

Lisa Cant  
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Professor Senocak  
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## **How the Preservation of Archives During WWII Led to a Radical Reformation of Strategic Intelligence Efforts**

*Captured documents invariably furnish important and reliable information concerning the enemy which makes it possible to draw conclusions as to his organization, strength, and intentions and which may facilitate our war effort materially.*

-Captured *German Order of the Day*, as quoted in MIRS History.<sup>1</sup>

In 1943, in the midst of World War Two, the Allies established what was perhaps the most unusual and unexpected army unit of the war: the Monuments, Fine Arts and Archives army unit (MFA&A), created not so much to further the war effort but specifically to address the fate of culturally significant objects. The unit notably placed archivists and art specialists within advancing American and British army units.<sup>2</sup> Drawn from existing army divisions these volunteers had as their mission the safeguarding of works of art, monumental buildings, and—more significantly for this study—archives, for the preserved archives ultimately produced intelligence that was valuable both to the ongoing war effort and for the post-war administration of Allied occupied Germany. In order to achieve their mission effectively, the embedded archivists had to be on the front lines, as this was where the most damage could be expected to happen. This was also incidentally where the freshest information could be found. This paper will focus on the archives, what they produced, and what happened to them once they were captured. Although the MFA&A division was initially created to find looted objects and protect culturally relevant material including archives, the Military Intelligence Research Section (MIRS), a joint British and American program, recognized the possible intelligence benefits that

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<sup>1</sup> AGAR-S doc. 1440. “History and Operations of MIRS: London and Washington Branches, May 1943 – July 1945,” 2.

<sup>2</sup> AGAR-S doc. 1456. “Memorandum: MFA&A Recommendations, October 7, 1944,” 1.

could be gained through the exploitation of captured German archives. This agency pioneered strategic intelligence, as up to this point the use of a large quantity of enemy records to develop studies quickly enough for application in then-current large-scale military operations was an untried military technique.

### **Overview**

In both their advance and their retreat, the Germans removed many works of art and archives from their original locations. Adolf Hitler wanted to amass a great collection of art in Berlin, so his armies plundered many institutions and private homes in both Eastern and Western Europe. The Nazis also kept meticulous records of their wartime activities, from technological advances to the statistics of people murdered in concentration camps. In their retreat from the advancing Allied armies, the German authorities hid many of the valuable works of art along with archives that contained evidence of their war criminality. Other German archives were simply abandoned in their repositories. While the Allies were aware of the plunder of art, they did not foresee the vast amounts of useful information contained within the captured German archives, which is why the MFA&A program was developed specifically to find and protect culturally significant items. The program was not developed to exploit captured records, although this was ultimately one of its main tasks.

The MFA&A officers, in their attempt to retrieve and preserve both artworks and records of fact, had in some cases to hold interviews and make other investigative efforts with the original curators to locate artifacts and materials that were hidden. Other archives only had to be safeguarded against further damage by looters or from exposure while in a damaged building. However, once the contents of some of the archival material became known to the MIRS intelligence agency, a procedure to centralize and exploit the documents was undertaken, named

Operation Goldcup. Once captured, archival files were screened for useful information, removed to central depots in Germany and eventually to others in London and Washington, D.C., where governmental agencies such as the FBI and the Air Force combed through them for useful, current intelligence; for information relevant to war crimes trials; and ultimately for histories about the war. The MFA&A and MIRS mission with the archived material was unprecedented. Their investigatory methods were nothing more than trial-and-error, but, nonetheless, their contribution to the development of intelligence on the workings of the German Army and the Third Reich government was unparalleled, providing important information for active battle and for the military occupation of West Germany following the war, respectively. MIRS, the agency responsible for the documents in London and Washington, D.C., eventually evolved efficient and scientific techniques for the reception and cataloging of enemy documents, their circulation to all interested agencies, and their exploitation for intelligence purposes, thus pioneering a field of strategic intelligence.

This paper will investigate the development of the use of captured German documents for intelligence purposes during and after World War Two. An examination of both the founding principles of the MFA&A division and the activities of the MFA&A officers on the ground shows that both the division and its officers saw their mission as one of protecting archives for their own sake and for the people of Germany, who would need these files once the war was over, rather than one of information gathering. As a result, initially the MFA&A division focused on preserving archives, not exploiting them. When plans to centralize captured archives became known, several archivists even spoke out against plans to move archives to new locations, as such a move might damage them in one way or another. Paperwork related to the creation and activities of the MFA&A division indicates that these archivists opposed the idea of

gaining intelligence at the expense of the archives' integrity, as disorganized and scattered documents would, they maintained, be worthless. These protestations are in Archives II in the United States National Archives, called the Captured Records Policies and Procedures file, arbitrarily known as the AGAR-S document series. Despite such protestations, ultimately archives were moved to central depots within Germany and were screened for intelligence. From there, those files related to the German Army, Navy, or Air Force went on to centers in London and Washington, D.C, where they were processed further. In the end the MIRS received tons of documents containing an invaluable wealth of information for evaluation and interpretation. The MIRS was initially formed to run simultaneous studies of the captured, primary source documents in London and Washington. D.C., about German troop formations, as the estimates of the state and size of German forces varied wildly between the two places. From the various document centers, whether they were in Germany, the United Kingdom, or the United States, came many studies and reports covering, among other subjects, active battle strategies, recommendations about how the military occupation government in Germany should operate, technical studies of superior German rockets, and examinations of war crimes. Both official staff at the centers and visiting governmental agencies produced these reports and disseminated the information in them to other governmental departments.

Many of the archives never returned to their original locations, bearing out one of the main concerns of the MFA&A officers, that archives are indigenous to a population and relevant to its cultural history and that removal of them inherently destroys some of the archives' value. Furthermore, documents related to the war crimes trials at Nuremberg were removed from files in Germany, London, and the United States, often without leaving a copy, and were never returned. The many depots in Germany were centralized into one all-encompassing archival

facility and, once the war was over and the information had no further practical value, those records were eventually turned over to German archivists. The archives in London and Washington were not returned to Germany for decades, following a massive declassification and microfilming process to allow American and British civilians permanent access to captured files. This is the essential backdrop of the development of the wartime use of strategic intelligence gleaned from captured archives, the first time the United States utilized and disseminated information on an enemy in an organized basis.

## Literature Review

Scholars have given only limited attention to the activities of the MFA&A division, perhaps because the documents the division uncovered contained such rich information about Germany and the war that historians have been more interested in what was within these files than in how these files came to Washington, D.C. Robert Edsel's book, *The Monuments Men*, describes the activities of some of the MFA&A officers; however, rather than providing a broader examination of the organization itself, Edsel limited his narrative to a few key episodes based on the stories of particular individuals rather than to an examination of the division's workings.<sup>3</sup> He focused mainly on the dramatic moments when the MFA&A officers discovered works of art that were plundered by Nazis and hidden in salt mines and people's homes, along with governmental archives that were removed from their repositories by Nazis. While this provides an exciting story, it overlooks much of the work that was done to protect art, monuments, and archives that were not hidden or plundered. Similarly, Lynn Nicholas's work, *The Rape of Europa*, focuses again on plundered art in order to tell the story of how the Third Reich attempted to "cleanse" Europe of "degenerate" art and to create a vast collection for Germany.<sup>4</sup>

Scholarly work on the captured archives is limited to reports of first-hand experiences, written by several former MFA&A officers. Hilary Jenkinson, one of the most prominent English archivists and Deputy of the Public Record Office in the United Kingdom, published a pamphlet about his activities as an MFA&A officer in Italy in 1947 in conjunction with the British Committee on the Preservation and Restitution of Works of Art, Archives, and Other

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<sup>3</sup> Robert Edsel, *The Monuments Men: Allied Heroes, Nazi Thieves, and the Greatest Treasure Hunt in History* (New York: Center Street, 2009).

<sup>4</sup> Lynn Nicholas, *The Rape of Europa: The Fate of Europe's Treasures in the Third Reich and the Second World War* (New York: Knopf, 1994).

Material in Enemy Hands.<sup>5</sup> He stated from the outset that his intention in publishing this account was to encourage the drawing up in England of lists of all the important archives, in case of threats to their safety. His proposed *Register of National Archives* would allow authorities to know which archives were in each location quickly. In light of this, his account of his time during the war placed a heavy emphasis on the role that the lists of Italian archives played. He emphasized that, since the lists were written in England and in the United States, they were incomplete, and this was the reason some archives were not protected quickly enough.

Similarly, Leslie Poste's dissertation from the U.S. Army Civil Affairs School in Georgia was published with the intention of changing policies in the future rather than as a historical analysis. Poste was also an MFA&A officer and presented his first-hand account of what he did during the war as an archivist along with a discussion of the legality of the capture of documents by the United States. He was not only concerned with archives but also with how libraries were protected during the war. However, since library material was not considered to be of use for intelligence by the US army, he did not discuss the transfer of archives out of Europe in any great detail. He argued that the use of aerial bombardment during World War Two made many of the existing treaties on the protection of libraries during wartime obsolete, as they were written in the nineteenth century.<sup>6</sup> He concluded that, with the new threats posed by thermonuclear warfare, there was a need for new treaties and that libraries themselves establish emergency procedures and perhaps microfilm irreplaceable documents.<sup>7</sup> It is a useful source, however, for Poste included copies of many primary sources.

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<sup>5</sup> Hilary Jenkinson, *Italian Archives During the War and at Its Close* (London: H.M. Stationary Office, 1947).

<sup>6</sup> Leslie Poste, "The Development of U.S. Protection of Libraries and Archives in Europe During World War II" (PhD diss., U.S. Army Civil Affairs School, 1958), 313.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

At a conference organized by the National Archives and Records Service in 1974, archivists who had been MFA&A officers were invited to present papers regarding some aspects of the captured records. The forward of the published papers stated that the conference was held in order to provide for the exchange of ideas and information, to inform scholars about the wealth of information available in the National Archives, and to allow researchers to propose better ways of facilitating access to these resources.<sup>8</sup> These papers, therefore, were not intended to provide historical analysis, merely to provide information to researchers. Seymour Pomrenze, another archivist with the MFA&A division, outlined the official government procedures that allowed the implementation of the plans of the MFA&A during the war, including the various approvals and permissions that needed to be obtained.<sup>9</sup> He finished with the return of the documents to Germany in the 1960s, explaining the complications involved. He was instrumental in creating the Captured Records Policies and Procedures archive, also known as the 'AGAR-S' document series. The main source for this paper, this is a compilation of army records and other documents from the War Department in the National Archives II in Maryland. He explained that historians had not yet analyzed this series, and one purpose of the conference was to draw attention to it.

At the same conference Telford Taylor presented a paper about the role of captured German archives in the Nuremberg War Crimes Trials, "The Use of Captured German and Related Records in the Nurnberg [sic] War Crimes Trials."<sup>10</sup> A lawyer who participated in the prosecution during the proceedings, he outlined his experience of trying to organize and manage

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<sup>8</sup> Robert Wolfe, *Captured German and Related Records: A National Archives Conference*, ed. Robert Wolfe (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1974), forward.

<sup>9</sup> Seymour J. Pomrenze, "Policies and Procedures for the Protection, Use, and Return of Captured German Records," in *Captured German and Related Records*, ed. Wolfe.

<sup>10</sup> Telford Taylor, "The Use of Captured German and Related Records in the Nurnberg War Crimes Trials," in *Captured German and Related Records*, ed. Wolfe, 95.



the many documents received that contained evidence for use in the trials at Nuremberg. His purview, however, is also limited. He focused only on the documents after they arrived at Nuremberg and presented a picture of how the Nuremberg Trial archives were created.

None of the literature addressing the MFA&A and captured archives clearly highlights the shift that occurred within the division's responsibilities—from protecting archives to exploiting them. Neither does it examine the role of the MIRS in the larger story of the exploitation of documents and the way the intelligence gained from the captured archives was used. This paper will address these gaps, providing a broader examination of the development of the use of strategic intelligence and bringing together these authors' piecemeal accounts as well as utilizing many primary sources from the AGAR-S series mentioned above, the Captured Records Branch, located in Archives II in Maryland. This archive contains records of the War Department and Special General Staffs; records of Allied Operational and Occupation Headquarters, World War Two; records of the Adjutant General's Office; and records of the National Archives and Records Service.

In the first chapter I discuss the formation of the Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives Army Division in order to show that the MFA&A was developed to protect rather than exploit archives. In a subsection of this chapter, I examine the instruction manual drawn up by the second Roberts Commission, which was the committee that created and oversaw the MFA&A. This further reinforces the assertion that the MFA&A officers were initially meant to find, salvage, and protect archives and not remove them from their buildings unless absolutely necessary. Additionally, a section about the activities of the officers during the war again highlights that the MFA&A officers initially did not see their mission as one of exploitation of archives. In the second chapter, I demonstrate the shift in the activities of the MFA&A from a

policy of protecting archives to one of exploiting them. I discuss the formation of the MIRS and how this agency argued not only for the exploitation of captured archives related to the German Army, Navy, and Air Force but also for the centralization of archives in depots in Germany. Archivists opposed the centralization of captured records, though ultimately they oversaw the process. Then, I explore the exploitation of records by the MIRS both during and after the war and by the MFA&A division at the depots in Germany. Finally, I examine how the captured archives were used in the Nuremberg War Crimes Trials. In the third chapter, I explore the eventual return of the captured archives to Germany. In the conclusion, I explain that the development of this kind of strategic intelligence was new and had implications for all future wars. The MIRS would not have had many primary sources to base their intelligence reports upon, if it were not for the MFA&A, which was initially created only to protect archives.

## Chapter One: Formation of the Monuments, Fine Arts and Archives Division

As its name suggests, the MFA&A sprang from groundwork laid by many people with backgrounds in and concerns about the arts and academia rather than in military intelligence. Prior to World War Two, there was a lack of coordination among field commanders and the War Department about what to do with enemy archives the commanders encountered, and no clear regulations addressed the topic. The kernel for the division's founding may lie as far back as the 1860s, when the Lincoln administration issued General Order No. 100 as a statement of general principles applicable to the army. Although it made no direct reference to enemy documents, the order stated that the army could seize private property, including archival material held by universities and libraries, for military necessities on the condition that a receipt was given to the owner. A peace treaty with the enemy government, the order prescribed, would determine final ownership of any confiscated property. During the American Civil War, the federal government captured a large quantity of Confederate documents, but these were not the documents of a completely different country, and the scale was nothing like that in World War Two.<sup>11</sup> The order was not changed prior to World War One, and, as the historian Philip Brower has argued, it was not binding, as "Anyone from the President of the United States to a field commander might disregard or alter it."<sup>12</sup> During World War One, the individual corps examined captured documents and decided what information would be useful to the action at their fronts and then forwarded that information on to army headquarters.<sup>13</sup> These corps were interested only in documents like military maps and army regimental orders directly related to battle; everything

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<sup>11</sup> Pomrenze, "Protection, Use, and Return of Captured German Records," in *Captured German and Related Records*, ed. Wolfe, 6.

<sup>12</sup> Philip P. Brower, "The U.S. Army's Seizure and Administration of Enemy Records up to World War II," *The American Archivist* 26, no. 2 (1963): 194.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

else was deemed “worthless material” and largely ignored.<sup>14</sup> At the end of hostilities, the use of enemy records was virtually abandoned, despite the occupation of Germany.<sup>15</sup> The U.S. Army had approximately fifty cubic feet of enemy documents in its possession, a tiny fraction of the thousands of tons of documents seized during World War Two.

Between the wars, no new policies were drawn up related to the capture and use of archives during war. World War Two would, as is already detailed above, see a marked difference from this policy, and this was mainly due to the urging of several academic institutions. These included the American Defense-Harvard Group and the Committee of the American Council of Learned Societies on the Protection of Cultural Treasuries in War Areas, which began lobbying during the war for the creation of some sort of protective agency for cultural objects after the extent of the German occupation of Europe became apparent. It was a timely decision, as never before had the United States Army been confronted with so many enemy records in multiple locations.

Even before the American declaration of war, academics in some circles, including people affiliated with the Smithsonian Institution, the National Gallery of Art, Columbia University, and the Board of Trustees for Amherst College, expressed concerns about the protection of archives and libraries during war, and civilian agencies sprang up to address these concerns. In 1941, *The New York Times* published an article containing a letter to Murray Butler, President of Columbia University, from E. Van Cauweburgh, the librarian of the Louvain University in Belgium, about the fire in the University on May 11, 1940.<sup>16</sup> Cauweburgh reported that the “library was nearly completely gutted by fire; that the fine stack rooms at the back,

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 206n57.

<sup>16</sup> *New York Times*, April 17, 1941, as quoted in Poste, “Protection of Libraries and Archives,” 70.

housing our precious collections, are no more.”<sup>17</sup> The article recommended that something should be done to help institutions to rebuild their collections following the end of the war. Additionally, Supreme Court Chief Justice Harlan F. Stone wrote a letter to President Franklin D. Roosevelt in the autumn of 1942 suggesting the establishment of a government commission to protect artistic and historic monuments in Europe.<sup>18</sup> Stone was involved with the world of art, as he was chancellor of the Smithsonian Institution and chairman of the Board of Trustees of the National Gallery of Art.<sup>19</sup> Finally, on May 5, 1943, Dr. Ernest Posner presented a paper entitled “Public Records Under Military Occupation” to a small group of archivists, including Fred Shipman, the director of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library at Hyde Park, which had been established in 1940.<sup>20</sup> Posner emphasized that, because Europe was such a “complex civilization,” it was very dependent on its archives, which were facing imminent danger.<sup>21</sup> Shipman wrote a letter to Roosevelt outlining the catastrophe that was about to descend on European archives during the imminent invasion by the Allies.<sup>22</sup>

Responding to these recommendations, Roosevelt created the American Commission For the Protection and Salvage of Artistic and Historic Monuments in War Areas on June 23, 1943. Roosevelt appointed Justice Owen Roberts of the Supreme Court to head the Commission, which became known as the second Roberts Commission. It was the second Roberts Commission that created the MFA&A army division. Although the second Roberts Commission became the

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Letter to President Franklin Roosevelt from Harlan F. Stone, December 8, 1942, as quoted in Poste, “Protection of Libraries and Archives,” 83.

<sup>19</sup> Alpheus Thomas Mason, *Harlan Fiske Stone: Pillar of the Law* (New York: The Viking Press, 1956), 754.

<sup>20</sup> Oliver W. Holmes, “The National Archives and the Protection of Records in War Areas,” *The American Archivist* 9, no. 2 (April 1946), 111.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Letter Shipman to President Roosevelt, May 1943, as quoted in Holmes, “National Archives,” 111.

major civilian agency involved with the protection of artistic and archival materials, it was preceded by two other agencies that were absorbed by the presidentially-mandated body. These two other agencies, the American Defense-Harvard Group and the Committee of the American Council of Learned Societies on the Protection of Cultural Treasuries in War Areas, provided many of the same functions that the second Roberts Commission later assumed but with important distinctions: The second Roberts Committee was also concerned with protecting archives, not just art, and it had the cooperation of the military.

The American Defense-Harvard Group established a sub-committee on March 20, 1943, to assemble information about art objects and monuments that might need protection in theaters of war.<sup>23</sup> In April 1943, sixty-one scholars prepared lists of cultural monuments in Europe and Asia for the War Department's use when the Allies ultimately invaded. The sub-committee provided a manual on protective measures to be taken in the field and created lists of specialist personnel who could accompany the army units to help protect art objects.<sup>24</sup>

Additionally, the Committee of the American Council of Learned Societies on the Protection of Cultural Treasuries in War Areas was established on January 29, 1943.<sup>25</sup> Dr. William Bell Dinsmoor, Professor of Archaeology at Columbia University, was named chairman of the committee. He was in contact with Henry L. Stimson, the Secretary of War, about the military measures that would ensure the protection of the artifacts about which the Committee

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<sup>23</sup> Report of the American Commission for the Protection and Salvage of Artistic and Historic Monuments in War Areas, 1946 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1946), 33, as quoted in Poste, "Protection of Libraries and Archives," 80.

<sup>24</sup> "Notes on Safeguarding and Conserving Cultural Material in the Field," American Defense-Harvard Group, 1943, as quoted in Poste, "Protection of Libraries and Archives," 79.

<sup>25</sup> Poste, "Protection of Libraries and Archives," 80.

was concerned.<sup>26</sup> In a letter to the Director of the School of Military Government, Brigadier General Cornelius W. Wickersham, Dinsmoor outlined many of the recommendations that the MFA&A would also later make, including compilation of lists of artistic specialists already in the armed forces; preparations of comprehensive lists of cultural monuments, museums, and private collections; preparations of city and town maps with monuments marked; compilation of lists of European artistic personnel; compilations of lists of artistic works that had been confiscated, forced to have been sold, or destroyed in Europe; and preparations for the salvage and treatment of works once they were found.<sup>27</sup>

### **The Second Roberts Commission's Policies and Instructions to Officers**

While the other two agencies performed many of the same functions of the second Roberts Commission, the latter was, as previously noted, presidentially mandated and headed by a Supreme Court justice, giving it the power to act and implement the embedding of archivists and art specialists in army units. The Commission defined its responsibilities during a meeting on November 13, 1943 and also outlined the reasons why it was important to preserve archives. With reference to books, manuscripts, archives, and records, its duties were to protect those materials, which “by virtue of their integration into organized collections, have usefulness and value as tools and instruments of scholarship.”<sup>28</sup> Other archives, such as current and non-current governmental records “are essential to a social, political, and economic reconstruction... their preservation may clearly speed the prosecution of the war and the rehabilitation which must

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<sup>26</sup> “Memorandum for the Secretary of War Relative to the Military Steps to be Taken for the Protection and Salvage of Artistic and Historic Monuments in Europe,” Signed by Francis Henry Taylor, Director, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, March 15, 1943, as quoted in Poste, “Protection of Libraries and Archives,” 80.

<sup>27</sup> Letter to Brigadier General Cornelius W. Wickersham, Director, School of Military Government, from William Bell Dinsmoor, Archaeological Institute of America, April 7, 1943.

<sup>28</sup> AGAR-S doc. 804. “Minutes of Subcommittee Meeting Held in the Library of Congress on November 13, 1943,” 2.

follow the peace.”<sup>29</sup> Ancient manuscripts, books, and archives were to be preserved because they “may be unique and irreplaceable,” and are of “scholarly importance.”<sup>30</sup>

In order to accomplish their goal of protecting the abovementioned categories of material, the commission outlined six activities it would undertake. The removal of archives to central depots and to depots in the United Kingdom and the United States does not appear in these initial declarations of the activities; apparently, this idea developed later. The first action planned was the preparation of data on the locations of archives, whether publicly or privately owned. Experts used maps showing cultural institutions, monuments, and archival repositories in order to compile lists, which they then ranked by importance.<sup>31</sup> Modern archives were given high priority, because “of the special value of the more recent records” to the army—indicating that the concept of intelligence gathering was already present at the start, but ancient archives also received priority ranking because of their rarity.<sup>32</sup>

The second activity undertaken by the commission was to provide the army with men with the requisite professional training and technical skills.<sup>33</sup> This order created the MFA&A army unit, composed of officers assigned specifically to the division’s mission. The commission encountered a problem, however, as the army mandated that these men had to be in active duty and have a rank of Major or above, and the commission’s list of prospective archivists did not contain many active members ranking high enough.<sup>34</sup> Leslie Poste, an MFA&A officer with a

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>31</sup> AGAR-S doc. 801. “Letter to Archibald MacLeish, Librarian of Congress, from Salon J. Buck, Archivist of the United States,” October 1, 1943, 2.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>33</sup> AGAR-S doc. 804. “Minutes of Subcommittee Meeting Held in the Library of Congress on November 13, 1943,” 3.

<sup>34</sup> AGAR-S doc. 1456. “Memorandum Regarding MFA&A in the European Theater of Operations,” 5.



librarian background, explained that the War Department was initially opposed to commissioning civilians for the work, though it ultimately permitted a limited number to join.<sup>35</sup> The Department also agreed to draft an archivist, Fred Shipman, for a second time upon the recommendation of the MFA&A, even though he was older than the draftees normally considered.<sup>36</sup> Ultimately, there was a chronic lack of available archivists relative to the number of art experts in the unit. This meant that often there was not an archivist with all the advancing MFA&A divisions, and an art historian would assume the archivist's tasks without any training. The art experts were primarily concerned with older archives solely "as cultural materials" and were, unfortunately, uninterested in modern archives that could yield useful, current information.<sup>37</sup>

The next three tasks described in the unit's statement of purpose took place in the field. First, the officers would survey the damage done to archives as the Allied occupying forces moved through Europe. The commission recommended that special experts for books and archives be provided, as they would better understand the extent of damage done.<sup>38</sup> Second, the unit officers would oversee the salvage and protection from further damage of "injured" archives.<sup>39</sup> Third, the officers would give recommendations about the allocation of responsibility for the rehabilitation of damaged archives. The commission recognized that this responsibility might become problematic, as it might be difficult to determine how many things became

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<sup>35</sup> Poste, "Protection of Libraries and Archives," 94.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

<sup>37</sup> AGAR-S doc. 307. "Letter J.H. Hilldring, Director, Civil Affairs Division to Mr. Oliver Holmes, the National Archives, January 24, 1946," 2.

<sup>38</sup> AGAR-S doc. 804. "Minutes of Subcommittee Meeting Held in the Library of Congress on November 13, 1943," 3.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

damaged.<sup>40</sup> The final activity in the commission's list of objects covered protecting archives in battle situations to ensure "the restoration to their owners after the war of materials stolen or pillaged by Axis forces."<sup>41</sup>

The instructions given to the MFA&A officers reflected these goals but placed a much higher emphasis on protecting archives from looting by the civilian populations and on destruction by the Allied troops. The evolution of the mission reflects fears about what local populations would do under an Allied occupation force and whether the Allied troops would respect the importance of the mission. An instruction manual, approved in April 1944, recognized that the most important archives would probably have been removed from their usual depositories to places considered safer. In order to find these high priority archives, MFA&A officers were meant to find the local curators shortly after the Allied troops moved in and use these locals to help protect the archives and identify what was missing.<sup>42</sup> The local custodians were to take "an appropriate oath" against destroying, removing, or tampering with records and were to provide MFA&A officers with card catalogs so that they could ensure the local archivist was not hiding any records.<sup>43</sup> The MFA&A officers were to prevent troop billeting in archival buildings and prevent "pilfering, looting, souvenir hunting, etc., by members of the armed forces of the allied countries."<sup>44</sup>

The manual drew special attention to two kinds of materials: Nazi party records and "notarial" records. MFA&A officers were to post signs and guards to prevent civilian populations from removing or mutilating archives, particularly "Records of military and civil

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> AGAR-S doc. 101. "Draft Memorandum For Instruction to Monuments Officers Serving with Tactical Units, Approved April 15, 1944," 1.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 1.

authorities of the enemy and records of fascist organizations.”<sup>45</sup> The fear was that Nazi party members would attempt to destroy evidence of their criminality and that local populations would loot archives for ancient books of value. The preservation of notarial records, which consisted of wills, marriage agreements, contracts, and other records relating to family and personal matters often found in the archives of notaries, were singled out was because they “are indispensable in determining many kinds of property and other civil rights.”<sup>46</sup> The emphasis on these two different types of documents shows that the second Roberts Commission was concerned not only with finding evidence of war criminality but also with ensuring civilians’ rights in the post-war period.

The instruction manual made no mention of MFA&A officers removing archival materials for intelligence purposes. They were allowed to remove materials only if the buildings that housed the collections had “collapsed or have been so seriously damaged that they can no longer house collections.”<sup>47</sup> In this case, the material was to be removed in secure containers and housed in any available structure except for attics and basements. The manual also highlighted the “first-aid treatment” that officers could perform on materials that had been damaged by fire and water or that were scattered among rubble. Even in these cases, according to this manual, the salvaged materials were to stay in buildings nearby rather than moved to a central location. The manual also recognized that the directions were only general guidance for officers “in their task of protecting” archives, as it was understood that not all measures recommended would be possible under wartime conditions and that first-aid activities could continue after the cessation

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 3.

of fighting.<sup>48</sup> Apparently it was assumed that, following the end of hostilities, the archival material would still be in the location where it was found and that archivists could continue their work then. Additionally, in a memorandum for the President on January 6, 1944, Shipman, an MFA&A officer in addition to his post as the director of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library at Hyde Park, outlined that it would be his job “to survey the problems relative to records and archives found in [Italy] and to organize plans to preserve, salvage, and make available important records for use in the continued administration and future reconstruction of the area.”<sup>49</sup> Shipman highlighted that the archives would be used for the administration of the country following the war and notably did not mention that Allied governments would make any use of the archives during the war. It seems that, even at this late date, the archivists were more interested in protecting the archives rather than utilizing them for intelligence, as worries about the dispersal of the documents which might never be returned persisted.

The MFA&A also specifically addressed the question of whether archival material should be used as restitution for countries that had lost cultural objects as a direct result of German activities during the war. Restitution would have made Germany provide similar items to countries that could prove that their cultural items had been deliberately destroyed by Germans and German items would replace them. A subcommittee meeting on November 29, 1943, decided that, although German guilt might be determined in the destruction of libraries, archives, museums, and record offices throughout Europe, archival material would not be used to rectify the situation in the post-war period, because archival material were “instruments of culture” which should be utilized to further “the interests of international scholarship generally rather

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> AGAR-S doc. 211. “Memorandum for the President, January 6, 1944,” 1.

than the interest of any single nation.”<sup>50</sup> Archibald MacLeish, the chairman of the subcommittee, argued that archives “should not be lost to the countries where they now are,” even if that included Germany, as their value is a “virtue of their integration into organized collection.”<sup>51</sup> He advocated for the archives to remain in their original locations permanently, worried they would lose their usefulness if removed for restitution purposes.

Further, MacLeish argued against moving archives even for use by the military. He acknowledged that archives possess “a considerable military value in terms of a war of the dimensions of the present conflict,” but that, since these records were “essential to a social, political, and economic reconstruction,” their removal would produce “chaotic results.”<sup>52</sup> Further, MacLeish recommended that archives and libraries reopen under the care of their original directors and officials, or, if that were not possible, then of someone from the region.<sup>53</sup> He wanted to ensure that archives would continue functioning as they had before the war in order to better facilitate “the rehabilitation which must follow the peace.”<sup>54</sup> Although the United States Army ultimately agreed that archives should not be used as restitution to other countries, it disagreed in the removal and use of captured archives for its own purposes, as the wealth of knowledge and strategic advantage that could be gained from the captured archives became increasingly clearer.

### **Activities of the MFA&A Officers: Finding and Protecting Archives**

Initially, as the Allied forces battled through Italy, France, and eventually Germany, embedded archivists worked to find and safeguard documents according to the guidelines. As

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<sup>50</sup> AGAR-S doc. 804. “Minutes of Subcommittee Meeting Held in the Library of Congress on November 13, 1943,” 2.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

noted above, their mission evolved, however, from protecting archives for the use of the local population to centralizing archives for the use of the Allied military intelligence. The enormity of the archivists' operation can be appreciated by considering the main types of records they encountered. Government archives included federal, state, and provincial administration records, encompassing records of births, deaths, marriages, and taxation; legal administration, including ownership records and lawsuits; law enforcement administration; political party documents; and records of private companies that did work of a public nature. Private archives were from businesses and families that owned large enterprises and estates or castles. Church archives were located in dioceses, cathedrals, monasteries, and other churches. Generally speaking, the older archives suffered the least, as many of these were removed to places of relative safety earlier than the more current records.<sup>55</sup> The older archives were systematically found, secured, and protected; while current records were often hidden in less secure places, like mines and caves. The areas covered by the MFA&A officers were so large that it was impossible for the officers to visit all of the officially protected archives. During early 1945, officers averaged visits to 125 buildings per man per month.<sup>56</sup> By April 1945, the area occupied by the Twelfth Army Group in Germany contained approximately 47,000 square miles. Only two MFA&A officers were stationed in this area, and neither had assigned transportation.<sup>57</sup>

The officers had to find documents hidden in strange places, including the aforementioned mines and caves. A memorandum stated that the propensity of the Germans for dispersing their documents over many hiding places made it impossible to declare the archives

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<sup>55</sup> AGAR-S doc. 118. "The National Archives: Minutes of Meeting of Open Conference on Administration, January 2, 1946," 2.

<sup>56</sup> Poste, "Protection of Libraries and Archives," 159.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

complete, as they were undoubtedly fragmented.<sup>58</sup> The German government not only wanted to hide documents, it often wanted them destroyed. MFA&A officer Sergeant Child's first archival target in Germany was a salt mine located half a mile below the surface of the earth.<sup>59</sup> The German government had ordered it set on fire, but the blaze had been so hot that the roof of the mine collapsed, smothering the flames. The officers had to break up large blocks of rock salt to reach the archives, although ultimately only eighteen boxes of records were salvaged.<sup>60</sup> Similarly, eight tons of German military records were found in caves near the town of Marktheidenfeld. They contained personnel files of the Wehrmacht (the armed forces of Nazi Germany), the Luftwaffe (the Nazi air force), and the Waffen-SS (the elite ground force).<sup>61</sup> These documents also contained records of German military courts, involving "numerous impositions of capital punishment, and showing that families of such soldiers were merely notified that subject soldiers were 'missing.'"<sup>62</sup>

In addition to finding documents that the Germans had hidden in unsafe places, MFA&A officers were responsible for protecting archives against damage by Allied troops. While the archivists understood the reasons to preserve archives, they constituted only a miniscule part of the army, and, unfortunately, many archives were damaged by Allied troop activity. In a report about archives found in the Tempelhof Airdrome, which during the war was an important part of the German armed forces' reconnaissance and mapping program, the author concluded, "It is obvious that the troops could not have been well indoctrinated in intelligence discipline," as the

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<sup>58</sup> AGAR-S doc. 1890. "OMGUS Deputy Military Governor, October 12, 1946," 1.

<sup>59</sup> AGAR-S doc. 307. "Letter J.H. Hilldring, Director, Civil Affairs Division to Mr. Oliver Holmes, the National Archives, January 24, 1946," 3.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> AGAR-S doc. 1877. Letter to Commanding Officer, C-2, Documents Control Section from Peter Vacca, Major, MI, Branch Chief of Intelligence. "German Army Records," 9 April 1946, 1.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

first American Forces to occupy the building used maps to cover broken windows and doors.<sup>63</sup>

Multiple instruction books were distributed to commanders, with rules to prevent damage to archives for the war effort:

In the case of written papers and books it is to be noted that even those which do not appear to be ancient may be of great importance, not only historically but as containing information necessary for the practical purposes of the war. Casual destruction or dispersal of such collections, wherever found, will not be permitted.<sup>64</sup>

A command was even issued by General Eisenhower in August of 1944 that safeguarding archives would be necessary “in Germany where the effective imposition of Military Government may depend largely upon how successful we are in this task. All concerned will, operations permitting, exert every effort to safeguard and preserve the records, files, and documents listed herein.”<sup>65</sup> Directives urged commanders to protect archives against looting by civilian populations, because “Public records are indispensable in the administration of the occupied country and must be preserved as intact as possible for the use of the military government.”<sup>66</sup>

If the future administration of Germany was not reason enough, commanders were implored to think of civilians’ rights. The same document emphasized the importance of public records as “the most important sources of social and economic history, and are also indispensable in determining many kinds of property and other civil rights.”<sup>67</sup> The Archivist of

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<sup>63</sup> AGAR-S doc. 1885. “Report on Captured Enemy Photographic and Mapping Material at Tempelhof Airdrome,” 2.

<sup>64</sup> AGAR-S doc. 212. “Preservation of Property of Historical or Educational Importance in Italy,” 3.

<sup>65</sup> AGAR-S doc. 302. “Official General List of Archives in Western Germany,” 1.

<sup>66</sup> AGAR-S doc. 101. “Draft Memorandum: Books, Manuscripts, Archives, and Public Records,” 4-5.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.



the United States, Salon J. Buck, clarified, “not only property rights but human rights are involved ...Thousands will be released from concentration camps with their personal papers as well as belongings lost, and will have to search through public records for evidence that will be legally acceptable as to their very identity.”<sup>68</sup> Buck’s statement emphasizes the initial reason the archivists within the MFA&A division undertook the mission to protect archives: to aid the civilians’ rebuilding their lives after the war.

Despite these directives, some archives suffered destruction from Allied troops that did not have an MFA&A officer embedded in them. The British archivist Hilary Jenkinson recounted two incidents from Italy: The first was during a cold winter night when Allied troops burned old papers for warmth. The second was when troops used bulky bundles of files to lay a road through mud.<sup>69</sup> In Germany, Allied troops used an archive as a photography laboratory and darkroom and discovered that the ancient papers from the files were absorbent enough to speed the drying of film.<sup>70</sup> In times of war, it is understandable how soldiers, facing freezing nights, would be tempted to use documents as fuel for a fire, but documents were also ruined by sheer negligence.

In Bavaria in January of 1946, twenty-five thousand volumes of Bavarian war archives from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries and prisoners of war moved the Munich District Archives from the damaged Oberammergau Archives Collection Center to unheated, partially exposed stables.<sup>71</sup> Authorities from the American European-Theater Intelligence School, a training facility for the future American military administrators of occupied Germany, made

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<sup>68</sup> AGAR-S doc. 801. “Letter to Archibald MacLeish from Salon J. Buck, October 1<sup>st</sup>, 1943,” 2.

<sup>69</sup> Jenkinson, *Italian Archives*, 17.

<sup>70</sup> AGAR-S doc. 309. “Report of Seymour J. Pomrenze on Archives in Wurttemberg-Baden,” 13.

<sup>71</sup> AGAR-S doc. 502. “Oberammergau Collection Point: Status of Collecting Point Report, January 1946,” 1.

prisoners of war push the Bavarian archival materials down chutes into trucks, and transfer them to the stables. This was an attempt to safeguard the archives because the building was damaged; however, the official procedure was clearly not followed. The result was the disorganization of many of the files and the loss of others, including the trampling of some in the snow. No care was taken to preserve the order of the archives, which is a valuable part of any collection of records, as a disorganized archive can render the individual documents meaningless. The MFA&A officers later facilitated the transfer of these Bavarian war files to a more adequate building. These events show that, even after being urged by the Commander-in-Chief not to destroy items of cultural significance and after receiving detailed directives not to destroy or disrupt archives, troops did not always follow those directives.

There was a marked shift in the activities of the MFA&A officers when they stopped solely protecting archives from further damage and began centralizing them in depot centers in order for the information to be exploited. This change came about because the intelligence agency, MIRS, recognized the strategic benefits that could be gained by analyzing captured German Army, Navy, and Air Force records, which were already sent on to London and then Washington.<sup>72</sup> In order to facilitate the transfer of these documents to the MIRS, as well as to exploit other documents, captured ministerial archives were centralized in depots.

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<sup>72</sup> AGAR-S doc. 118. "The National Archives: Minutes of Meeting of Open Conference on Administration, January 2, 1946," 2.

## Chapter Two: The Exploitation of Records

### The Military Intelligence Research Section: Formation and Activities During the War

The MFA&A program and the MIRS program were established around the same time, but with completely different goals. As already pointed out, the MFA&A wanted to protect archives, while the MIRS wanted to produce intelligence reports, though not initially from MFA&A-collected documents. As the wealth of information contained within the enemy archives became clear, MIRS used the materials gathered by the MFA&A for its intelligence reports. Without the MFA&A program, MIRS would not have received such a large quantity of primary source intelligence material, which allowed the United States and the United Kingdom to amass vast amounts of information on their rival's war techniques and technological advances. The MFA&A program not only protected archives, as many archives would not have survived the war without their work, it also provided much of the material which the newly developed intelligence unit ultimately exploited.

MIRS was formed to produce intelligence reports on active battle efficiently. Its predecessor, the War Department-War Office Research Section (WD-WORS), was formed in order to address intelligence issues between the United States and the United Kingdom. In May of 1943, representatives of the American Intelligence Unit known as G-2 and the British War Office held a conference about the strength of the German Army, based on the number of divisions identified and believed to exist or to be capable of formation.<sup>73</sup> In what was known as the Pink Book, dated September 1942, the United States identified 382 German combat

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<sup>73</sup> AGAR-S doc. 1434. "Decisions Resulting From A Conference Held in London Between Representatives of the G-2-MIS War Department, and of the DMI War Office," 1.

divisions, a vastly different number from the British estimate of 234.<sup>74</sup> The attendees decided that the real strength of the Axis armies could not accurately be predicted, because there was “such a divergence of opinion between the British and American estimates of manpower and casualties.”<sup>75</sup> In order to come to a more accurate and mutually acceptable estimate of the strength of German armies, WD-WORS was formed with two branches, one in London and one in Washington, D.C.

These two combined research centers became known as MIRS, as their responsibilities expanded beyond the initial project of estimating the troop size of the German Army. These research offices were tasked with providing studies on the strength of the Axis armies, delivering information on enemy formations, keeping the war offices supplied with information to show the location or likely future locations of Axis formations, supplying intelligence officers in London with information to analyze and interpret, and maintaining contact with the Prisoner of War Sections to guide interrogators in order to produce more information.<sup>76</sup> To facilitate the completion of these goals, all intelligence related to Axis armies was transmitted as quickly as possible to the London War Office for processing then sent to Washington, D.C., for additional intensive studies.<sup>77</sup> Initially, the studies were confined to Order of Battle reports, strategic and practical information about active battle.<sup>78</sup> As the MFA&A officers reported on the information contained within the archives they captured, the basis of information rapidly expanded. Archives related to the German Army, Navy, and Air Force were immediately sent to the MIRS for

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<sup>74</sup> AGAR-S doc. 1440. “History and Operations of MIRS: London and Washington Branches, May 1943 – July 1945,” 6.

<sup>75</sup> AGAR-S doc. 1434. “Decisions Resulting From A Conference Held in London Between Representatives of the G-2-MIS War Department, and of the DMI War Office,” 1.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> AGAR-S doc. 1440. “History and Operations of MIRS: London and Washington Branches, May 1943 – July 1945,” 3.

analysis. The scope of the studies conducted by the MIRS included much more detailed reports on German military strength, reports on Nazi war criminality, reports on the administration of occupied Germany, and technical reports in addition to the previous areas covered by the WD-WORS.<sup>79</sup>

During the earlier stages of the war, much of the information came from captured personnel and intercepted mail, as the MFA&A officers did not yet have access to German archives, but as time passed, up to 90% of the information in each MIRS report came from captured records.<sup>80</sup> During the war, the reports were to focus only on “the German enemy” rather than on all the countries that the captured archives covered. Specifically, MIRS personnel were not to use military records that applied to neutral or friendly nations, as these were not the property of the United States or the United Kingdom; they still legally belonged to the other nation.<sup>81</sup> The reports were supposed to focus mainly on time-sensitive issues; however, the agency produced many about scientific and technical information on rockets and gas propulsion.<sup>82</sup> This was done at the urging of the American Department of Commerce, which, by executive order, ensured the dissemination of scientific and technical information to the American scientific industry.<sup>83</sup> A later criticism of these types of reports argued that this information could have waited until more time-sensitive information was analyzed, as the practical uses of this information would not become apparent for a number of years.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>81</sup> AGAR-S doc. 1434. “Agreement on Handling and Exploitation of Captured German Documents in Post VE-Day Period,” 4.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>83</sup> AGAR-S doc. 1447, “Liaison with British in Regard to Captured Enemy Documents, January 18, 1945,” 1.

<sup>84</sup> AGAR-S doc. 1440. “History and Operations of MIRS: London and Washington Branches, May 1943 – July 1945,” 93.

During the 1940s, the two record groups that were most frequently used for intelligence studies were the German Army Field Commands and German Army High Command (OKH).<sup>85</sup> These studies included information for operational forces, handbooks for the eventual military occupation and administration of Germany, and studies on psychological warfare.<sup>86</sup> This effort included investigations into the effects of strategic bombing on German morale and on its economic, political, social, and military processes, helping the Allies to make decisions about where and when to bomb. Other studies related to the United States Air Force and assessed the tactical or strategic effectiveness of air power.<sup>87</sup> These reports also aided the ground forces, as when MIRS released a report containing the names of senior German military personnel, which proved extremely useful to the Allied armies in the screening of surrendered German forces.<sup>88</sup> These studies were naturally classified at the time and exist today in the various archives of the respective agencies.

### **Operation Goldcup: The Centralization of Captured Archives by the MFA&A**

In order to supply MIRS with captured archives more efficiently and to aid in the administration of occupied Germany, current German ministerial records were to be centralized in depots. MIRS personnel argued that, although individual documents were valuable for combat intelligence, complete collections of archives would allow more thorough research.<sup>89</sup> MFA&A archivists, as mentioned previously, initially opposed this approach, though ultimately they agreed to oversee the centralizing process. Minutes of a meeting of the second Roberts

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<sup>85</sup> AGAR-S doc. 1324. "Number of Requests by Record Group, 1955," 2.

<sup>86</sup> Herman Goldbeck, "German Military Documents and Captured Records Sections," in *Captured German and Related Records*, ed. Wolfe, 45.

<sup>87</sup> Harry Fletcher, "The Use of Captured German and Related Records by the United States Air Force," in *Captured German and Related Records*, ed. Wolfe, 73.

<sup>88</sup> AGAR-S doc. 1440. "History and Operations of MIRS: London and Washington Branches, May 1943 – July 1945," 15.

<sup>89</sup> AGAR-S doc. 1434. "Departmental Records Branch, Alexandria, VA, October 2, 1951," 14.

Commission in November 1943 emphasized that the value of an archive is “established by the fact of the integrated collection and not necessarily by the value of individual pieces.”<sup>90</sup> The subcommittee recommended protecting archives where they were located, rather than separating them. In July 1944 Captain Brooke, a British MFA&A archivist, filed a report which attacked the idea of centralizing Italian archives, as was later done with those in Germany. He wrote, “Advanced Intelligence have submitted to A.F.H.Q. a suggestion that in important cities of Northern Italy, all Archives shall be collected in lorries and housed in one cast central repository. Such action would do irreparable [damage] and completely defeat the end in view.”<sup>91</sup> He outlined that the “end in view” referred to the MFA&A officers’ responsibilities: “to arrange for the safeguarding of all collections of Archives (any documents of ancient or modern date) from damage or dispersal.”<sup>92</sup>

Despite protests such as these, as already mentioned, archival material was centralized for efficient exploitation. In 1944 Professor Sinclair Armstrong initially conceived of the idea of gathering together all ministerial records of the central government “for the administrative use of Allied Military Government.”<sup>93</sup> MIRS went one step further than Armstrong, arguing that the centralization of captured archives would more efficiently provide them with primary sources of intelligence and that reports could be made at the depots on other aspects of the German ministry.<sup>94</sup> They further argued that, since more than one agency might need any specific

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<sup>90</sup> AGAR-S doc. 804. “Minutes of Subcommittee Meeting Held in the Library of Congress on November 13, 1943,” 2.

<sup>91</sup> AGAR-S doc. 228. “Headquarters Allied military Government Rome Region: Monuments, Fine Arts & Archives Division: Responsibility for Custody of Archives, July 14, 1944,” 2.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> AGAR-S doc. 118. “The National Archives: Minutes of Meeting of Open Conference on Administration, January 2, 1946,” 2.

<sup>94</sup> AGAR-S doc. 1434. “Departmental Records Branch, Alexandria, VA, October 2, 1951,” 14.

document, it would make more sense to have one central location where documents could be exploited in order to keep them organized.<sup>95</sup>

The centralization of documents at depots became known as Operation Goldcup. This included the use of German personnel as assistants to the MFA&A officers. Operation Goldcup went into effect on April 12, 1945, just less than a month before the unconditional surrender of the German military, on V-E Day, May 8, 1945, though the largest depot was not established for another month after that. In June of 1945, a large munitions center of four hundred buildings in Eschenstruth, near Kassel, Germany, became the Ministerial Records Collecting Center, with MFA&A officer Lester Born in charge.<sup>96</sup> Similar centers were also established in Oberammagau, Offenbach, and Landshut.

Intelligence Directive No. 7, issued by the Office of the Chief of Staff, Control Commission for Germany, on September 6, 1945, called for a joint strategy between the British and Americans in their respective zones of occupation “by instituting a unified system for controlling access to and exploitation of German documents and archives.”<sup>97</sup> The directive described how the British Army of the Rhine was instructed to establish document centers similar to the American one near Kassel to protect German archives, maintain a register showing the location and nature of documents in their area, allow for the circulation of information in the register, and assist all exploiting agencies.<sup>98</sup> The American Kassel Document Center, however, was to maintain control over all archives and documents belonging to the former German government, but that did not include the retention of “German Army, Navy, and Air Force

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> AGAR-S doc. 118. “The National Archives: Minutes of Meeting of Open Conference on Administration, January 2, 1946,” 2.

<sup>97</sup> AGAR-S doc. 1324. “Intelligence Directive No. 7: The Handling of German Documents and Archives, September 6, 1945,” 5.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.



records,” which were sent on to London and then Washington, D.C.<sup>99</sup> The directive then outlined the method of examining documents at the center, since removing items was strongly discouraged.<sup>100</sup> The documents that remained at the centers were for the administration of Germany, but there were also research studies conducted there by intelligence staff and visiting governmental agencies.<sup>101</sup>

### **The Exploitation of Records at the Archival Depots in Germany**

All the captured documents from the war in Europe were jointly owned by the United States and the United Kingdom in accordance with the Bissell-Sinclair Agreement, which outlined the property rights relevant to captured documents, and it was decided that both countries had to be in agreement on the documents’ ultimate fate. The agreement assigned captured Japanese documents to the United States exclusively.<sup>102</sup> By September 1945 the Ministerial Collecting Center in Kassel was the largest depot in Germany, with its hundreds of buildings that could be utilized for such a project, as they were dry, clean, and empty. It contained 1,310 tons of German archives. The largest collections were from the ministries of the foreign office, justice ministry, and economics ministry.<sup>103</sup> Additionally, the center processed the archives from the Oberkommando der Wehrmacht ministry, which had been responsible for the Air, Ground, and Naval forces, documents intended for the MIRS program, which initially all went through a collecting center. Born personally supervised some of the more important transfers of archives to the center by trucks, including the Nazi Party records uncovered near

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<sup>99</sup> AGAR-S doc. 118. “The National Archives: Minutes of Meeting of Open Conference on Administration, January 2, 1946,” 2.

<sup>100</sup> AGAR-S doc. 1324. “Intelligence Directive No. 7: The Handling of German Documents and Archives, September 6, 1945,” 5.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> AGAR-S doc. 1437. “United Nations War Crimes Commission, Research Office: Document Centers in Germany and Austria, February 1946,” 3.

Munich in October 1945 and the “SS Race and Settlement records.”<sup>104</sup> Born described the early days of the center as “chaos already reduced to mere confusion,” when he received help from another MFA&A officer, Sergeant Child.<sup>105</sup> At its greatest strength, the center had 48 officers and 190 enlisted men assigned to it, not including many Germans who also worked there.<sup>106</sup> A report on the public archives of Germany determined that “comparatively few German archivists had compromised themselves through active participation in the Nazi party,” and that, since the archival staffs had changed very little since the prewar years, this staff could be utilized.<sup>107</sup> The German personnel’s names were carefully checked against lists of those wanted for war crimes or as possible witnesses for war crimes trials.

Both the German personnel and the American intelligence staff together produced about 400 reports and studies, and approximately 600 visitors came to make investigations of documents for the agencies to which they were assigned.<sup>108</sup> The staff produced written summaries of the archival material they had, and these were circulated within various branches of the government in order to help the visitors. A Clearance Committee oversaw the finding aids, ensuring that they were accurate and detailed. The center provided microfilm copies of documents to various agencies upon request.<sup>109</sup> A *Washington Daily News* story from July 1945 highlighted some of the problems at the center, including departmental rivalry between the nine different agencies handling the papers for studies; lack of coordination in examining records,

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<sup>104</sup> AGAR-S doc. 1837. “Office of Military Government for Germany (US) Ministerial Collecting Center, Furstenhagen, Germany: Documents of Quadripartite Interest, October 26, 1945,” 1.

<sup>105</sup> Lester K. Born, “The Ministerial Collecting Center near Kassel, Germany,” *The American Archivist* 13, no. 3 (July 1950), 250.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 239.

<sup>107</sup> AGAR-S doc. 301. “Report on the Public Archives of Germany,” 26-27.

<sup>108</sup> Born, “The Ministerial Collecting Center near Kassel,” 247.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

which resulted, for example, in re-microfilming documents for each of multiple studies rather than just making more copies; United States departments' failure to send representatives who could read German; and a lack of available translators.<sup>110</sup>

The documents were used in the administration of the country. They also helped to reunite missing people with their families and provide information to and about claimants for pensions, social security payments, death certificates, and compensation for property losses.<sup>111</sup> Additionally, the documents were used to determine culpability in the Nuremberg Trials. Documents from the Volksgerichtshof (the People's Court), which were found at the Ministerial Collecting Center, were used in the portion of the Nuremberg Trials known as the Judges' Trial.<sup>112</sup> The papers of notorious cases like that of Hans and Sophie Scholl of the White Rose resistance group were found here alongside less famous cases such as that of a young German woman, a widow of a service man, who was sentenced to death for "telling a joke about the Führer."<sup>113</sup>

By 1953, all the archival depots were centralized in the Berlin Document Center, located near the edge of West Berlin.<sup>114</sup> The center is a complex of many buildings; the Germans used the main one during the war as a telephone-monitoring center. It had cavernous underground areas that were useful for storing the archives. It exists today as the main archival center in Germany, containing mostly national governmental papers.

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<sup>110</sup> AGAR-S doc. 1490. *Washington Daily News*, "Department Rivalry," July 23, 1945, 1.

<sup>111</sup> James S. Beddie, "The Berlin Document Center," in *Captured German and Related Records*, ed. Wolfe, 141.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

### **The Exploitation of Records by MIRS After the War**

An agreement on the exploitation of captured German documents in the post VE-Day period outlined the MIRS program that oversaw the research centers in both London and Washington, D.C. As stated above, the research during the war was primarily meant to be about enemy troop formation and locations, while in the post VE-day period much broader studies were produced. The research in this period had the following purposes: to assist in the war against Japan, to produce intelligence required for the Allied occupation in Germany, to obtain evidence needed by the War Crimes Commission, to assist scientific and technical development, and to produce studies for the National Defense.<sup>115</sup> Other studies related to the United States Air Force and assessed the tactical or strategic effectiveness of air power, while others explored the strength of German aerospace technology in order to determine the American aerospace program's relative strength.<sup>116</sup> These technological studies allowed the United States either to verify the superiority of their military equipment or to glean the information necessary to update its technology.<sup>117</sup> Archives from German Armed Forces Headquarters in Romania were particularly useful for scientific information related to German rocket and gas propulsion.<sup>118</sup> These studies helped the war effort in the Pacific Theater; as the United States applied the information about bombing to plan the role that strategic bombing would take in the war against Japan.<sup>119</sup> All the records received various levels of classifications, the most strict covering

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<sup>115</sup> AGAR-S doc. 1434. "Agreement on Handling and Exploitation of Captured German Documents in Post VE-Day Period," 2.

<sup>116</sup> Fletcher, "The Use of Captured German Records by the United States Air Force," in *Captured German and Related Records*, ed. Wolfe, 73.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>118</sup> AGAR-S doc. 1434. "Departmental Records Branch, Alexandria, VA, October 2, 1951," 14.

<sup>119</sup> Fletcher, "The Use of Captured German Records by the United States Air Force," in *Captured German and Related Records*, ed. Wolfe, 75.

information about the intelligence organization of the Allies; cryptographic methods, procedures, and equipment; intelligence obtained by German agents about Allied countries; interrogations deemed “sensitive”; personal records of individuals; and data “prejudicial to the interests of the United States or its Allies or that would appear to affect them adversely in current international affairs.”<sup>120</sup>

The London branch’s studies were primarily concentrated on “short-range intelligence purposes,” while the Washington branch’s studies were for “long-range intelligence purposes.”<sup>121</sup> The demarcation between short- and long-range intelligence was never clearly defined, and there was some overlap between reports from the two branches. In some instances, the two branches produced reports at nearly the same time on the same topic, but, as the two branches often approached the same topic from different viewpoints, the reports were seen as complementary.<sup>122</sup> On only “two or three occasions” were contradictory reports produced simultaneously. The operation maintained constant contact between its branches throughout the entire project, with personnel shuttling between the two frequently. The Washington branch was used as a training ground for the staff, who were then sent to London. The MIRS project was unique among intelligence-producing organizations up to that time, because it compiled all its information from primary sources. MIRS produced bulletins, compilations, studies, and books that were “praised by all intelligence echelons in the United States and British Armies for their high standards of completeness and accuracy and for the extremely useful form in which the material was presented.”<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> AGAR-S doc. 2005. “Classification Criteria,” 1.

<sup>121</sup> AGAR-S doc. 1440. “History and Operations of MIRS: London and Washington Branches, May 1943 – July 1945,” 7.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

The archives in the United States were held in two places, in the Pentagon and in Alexandria, Virginia. In 1947, it was estimated that the entire collection weighed approximately 700 tons, and it was divided into three main sections: The Army Archive, the High Command Archive, and the SS and General Archives.<sup>124</sup> The Army Archive consisted of journals of the German field units, which they were required to keep. This also included the journals of Army commanders in occupied territories. The High Command Archives included the archives of the high level military and ministerial organizations of the German Air Forces, Navy, and Armed Forces general staff, including about 70,000 personnel files of German regular army officers.<sup>125</sup> The SS and General Archives included the files of the Nazi Party organization, the SS, and the Waffen SS. It also encompassed espionage and counter-espionage files, concentration camp records, records of civilian production, and German field manuals. In addition to the studies conducted by the staff at the centers, the FBI and the War Crimes Commission had open access to any documents they needed.<sup>126</sup>

Within MIRS there was not always a consistent policy toward the captured documents, despite the high level of organization. In 1950, a report written by the Assistant Chief of the Division of Historical Policy Research stated that documents found in London or the United States that were not exclusively Army, Navy, or Air Force records were returned to the document centers in Germany.<sup>127</sup> However, three years earlier, according to a memorandum, when documents arrived in the United States they were screened for intelligence purposes, and those that were determined to be non-military records were lent “on a permanent basis” to

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<sup>124</sup> AGAR-S doc. 1423. “Memorandum for the Director of Central Intelligence: Disposition of Captured German Documents, May 26, 1947,” 11.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>127</sup> AGAR-S doc. 1324. “Captured Enemy Records, January 1950,” 2

interested American governmental agencies, not returned to Germany.<sup>128</sup> This was not the only inconsistency in the MIRS program, as often personnel would receive security clearance to analyze a set of documents only to have it revoked after the sensitive contents of the documents were revealed by the person who was originally granted access.<sup>129</sup> When this happened, a different member of staff with a higher security clearance would then have to reanalyze the documents. These instances demonstrate that the program was not without problems, but it is important to remember that this was an entirely new intelligence system.

There was some debate within the archivist profession and within the Restitution Branch (the organization charged with returning plundered or lost items to their rightful owners) over whether the removal of documents from Germany was a legal action. A memorandum prepared by Colonel John Raymond for the Restitution Branch discussed the various conventions that could affect the legality of the move. He argued that Article 56 of the Regulations Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land, as outlined in the Hague Convention of 1907, provided that “the property of municipalities, that of institutions dedicated to religion, charity, and education, the arts and sciences, even when state property, shall be treated as private property,” and expressly forbade seizure of items of this nature during times of war.<sup>130</sup> However, Raymond noted, if this rule had been followed to the letter, the United States Army had no authorization to remove many of the documents from Germany that it did. He also argued, “archives are, by their

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<sup>128</sup> AGAR-S doc. 1423. “Memorandum for the Director of Central Intelligence: Disposition of Captured German Documents, May 26, 1947,” 2.

<sup>129</sup> AGAR-S doc. 1440. “History and Operations of MIRS: London and Washington Branches, May 1943 – July 1945,” 99.

<sup>130</sup> AGAR-S doc. 511. “Right of Occupying Power to Remove Indigenous Archives, Records and Documents, March 17, 1947,” 5.

nature, indigenous in origin and usefulness. Their removal makes them practically useless for the purpose for which they were created and preserved.”<sup>131</sup>

However, Raymond concluded that, if an enemy state had removed indigenous public, semi-public, and private archives after the termination of hostilities and held the archives in a trust for the future use of the inhabitants of the country, it would be legal to move such archives. He recommended a declaration that ensured that it would be in the German public’s best interests to have the documents removed for their safekeeping. Without this declaration, however, any removal of such documents “would constitute a breach of international law.”<sup>132</sup> The declaration would, in essence, reassure the public that their documents would eventually be returned when the threat to their safety was over. The Colonel did not outline any rules for how the documents could legally be used by the United States while they are in that country’s protection.

A 1947 report for the Restitution Branch declared that, although the Hague Convention prohibited the removal of archives by a belligerent occupier, it did not apply in the occupation of Germany following the war, as this was no longer an “occupation during a period of hostilities.” The report further argued that, since Germany surrendered unconditionally, the Hague Convention of 1907 did not apply, and the Allies were legally allowed to remove whichever documents they wanted, as long as they were captured in accordance with “the laws of humanity,” and held by “civilized people.”<sup>133</sup> Additionally, because Germany had no central government, as the Allies took over that responsibility, they considered the former government’s archives their possessions. Due to these arguments, the United States and the United Kingdom

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 7-8.



did not make any assurances that the documents that were in London and Washington, D.C., would ever be returned to Germany.

Scholarly exploitation of captured documents began quickly after the war. The American and British governments jointly decided in 1946 that publishing a selection of German Foreign Ministry documents would be desirable in order to “demonstrate Germany’s responsibility for the outbreak of the recent war.”<sup>134</sup> Restricted to the years 1918-1945, the publication was in both German and English. The project was intended to demonstrate the unfolding of German foreign policy during those years, and it was estimated that the project would contain twenty volumes of copied, annotated documents. These volumes are now known as the German War Documents Project and were made available for scholarly use beginning in the mid-1950s in microfilm and paper copies and were distributed by the Public Records Office in London and the National Archives in Washington, D.C.<sup>135</sup>

### **The Use of Captured Documents in the Nuremberg Trials**

The Office of the Chief of Counsel for War Crimes sent agents who were responsible for gathering and processing enemy files that contained evidence of war criminality to the central depots in Germany and the MIRS centers in London and Washington, D.C.<sup>136</sup> The documents that related to specific atrocities were filed in existing case files compiled by the staff at the depots as the documents were initially sorted, and the concentration camp documents went on to other committees for further investigation. The Office of the Chief of Counsel for War Crimes was the only agency that was allowed to remove original documents from the depot centers in

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<sup>134</sup> George O. Kent, “The German Foreign Ministry Archives,” in *Captured German and Related Records*, ed. Wolfe, 122.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>136</sup> AGAR-S doc. 1423. “Memorandum for the Director of Central Intelligence: Disposition of Captured German Documents, May 26, 1947,” 12.

Germany, but the centers often retained microfilm copies, though many times copies were not retained.<sup>137</sup>

A September 1945 Branch Memorandum that was contained within a report by the German Documents Conference, conducted by the U.S. War Crimes Branch, described the specific documents the officers were to look for:

- a. 'Documents related to specific war crimes', i.e., those which definitely possess essential evidential value in connection with a specific atrocity.
- b. 'Documents related to concentration camps', i.e., those which definitely possess essential evidential value in connection with a concentration camp case.
- c. 'Reference Documents', being those relating only generally to war crimes and usable only for research purposes, e.g., bound volumes giving general information concerning SS personnel.
- d. 'Real Evidence', i.e., evidence other than from the mouth of a witness such as instruments and devices used in the commission of a crime, or maps, pictures, plats and fingerprints, etc.<sup>138</sup>

The translation of documents relating to specific war crimes in which American victims were involved received "translation priority over all other documents."<sup>139</sup>

The original documents that were used as evidence in the war crimes trials at Nuremberg were never returned to the centers in Germany, as archives were developed to contain the set of all the documents used in the trials.<sup>140</sup> An article by Telford Taylor, the assistant to the Supreme Court Justice Robert Jackson, chief prosecutor of the International Military Tribunal (IMT) Nuremberg Trials (the first trials held by the four Allied nations), outlined the disorder that diffused the preparatory phase of the Nuremberg proceedings. Justice Jackson did not bring any supporting staff from the Supreme Court and relied on military personnel who had been lawyers,

<sup>137</sup> Born, "The Ministerial Collecting Center near Kassel," 247.

<sup>138</sup> AGAR-S doc. 1433. "Report German Documents Conference: Branch Memorandum No. 18, 'Gathering and Processing of Bulk Enemy Documents, September 1, 1945.'" 45.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>140</sup> Taylor, "Use of Captured Records," in *Captured German and Related Records*, ed. Wolfe, 95.

translators, and court reporters before the war, though they lacked uniform training. During the few months before the trials, these people visited the document centers established by MFA&A and MIRS and combed through the records there, taking both the compiled files on war crimes and other, overlooked documents.

During the preparatory period just prior to the IMT trial, the prosecution team was divided about whether the main source of evidence should be documentary or based on witnesses' testimony. General Donovan, a former lawyer, viewed the trials as would a U.S. district attorney and so immediately began looking for witnesses.<sup>141</sup> It became quickly evident that the victims of the crimes were in large part dead and that some former German generals would not testify against their former commanders. Justice Jackson, on the other hand, had skimmed some of the documents and had concluded that, because of the well-known proclivity of the German government and military or keeping meticulous records, the basis for the prosecution's case could be documentary.<sup>142</sup> Interrogations of the defendants also took place, resulting in some testimonial evidence, but Taylor estimates that three-quarters of the evidence in the trials was documentary.<sup>143</sup>

The American and British document centers were the primary source for evidence used in the trials, as materials from the Soviet-occupied sections of Germany were largely unavailable. Taylor commented about the Russians, "their documentation remains to this day a considerable mystery to me. All I can say is that at the trials they were not forthcoming with very much in the way of documents, and certainly on a comparative basis one would have to say

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 97.

that the contribution was negligible.”<sup>144</sup> Taylor remarked that, although Justice Jackson was one of the most able lawyers of the time, he was not the best administrator. This led to a lot of autonomy in the various divisions of the staff responsible for organizing the records, leading to “chaos.”<sup>145</sup> The documents were divided in a very unsystematic way, serving the purposes of the prosecution only, rather than collecting documents for a logical historical purpose. For example, documents collected at the London MIRS center by a naval lieutenant named Rothschild were filed under *R*, while documents collected in London by other people were filed under *L*.<sup>146</sup> There was no consideration for what was contained in the documents, where they came from, or for which trial they might be of the most use. The result was that the archival records from the Nuremberg Trials do not follow any traditional rules of archival organization. This also meant that some documents were lost, and, as copies were not always made before removing the documents from their original files, they were lost permanently.

In Justice Jackson’s opening statements at the IMT trial, he read a translation of a letter from General von Fritsch, the former commander-in-chief of the German army, who had been killed in Poland in the early part of the war. The letter, to Baronin Margot von Schutzbar, was very critical of Jews.<sup>147</sup> When the German defense team asked for the original letter, it could not be found. It has never been located. Taylor was convinced from administrative files that the letter and a whole series of two hundred letters from von Fritsch to von Schutbar did exist and that the translations were accurate, but they were inadmissible in court.<sup>148</sup> He did not suspect any criminal misdeeds in their disappearance, only disorganization due to lack of experience in

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<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

handling documents. Various theories about the current location of the letters have been put forth, including one which purports that they were returned to the baroness after their translation and another which maintains that they are in private hands in Great Britain.

The unsystematic chaos also meant that some important documents were overlooked. Taylor recounted how, one year after the IMT trial, the head of the Interrogation Section came into his office with five volumes in German shorthand, labeled “General Thomas’s Diary.”<sup>149</sup> It had just been discovered that this was not some unknown general’s diary but actually the diary of General Halder, chief of the German General Staff from 1938 to 1942. There Halder recorded what he did, what he heard, and often his opinions on what was going on nearly every day from 1939 to 1942. This would have been an invaluable resource for the IMT trial because it established Hitler’s plans after the invasion of Poland. On September 19, 1939, Halder wrote that he received information from the SS Commander Reinhard Heydrich, one of the most senior Nazi Party officials, that the SS was going to “clean house” in Poland, removing Jews, the Catholic clergy, the aristocracy, and the intelligentsia.<sup>150</sup> While Heydrich was not on trial, as he was dead, other SS officials could have been implicated by these facts.

The evidence contained within the documents was sometimes given more weight than witnesses’ testimony, as seen during the Doctors’ Trial. The documents uncovered at the former SS Ahnenerbe Headquarters in Waischenfeld had been heavily looted by German citizens prior to the Allied invasion, but what was found was still extremely useful for the trials.<sup>151</sup> Two large, unopened, steel safes protected some documents that related to the human experiments conducted by Das Ahnenerbe, the facility researching the roots of the Aryan race, the activities

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>150</sup> Alexander B. Rossino, *Hitler Strikes Poland: Blitzkrieg, Ideology, and Atrocity* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2003), 22, 116.

<sup>151</sup> AGAR-S doc. 1886. “SS-Documents of the Organization ‘Das Ahnenerbe’, Waischenfeld,” 1.

of which included human experimentation. These documents were used as evidence against Wolfram Sievers, the organization's director. Sievers asked for leniency from the court, because he had helped a resistance group from 1929 on, an assertion supported by testimony from Dr. Friedrich Hielscher, but the documents revealed many horrendous human experiments, and he was sentenced to death on August 21, 1947.<sup>152</sup> Taylor explained that the documents were used to break down Sievers' credibility and that the judges in the case felt that Friedrich and Sievers's claims about his activities with a resistance group were not as convincing as the documentary evidence.<sup>153</sup>

Following the end of the trials, the documentary evidence and the transcripts of the trials were published. The IMT trial's transcript and evidence was published in English, German, French, and Russian in what is known as the Nuremberg Blue Series. Another archival collection, named the Red Series, compiled by Justice Jackson, contains many of the documents that were accumulated for trial but ultimately not used during it. It also contains many transcripts of the interrogations of the defendants and witnesses. The other twelve trials were published collectively in what is known as the Green Series. These three series were made available to leading universities and libraries around the world for scholarly research. The assembly of these documents is significant for historians who study the trials, but for historians of other aspects of the war, they are less significant. There is no logic to this assemblage of documents, because they did not come from the same archives, they are not chronological, and they are not even topically organized.

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<sup>152</sup> Heather Pringle, *The Master Plan: Himmler's Scholars and the Holocaust*, (New York: Hyperion, 2006), Chapter 22.

<sup>153</sup> Taylor, Transcribed Discussion during Conference, in Wolfe, *Captured German and Related Records*, 108.

### Chapter Three: The Return of the Documents

Although the United States and the United Kingdom remained ambivalent for years about whether they would ever return the captured documents held in Washington, D.C., to Germany, they quickly developed a policy about returning archives that the Germans had stolen from other peoples. The Nazi program of conquest included stripping occupied countries of cultural objects and archives in order to enrich Germany through looting. This included state, church, and private archives and objects of art. In Western Europe this confiscation was mostly confined to Jewish collections, except in cases that were rationalized under the pretext of protecting archival material.<sup>154</sup> Books and archives that were taken by Germany during the occupation of other countries initially went to the Offenbach Archival Depot, and, once their origins had been verified, they were returned to their original owners in 1946.<sup>155</sup>

This depot also facilitated the return of stolen books and papers to Jewish families and institutions. According to MFA&A officer Captain Pomrenze, by 1946 this included nearly three million books.<sup>156</sup> Included in the collection were the Rosenthal library of 35,000 books, taken from Amsterdam, and the Spinoza library of philosophy, stolen from the Hague. The rightful ownership of many of the Jewish books and archives was not always so clear, however. Nazis established research institutes for the study of the so-called Jewish problem, the largest institution being located in Frankfurt under the direction of well-known Nazi Alfred Rosenberg. These institutions were to provide a pseudo-scientific basis for anti-Semitic propaganda, and so they collected Jewish books in order to distort the view of Jews, according to the Commission on

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<sup>154</sup> Poste, "Protection of Libraries and Archives," 235.

<sup>155</sup> AGAR-S doc. 506. "Office of Military Government for Greater Hesse: Establishment of the Offenbach Archival Depot, March 2, 1946," 1.

<sup>156</sup> AGAR-S doc. 506. "MG Discloses How Nazis Desecrated Jewish Torah," *Stars and Stripes* March 9, 1946, 1.

European Jewish Cultural Reconstruction.<sup>157</sup> Ironically, at the same time that the Nazis were exterminating Jews, they were methodically collecting and preserving Jewish religious and cultural objects. On the advice of the Commission on European Jewish Cultural Reconstruction, books, objects, and archives whose previous owners could not be identified were to be distributed among Jewish cultural institutions, particularly those outside of Europe, as the majority of Jews in the world after the war no longer lived there.<sup>158</sup>

Books and documents held in the Offenbach depot that were privately owned by German citizens before the war were returned in 1947, at least to those people living in the British and American occupied zones of Germany. Approximately 150,000 unidentifiable books of German origin were distributed among “universities, schools, municipal or other public institutional libraries which suffered the heaviest war losses.”<sup>159</sup> This did not include books of “national-socialistic nature,” those deemed Nazi propaganda, which were “pulped for paper salvage.”<sup>160</sup> The books that were returned were, however, still subject to claims of restitution by other occupied nations, and, if any such claims were made, the books were to be returned.<sup>161</sup> This was known as “restitution-in-kind,” as an institution that could prove their material had been deliberately destroyed by Germans could ask for similar items to be confiscated from Germany as reparation.<sup>162</sup>

The archives held in European depots became the property of the Federal Republic of Germany not long after the formation of the West German government in 1949. This was done

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<sup>157</sup> AGAR-S doc. 1454. “Commission on European Jewish Cultural Reconstruction, June 5, 1945,” 2.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>159</sup> AGAR-S doc. 1461. “Responsibility for Certain Categories of Books Now Held in the Offenbach Archival Depot, August 5, 1948,” 2.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*



after assessments of whether the requested archives would not “prejudice US or allied interests” and after receiving congressional approval.<sup>163</sup> The archives held in London and Washington, D.C., however, remained joint property of the United Kingdom and the United States for a much longer period. The director of the War Records Office in Washington, D.C., E. G. Campbell, argued in a report in 1947 that the seized records held in the United States should never be returned to Germany for a number of reasons. First, he argued that the files had often been incorporated into American government agencies’ own archives and that it would be impossible to remove them without diminishing the effectiveness of those archives.<sup>164</sup> An example of this is the United States Strategic Bombing Survey, whose archive still today contains many appraisals of enemy technology and developments during wartime and whose own technologies are built off these earlier developments.<sup>165</sup> Second, Campbell argued that many documents were removed from Germany because “it was believed that the possibility of destroying German militarism would be greater if the written documentation of Germany’s military and naval history were removed from Germany.”<sup>166</sup> He cited the studies that were conducted by German military staff after the treaty of Versailles on their own World War One documents to justify this statement, arguing that to prevent a repetition of this procedure, it would be better to remove the documents. Third, he argued that the documents were wanted in the United States and in Great Britain to detect evidence of war criminality and also to learn information about the development of the materials and techniques of war. Finally, he argued that, since so many of the captured documents in the United States had been scattered between many agencies, it would be difficult

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<sup>163</sup> AGAR-S doc. 1011, “Division of Historical Policy Research, May 23, 1953,” 1.

<sup>164</sup> AGAR-S doc. 703. “Retirement of Seized Enemy Records, March 20, 1947,” 1.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

to return them to specific places in Germany, as they were often out of order.<sup>167</sup> While some of the reasons stated above seem to reflect reality, nowhere in the documentation related to the transfer of archives to the United States and to London is there evidence that the Allies initially wanted to hold archives in order to prevent German rearmament.

Some American scholars did not agree with Campbell's statements, however. In 1949 Dr. Ernst Posner prepared a report in which he recommended that the restitution of German records to Germany be brought to the attention of the governments concerned.<sup>168</sup> He argued that, although some of the records were still useful for American and British intelligence purposes and that some of the records "may be considered *bona fide* war booty that may be retained indefinitely," other held records should have been restored to Germany.<sup>169</sup> German archivists, authorities, and the media began to state the case for the return to Germany of their records. Dr. Hermann Mau, representative of the former German Institute for the History of the Nazi Era (later known as the IfZ), visited the United States in 1951 at the invitation of the State Department to report on German archives held in the United States and why they would be useful in Germany.<sup>170</sup> On June 21, 1950, the German Bundestag passed a resolution requesting the return of the captured archives, and frequently after that German ministers took advantage of various meetings with American ministers to express their views on the matter.<sup>171</sup>

Even after the decision in 1949 that the United States should restore German military forces as part of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) defenses, no policy regarding the captured archives was implemented. Following this decision, however, the Department of

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>168</sup> AGAR-S doc. 301. "Report on the Public Archives of Germany, July 9, 1949," 58.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> AGAR-S doc. 1303. "Wayne C. Grover to Vollmer, 1951," 2.

<sup>171</sup> AGAR-S doc. 1341. *Manchester Guardian*, May 13, 1950, 1.

the Army recognized that Germany would need its military records in order to complete this goal.<sup>172</sup> However, a memorandum from 1951 concluded that “the wholesale transfer” to Germany of captured documents would be “detrimental and even dangerous to the security and defense of the United Kingdom and the United States,” and that it would “severely hamper the extensive work in progress in this and other countries on official Histories of the War.”<sup>173</sup> The report highlighted that no one had ever claimed that the captured documents were necessary for the administration of Western Germany and that the reason the German Chancellor gave was that he attached “importance to the ‘enlightenment of the German people on the events which occurred under the National Socialist regime.’”<sup>174</sup> The report pointed out that the documentary records of the Nuremberg Trials, which were already available for study, effectively showed this.

It was not until 1955 that the American and British governments reached an agreement for the return of German military records in army custody to Germany. During the negotiations that led to that agreement, some people proffered arguments that the return of the records without proper examination would result in security breaches, loss or compromise of intelligence data, and “embarrassment to the United States and its allies.”<sup>175</sup> Additionally, American historians exerted “considerable pressure against highest levels of government” for assurance that the captured records would be declassified and made available in original or reproduced form prior to their return to Germany.<sup>176</sup> As a result of the expression of these sentiments, the agreement provided for declassification of the records and microfilming of certain sections of them, before shipping them to Germany. The review of all the archives necessary to declassify them was a

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<sup>172</sup> AGAR-S doc. 1327A. “Custody of Documents, November 29, 1949,” 1.

<sup>173</sup> AGAR-S doc. 1434. “Departmental Records Branch, Alexandria, VA, October 2, 1951,” 2.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>175</sup> AGAR-S doc. 2005. “Classification Criteria, September 19, 1956,” 1.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*

monumental task, as was the microfilming project. By 1958, more than 15,000 linear feet of documents had been copied, and the filmed records are now in the custody of the National Archives and available for scholarly research.<sup>177</sup> By March 1968, thirty-five shipments containing more than 25,000 linear feet of captured records had returned to Germany.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> AGAR-S doc. 2003. "Regrading Program for Captured German Records, July 7, 1960," 1.

<sup>178</sup> AGAR-S doc. 1578, 1615, and 2002.

## Conclusion

Although a wealth of literature about fascist Germany and World War Two exists—at least some measurable part of it relying on information contained in German archives and documents captured by the Allied Forces during and after the war—the story of the archives themselves has received scant attention. This story hinges on the actions of two wartime agencies, MFA&A and MIRS. Neither of these two programs had clearly formulated missions that encapsulated their later responsibilities; both programs developed and changed over time.

The Americans and the British created MIRS primarily to solve the intelligence problem growing out of differing reports about German troop strength. Initially, MFA&A officers worked only to secure the safety of archives by ensuring the buildings that housed them were structurally sound and by uncovering archives that had been removed and hidden by the retreating German officials. Sometimes this latter effort led to dramatic scenes of documents found buried deep within salt mines, but mostly the work was more mundane, with MFA&A officers checking lists and verifying the archives' contents. Once it became apparent that MFA&A officers had unprecedented access to captured German archives, the Allies realized that strategic and intelligence benefits for the armies and for occupation forces could come from the captured material. This led to the expansion of MIRS's responsibilities to include the production of studies and reports based on the captured and cataloged material. To facilitate this work the MFA&A division quickly developed a system for first centralizing the documents so that their contents could be exploited and for then shipping the documents to the MIRS centers in London and Washington, D.C. This development of the program of strategic intelligence that came to include the collection, analysis, and dissemination of information was unique in the world up to that point, as never before had so much information on an enemy been utilized to affect active

battle plans. Due to the success of the program, the United States implemented a similar one in the Pacific Theater to examine and exploit the records of Japanese governmental agencies.

As the war and the post-war period progressed, the joint mission of the organizations and the reports that issued from their activities took on a multitude of responsibilities: assisting in the war against Japan, producing studies of value for the National Defense, supporting scientific and technical development of the United States, providing intelligence for the occupation of Germany, developing evidence required by the War Crimes Commission, and amassing archival material for American historical research.<sup>179</sup> Additionally, as Germany had occupied and administered large areas of the USSR for four years during the war and compiled a lot of documentation about Soviet systems, the archives provided vast amounts of information on the USSR, which proved very useful to the West during the Cold War.<sup>180</sup>

Much to some archivists' dismay, many of the archival collections were dismembered and scattered to serve these various purposes and many documents proved to be lost forever. However, many of the records, such as they were, ultimately found their way back to their countries of origin in relatively quick order, though it took two decades to declassify the German archival material and return it to Germany. Copies of much of the German materials remain in the national archives of the United Kingdom and the United States and are available for scholarly study. Whatever the considerable scholarly value of these archives may be, however, these two programs, MIRS and MFA&A, most notably radically changed the way the United States came to use intelligence during wartime, and the country has taken advantage of this system of exploitation of information in every subsequent conflict.

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<sup>179</sup> AGAR-S doc. 1434. "Departmental Records Branch, Alexandria, VA, October 2, 1951," 14.

<sup>180</sup> Goldbeck, "German Military Documents and Captured Records Section," in *Captured German and Related Records*, ed. Wolfe, 38.

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