959.

concerned. Of the American share, some documents were used for the Nürnberg trials and as a result were made accessible to scholars. Others form the basis of the Department of State's *Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945*. Others found their way to the Library of Congress and to other libraries and depositories, such as the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace at Stanford University and the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research in New York. A great majority of the documents, however, estimated at 21,000 linear feet, were deposited at the Departmental Records Branch of the Adjutant General's Office in Alexandria, Va. (now the World War II Records Division of the National Archives). Until 1954 this mass of records was closed under an overall classification of "confidential." It was available to military and other governmental agencies but was not accessible to private scholars. In 1954 the Army began a gradual review of the material to separate what need not be closed from what was still properly subject to security classification.¹ The announcement awakened in a number of scholars the fear that a rare opportunity was about to be missed. Although the content of the papers was known only in the broadest outline, it was nevertheless obvious that historical material of great importance would soon be taken from this country without having been explored by American researchers. Accordingly, on the initiative of Prof. Hans Kohn of the College of the City of New York, an American Committee for the Study of War Documents was established as a private group. It had two main objectives: to microfilm as much of the material as would be considered historically important and to prepare and publish guides enabling scholars to find their way through the microfilm. The first chairman of the committee was Dean Reginald H. Phelps of Harvard University; he was succeeded by Prof. Lynn M. Case of the University of Pennsylvania. Since 1958 the chairman has been Prof. Oron J. Hale of the University of Virginia.

In 1956 the committee became a committee of the American Historical Association and in the same year it received from the Ford Foundation an emergency grant, part of which was earmarked for microfilming records of the German Foreign Office deposited at Whaddon Hall in England (the documents scheduled for earliest return to Germany) and another part for microfilming the records in Alexandria. A subcommittee on microfilming, headed first by E. Malcolm Carroll of Duke University, and later by Fritz T. Epstein of the Library of Congress, with Gerhard L. Weinberg as first

¹ See Fritz T. Epstein, "Washington Research Opportunities in the Period of World War II," in *American Archivist*, 17: 225 (July 1954).

director of operations in Alexandria, was faced with the complex task of finding space for a staff of researchers within the walls of a security-conscious Army organization, a *modus operandi* with the declassification procedures that had to precede any microfilming operations, and, above all, a systematic approach to a mountain of paper, which contained both historical paydirt and valueless dross.

The two problems first mentioned were solved with relative ease, thanks to the understanding help of the Adjutant General's Office and its Departmental Records Branch, under Sherrod East. A procedure was devised by which batches of reviewed records could be screened and filmed by the American Historical Association staff, after they had been reviewed for classification and before their return to Germany. Office space and microfilming equipment were made available to the project, and the personnel of the Departmental Records Branch absorbed the additional workload created by the eager and growing demands of the A. H. A. staff for material.

The problem of finding some uniform and meaningful system of screening, selecting, and describing the long rows of documents in the inner stacks of the Branch's warehouse was something of a challenge. The records are organized into record groups, some amounting to 1,000 or 2,000 linear feet. For some of these records, finding aids had previously been prepared to serve the special purposes for which they were used before the classification review. For some record groups, of less interest to the Government but of great interest to historians, there were no finding aids at all. It soon became clear that some criteria for the selection of documents would have to be established, since much of the material was of little value for historical research. It speaks for the organizational talent of Dr. Weinberg that, after a minimum of trial and error, he established a system under which the A. H. A. project still operates.

The trained historians of the A. H. A. staff screen, identify, and evaluate every folder of documents individually and then decide whether it should be filmed. If they consider it worth filming, they prepare a description of its contents on what are called data sheets — a cataloging technique developed by the Inter-Allied War Documents Project in Berlin. The process is the most important part of the work of the A. H. A. staff. A separate record is kept of all classes or series of documents not filmed, together with a brief indication of the reason for omitting them. At the beginning of each roll of film appears a description of all folders of documents appearing on that roll. This introductory description is also made available in mimeographed form.

The record groups into which the documents were organized by the Departmental Records Branch do not always correspond either to archival provenance or to author provenance. In order to give scholars a systematic description of the documents, the keystone of the A. H. A. identifications is archival provenance. To figure out the provenance is the first task of the A. H. A. researchers; and, simple as this sounds, it is often a challenging task.

Many of the documents were badly damaged during or after the war and passed through many hands, ships, and depositories. Often they had lost their covers and their title pages, by which it would have been easy to determine whose files they came from. Sometimes the documents, especially the military ones, bear no letter-heads, are signed in illegible scribbles, and have few other marks of identification. As a result the researcher must often hunt for other clues to determine the provenance of a document. These clues sometimes take surprising forms: perhaps the ribbon that ties the document together or the idiosyncrasies of the German clerk who put the folder together and for esthetic reasons punched the holes in a special pattern, which may have been previously observed on a document where more positive identification was possible. One German major, who composed in longhand defying identification a most interesting outline of the German military campaign in France after the Allied invasion, would have remained anonymous were it not for a scribbled note about an appointment he was to keep. The system of designating various offices and subdivisions of governmental agencies by numbers, followed by dashes and slashes and other numbers, seems sometimes to have been deliberately devised to baffle future historians; and often these puzzles are not solved until the researcher can somehow reconstruct from the contents of the records the organizational structure of the agency to which they belonged.

The second concern of the A. H. A. researcher is to summarize the contents of each folder in a short and meaningful description. Again, this task sounds simple but sometimes proves baffling in practice. Some German agencies filed their documents according to easily discernible systems that can be followed in the descriptions. Others, for example Himmler's empire, merely filed their documents in chronological order. A folder therefore may contain documents dealing with every subject that the Schutz Staffel (SS) touched or intended to touch; and there were few things, especially in the later stages of the war, that Himmler did not consider his business. The researcher faces then the task of describing each document individually, giving enough information to guide scholars

to specific subjects, agencies, or persons. A systematic effort also is made to record certain information available only in the original documents or accumulated through experience in handling the records. For it is an unfortunate fact that some elements important to the scholar are lost in reproduction on microfilm. An outstanding example is color. It was the habit of many German officials of higher rank to stick generally to one color in their penciled notations. It is easy to identify them by their brilliant greens (Himmler), vermillions (Keitel), browns (Jodl), or purples (Thomas). Many abbreviations are easier to decipher in the original than in the more blurred version of the film. Some barely legible documents become illegible on film and therefore, if possible, are transcribed before filming.

As far as possible, the A. H. A. researcher tries to point the way to reconstructing the German filing system under which the records were once organized. Often the results of this effort must remain fragmentary because the collection itself is incomplete, or the records are irretrievably disorganized, or the original system defies recognition. Nevertheless, where ascertainable, the original German markings on a folder are included in its description; and, as far as possible, records that belong together are either filmed together or cross-referenced. After the records of an agency have been processed, the researcher summarizes in a short introductory note what he has learned from the records: the frequent, sudden, and apparently senseless changes of name of the same organization, the interdependence of various agencies, the main outlines of the subjects with which the files deal. The data sheets also include information that makes possible the location of documents on the film, and they give cross-references to related materials in other record groups or in other parts of the same record group.

During the first year of its operations, the microfilming project processed well over 1,000 linear feet of records. Meanwhile, the gradual review of the records for reclassification continued with increased momentum, opening new masses of material; and it soon became obvious that a much greater expenditure of money would be necessary to microfilm all materials of interest. The system used by the project in the first year of its operation pointed the way in which this increasingly large task could be fruitfully attacked. The American Historical Association's grant from the Ford Foundation having been exhausted, a new grant was obtained from the Old Dominion Foundation in 1957, and a further grant from the Lilly Foundation in 1958.

In 1958 the American Historical Association also reached a new

agreement with the National Archives, to which the Departmental Records Branch had then been transferred. Various agencies of the United States Government had planned to microfilm certain parts of the German records before their restitution, and the National Archives was now to carry out this filming program. It became clear that the filming programs overlapped and that a fusion of the A. H. A. microfilming operations with those of the Government would avoid duplication and would produce more film and better, more uniform, guides to the material filmed. It was therefore agreed that the A. H. A. staff should prepare descriptive sheets for all material filmed and that the National Archives should take over the cost of all technical operations involved in the microfilming process itself. Thus the association's funds could be spent exclusively for professional personnel, and the quantity of material filmed every year could be increased. This joint venture has proved successful.

The harvest of 2 years of A. H. A. operations and of nearly a year of joint operation by the A. H. A. and the National Archives is 2,000 rolls of film now available in the National Archives and some 600 rolls in process, which will be available to researchers within a few months. The documentary material thus made accessible to American scholars covers a wide variety of subjects, agencies, and individuals. The following list includes only the broad classes, specifying the more important names and the larger groups of records; it is by no means exhaustive.

Record Group 1003: Records of *Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda*, dealing with the administrative and organizational aspects of that agency.

Record Group 1004: Extensive files of the *Reichswirtschaftsministerium*, some from the top echelons of the Ministry, dealing with the following subjects: mining operations in all parts of Europe, external trade, allocations of raw materials, and wartime economic problems of Germany. Intermixed with these records are files of *Südosteuropa-Gesellschaft*, pertaining to German control and exploitation of the economies of the southeastern European states. (This organization was also involved in Nazi cultural propaganda.) The record group also contains files of the *Statistische Reichsamt*, largely studies and compilations of data on the economy of Germany and of other European nations.

Record Group 1005: Records of the *Reichsluftfahrtministerium*, consisting primarily of documents relating to the production and testing of aircraft and aircraft weapons, including some documents on the administration of the Ministry. Most of the documents are records of various branches of the Ministry; a smaller number are records of some aircraft factories (such as *Junkers*) and of testing grounds of the Air Force. Other documents, from

the files of the *Luftarchiv* of the Ministry, deal with the development of the German Air Force in the 1920's.

Record Group 1007: Records of the *Reichsministerium für Rüstung und Kriegsproduktion*, pertaining to the conduct of the German war economy and to the German armament effort in World War II. A group of folders in this collection comes from Minister Speer's files, but the largest part consists of the files of *Rüstungskommando Augsburg*. These deal chiefly with labor supply and allocation and the utilization of slave labor, foreign workers, and prisoners of war in German war industry.

Record Group 1010: Records of the *Reichsführer SS und Chef der Deutschen Polizei* and of *Waffen-SS*. This is a vast collection, of which the following parts have been processed to date: files of *Persönlicher Stab Reichsführer SS*, which contain also some files of the *Himmler Adjutantur*; files of the *Himmler Feldkommandostelle*; some private papers of Himmler, Karl Wolff, and Richard Hildebrandt; files of the *Ordnungspolizei*, with some personal files of Kurt Daluge enclosed; operational records of the *Waffen-SS* and records of several *Oberabschnitte der Allgemeinen SS* as well as personnel files of foreigners serving either in the *Waffen-SS* and other SS formations or in the German armed forces; series of SS and police publications, such as *Fahndungslisten* and *Kriminalblätter*; and some records of other SS agencies. Work on this collection, covering over 1,000 linear feet, is still in progress, and records of additional SS agencies will be filmed.

Record Group 1011: Records of the *Reichskommissar für die Festigung deutschen Volkstums*, pertaining to forced resettlement of populations during World War II; and files of the *Reichskommissar für die Wiedervereinigung Oesterreichs mit dem Deutschen Reich*.

Record Group 1015: Records of the *Organisation Todt*, the construction agency of the German government, consisting primarily of the records of *Oberbauleitung Schwaben*.

Record Group 1016: Small fragments of records of various Reich ministries and other government agencies including some files of the *Auswärtige Amt*, *Reichsjustizministerium*, *Reichsfinanzministerium*, *Reichsministerium für Ernährung und Landwirtschaft*, *Reichsforschungsrat*, and *Reichsministerium des Innern*.

Record Group 1026: Records of the *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*. From this vast collection, records of the following agencies have been processed: *Chef OKW*, *Chef und Stellvertretender Chef des Wehrmachtführungsstabes*, *Wehrmachtführungsstab/Quartiermeister*, *Adjutantur Grossadmiral Dönitz*. The records of the *OKW/Wehrmachtpropagandaamt* are at present being screened, and work in this record group will continue for some time. A part of the OKW record group, constituting a sizable collection in itself, is that containing the records of the *Wehrwirtschafts- und Rüstungsamt* and its numerous predecessors and successors.² These records present in great

² A detailed article covering these and other economic records is being prepared by a member of the A. H. A. staff, Berenice A. Carroll, and will appear under the title "After Behemoth, the Chaos."

detail German armament and economic policies in the Weimar and Nazi periods at both the highest and lowest levels. They include such varied documents as the following: minutes of the *Reichsverteidigungsausschuss*; reports dealing with the collection of war booty in occupied territories; records of the *Wirtschaftsstab Ost*, an interdepartmental agency of the German Government dealing with economic administration and exploitation in occupied territories; reports on military operations in occupied Russia; intelligence collected by German military agencies pertaining to the industrial and economic resources of future victims of German aggression; records pertaining to forced labor and its management in Germany; and a wealth of records dealing with military and economic administration in Germany.

Record Group 1032: Field and Technical Manuals. In order to complete a collection of such manuals of the German Army, Air Force, Navy, and SS, which is in the possession of the World War II Records Division, some material of this nature is being processed for filming. There will also be included the *Kriegsstärkenachweisungen* and *Friedensstärkenachweisungen* of the German Armed Forces.

Record Group 1035: Records of the National Socialist German Labor Party (NSDAP), dealing with the early history of the party as well as the organization and activities of the party and its affiliated organizations during the years of Hitler's rule. The files are from agencies at all levels of party organization, from local groups to national headquarters, as well as those of affiliated organizations such as *Hitler-Jugend*, *Deutsche Arbeitsfront*, *Kraft durch Freude*, and *Winterhilfe*. It also includes scattered *Sturm Abteilung* (SA) files. Another part of this record group, now being screened, contains records of German student organizations, both before and after 1933, and a considerable quantity of files of the *Deutsches Ausland-Institut*, pertaining to German policies towards *Auslandsdeutsche* and including files of the *Reichskommissar für die Festigung deutschen Volkstums* and the *Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle*, pertaining to transfers of German populations.

Record Group 1036: Records of most varied provenance. Among them are records of research and educational institutions dominated or created by the NSDAP or by the SS, such as:

Reichsinstitut "Sven-Hedin" für Innerasienforschung, an SS-sponsored group, which undertook an expedition to Tibet and was later involved in antisemitic "research."

Deutsche Akademie München, an organization that maintained a vast network of agencies throughout Europe and the rest of the world, originally set up after World War I for teaching German abroad, later used as an instrument of Nazi propaganda.

Institut für Deutsche Ostarbeit, an organization concerned primarily with cultural looting and some research in Poland and with efforts to Germanize occupied territories in the East.

Akademie für Deutsches Recht, an institute organized to establish a truly "Germanic" legal system free of Roman influence.

Private and semiofficial associations reflecting some aspects of German relations with the Far East (such as the *Ostasiensausschuss*, *Deutsch-Japanische Gesellschaft*, *Verein zur Förderung der Deutsch-Mandschurischen Wirtschaftsbeziehungen*, *Deutsche Handelskammer Hankow*, and *Ostasiatischer Verein Hamburg-Bremen*).

This record group also contains some scattered top-level files of the *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*, *Oberkommando des Heeres*, and *Oberkommando der Luftwaffe*, some SS records, and occasional files of German civilian ministries. In addition there are some papers of Japanese legations and consular offices in Europe and of Italian military and civilian agencies. The collection further contains a vast quantity of records of over 200 German, Japanese, and other business companies, chiefly those engaged in trade between Germany, Japan, and other Far Eastern countries (for example, I. G. Farben). Scattered through this group are personal papers of various individuals, including Dr. Max Ilgner, Karl Haushofer, and Dr. W. von Tirpitz.

Record Group 1040: Files of German business and industrial firms. The records are fragmentary but sometimes of considerable interest. For instance, some deal with the degree of state control over the firms, their wartime expansion, their international business connections, their management of slave labor, and administrative matters pertaining to their business. Among others, the files of the following firms have been processed: *Auergesellschaft A. G.*, Berlin; *Dresdner Bank*, Berlin; *Friedrich Flick, K. G.*; *Focke-Wulf Flugzeugbau GmbH*, Bremen; *I. G. Farbenindustrie A. G.*, Frankfurt/Main; *Hermann Goering Werke*; and *Krupp A. G.*, Essen.

Record Group 1041: Records of three German private citizens: (1) accounts and letters of Dr. Theo Morell, personal physician to Adolf Hitler, dealing with his medical practice and his financial interests; (2) briefs and papers of Dr. Walter Luetgebrune, a lawyer whose clientele included numerous German Rightists and early Nazis whom he defended in cases involving assassinations, political murders, criminal libel, treasonable conspiracy, and other political offenses during the Weimar period; and (3) papers of Dr. Karl Haushofer, pertaining to his career as a geopolitician, his relations with Rudolf Hess, and his activities in and concerning the *Volksbund für das Deutschtum im Ausland* and the *Deutsche Akademie München*.

Record Group 1048: "Miscellaneous German Record Collection." Only some sections of this vast collection, which contains both highly rewarding material and useless stray items, have been screened. Among others, the following important documents were discovered in one part of the collection, scattered among files of various German governmental and military agencies: appointment books and telephone logs of Himmler, papers of the Hitler Secretariat for 1923, a complete transcript of the Hitler trial in 1924, files of Göring's *Stabsamt* for the World War II period, and papers of Franz Ritter von Epp. There are also records pertaining to the attempt to assassinate Hitler in July 1944; and papers of Generaloberst Alfred Jodl, Ministers Speer and Schwerin von Krosigk, Prof. Schmid-Noerr, Gen. Von Faber du Faur, Gen. Ritter von Pohl, Field Marshal von Blomberg, Generaloberst Franz Halder, and others.

Another part of this record group (the "EAP 66-" series), which has been filmed, contains documents of most varied provenance, pertaining to the economy of Germany and of many other countries. They show German fi-

nancial and economic interests in occupied territories and in enemy, neutral, and German-allied countries. Some are records of the *Reichswirtschaftsministerium*, the SS, the *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*, the *Reichsministerium für Rüstung und Kriegsproduktion*, *Reichsministerium für die besetzten Ostgebiete*, *Vierjahresplan*, *Wirtschaftsstab Ost*, *Südosteuropa-Gesellschaft*, *Reichsamt für Wirtschaftsausbau*, *Militärbefehlshaber in Frankreich*, and private firms. Some of these files complement material previously filmed in other record groups. Work in this record group, full of surprises, will continue for some time.

Record Group 1056: Records of the Communist Party in *Smolensk Oblast*, captured by the Germans in Russia. This film, previously prepared by the U. S. Government, has been provided with targets to facilitate its use.

To date, 13 finding aids under the general title *Guides to German Records Microfilmed at Alexandria, Va.* have been prepared by the A. H. A. project and published by the National Archives as part of its program to facilitate the use of microfilm in its custody. These guides cover the records now filmed, and they will be followed by others. It is hoped that a printed guide eventually will be issued for all the film prepared in Alexandria. The following guides are now obtainable from the Exhibits and Publications Branch of the National Archives:

- No. 1. *Records of the Reich Ministry of Economics (Reichswirtschaftsministerium).*
- No. 2. *Records of the Office of the Reich Commissioner for the Strengthening of Germanism (Reichskommissar für die Festigung deutschen Volkstums).*
- No. 3. *Records of the National Socialist German Labor Party (Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei).*
- No. 4. *Records of the Organization Todt.*
- No. 5. *Miscellaneous German Records Collection, Part I.*
- No. 6. *Records of Nazi Cultural and Research Institutions and Records Pertaining to Axis Relations and Interests in the Far East.*
- No. 7. *Records of Headquarters, German Armed Forces High Command (Oberkommando der Wehrmacht/OKW), Part I.*
- No. 8. *Miscellaneous German Records Collection, Part II.*
- No. 9. *Records of Private German Individuals.*
- No. 10. *Records of the Reich Ministry for Armaments and War Production (Reichsministerium für Rüstung und Kriegsproduktion).*
- No. 11. *Fragmentary Records of Miscellaneous Reich Ministries and Offices.*
- No. 12. *Records of Headquarters of the German Army High Command (Oberkommando des Heeres/OKH), Part I.*
- No. 13. *Records of the Reich Air Ministry (Reichsluftfahrtministerium).*

A word of caution should be added at this point for the benefit of those who will use these publications. The titles of the publications are those that were assigned to the particular record groups that the guides cover. The title of a given guide is no guarantee that material of entirely different provenance does not appear in that guide. The thorough scholar, who will want to collect all the material pertaining to one subject or one agency, will have to leaf through all the guides to make sure of complete coverage.

This in itself is a time-consuming enterprise; but it is important to remember, between fits of eyestrain, that the average page in the guide covers approximately 2,000 pages of documents. A small library of guides will probably cover all records selected for filming *from the mountain of papers*.