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During the latter months of the Second World War, Edmund F. Franz served with the U.S. Army's War Crimes Branch in Wiesbaden, Germany. Part of the team involved in war crimes investigation, Franz processed hundreds of pages of first-hand accounts by perpetrators, eye witnesses, concentration camp survivors, political prisoners, and prisoners of war that ultimately served the prosecution during the Nuremberg trials. At the war's end, he returned home to Aurora, Ohio, eventually bequeathing a collection of depositions from his wartime work to a friend, David M. Berke.

The Berke Collection contains copies of approximately 300 pages of material gathered by U.S. Army investigators in preparation for the Nuremberg trials. The depositions, affidavits, and reports that comprise the collection are varied in scope, but most center on German maltreatment of prisoners -- both political prisoners and prisoners of war -- with a handful of items relating to larger issues in intelligence and counter intelligence. Gathered originally by the Office of Strategic Services, the Counter Intelligence Corps, and other Army units, the materials offer chilling insight into the brutality of the concentration camp system, "labor reform" prisons, and police prisons, and the sheer scale of wartime inhumanity.

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Background on David M. Berke

During the latter months of the Second World War, Edmund F. Franz served with the U.S. Army's War Crimes Branch in Wiesbaden, Germany. Part of the team involved in war crimes investigation, Franz processed hundreds of pages of first-hand accounts by perpetrators, eye witnesses, concentration camp survivors, political prisoners, and prisoners of war that ultimately served the prosecution during the Nuremberg trials.

At the end of his military service, Franz returned to civilian life in Aurora, Ohio, seldom discussing his experiences in Germany. Before his death in 1984, however, he left careful instructions for his wife to deliver a briefcase of papers he had accumulated during the war to a friend and Cleveland businessman, David M. Berke (1911-1999), who decided in turn to donate the records to Kent State's Jewish Studies program.

Scope of collection

The Berke Collection contains copies of approximately 300 pages of material gathered by U.S. Army investigators in preparation for the Nuremberg trials. The depositions, affidavits, and reports that comprise the collection (nearly all in translation) are varied in scope, but most center on German maltreatment of prisoners -- both political prisoners and prisoners of war -- with a handful of items relating to larger issues in intelligence and counter intelligence. Gathered originally by the Office of Strategic Services, the Counter Intelligence Corps, and other Army units, the materials offer chilling insight into the brutality of the concentration camp system, "labor reform" prisons, and police prisons, and the sheer scale of wartime inhumanity. Most of the depositions taken from political prisoners were taken by British intelligence in Capri, Italy.

The collection has been organized into seven rough thematic categories. Most of these records are probably, though not certainly, duplicates of war crimes documents already on file at the National Archives in Washington, D.C.

Inventory

Bystanders: depositions

1945

2 items

Geurtz, Theodor

1945 June 22

2p.

Folder 1: 1

Statement by a German civilian, eye-witness to an execution of two American or English POWs.

Heydecker, Marianne

1945 June 10

2p.

Folder 1: 2

Statement by a civilian to mass Jewish graves at Berditschev and Zhitomer, as told by eye-witness Richard Stettmaier.

Concentration camps: reports

1945

4 items

United States. Counter Intelligence Corps, G-2 Information Bulletin no. 62 (Wobbelin)

1945 May 14

2p.

Folder 2: 1

Report on reception of prisoners from Schandelah at Wobbelin concentration camp and brutal treatment.

United States. Office of Special Services, Concentration Camp Dora

1945 Aug. 1

3p.

Folder 2: 2

OSS Report GR-5087 on forced labor and conditions at Dora (Buchenwald).

United States. Office of Special Services, Medical Research at Dachau

1945 July 2

2p.

Folder 2: 3

OSS Report GR-5087 on medical experimentation at Dachau.

United States. Seventh Army Interrogation Center, Concentration Camp Flossenbürg

1945 Aug. 4

8p.

Folder 2: 4

Consolidated interrogation report on administration, treatment of new arrivals, rations, labor, death rate, executions, and personnel.

Counter-intelligence reports

1945

3 items

Conference Note

1945 Jan. 5

2p.

Folder 3: 1

Report discussing possible Swedish entry into the war against Germany.

First Army PWI report

1945 Mar.

1p.

Folder 3: 2

Prisoner of War interrogation report (Peter Kluetsch, Johann Maesgen, and Johann Hammer) noting preparations of Nazi Party to go underground near Bonn and Linz.

Information re political activities of family of Gustav Krupp von Bohlen und Halbach

1945 July 25

2p.

Folder 3: 3

Discussing family members, spouses, and professions.

Innsbruck-Reichenau Forced Labor Camp

1945

7 items

Freiberger, Paul

1945 June 3

3p.

Folder 4: 1

Affadavit of SS Guard and gardener at Labor Reform Camp Reichenau; determined that "no further investigation is warranted."

Harm, Hermann

1945 May 29

12p.

Folder 4: 2

Interrogation of Hermann Harm, the head gardener at Camp Reichenau and "one of the greatest beaters in the camp and I was proud of the fact." Includes depositions from Harm and three victims: Wiktor Dwinow, Alexander Slesarews, Peter Popow.

Marchel, Adolph

1945 June 2

4p.

Folder 4: 3

Sworn statement of a Gestapo driver attesting to bodies of eight hanged inmates of Innsbruck-Reichenau Labor Camp he saw in his truck

Medushevskii, Watia

1945 June 10

3p.

Folder 4: 4

Statement by Reichenau prisoner who witnessed hanging of six or eight Russian prisoners at Camp Reichenau.

Papek, Josef

1945 June 13

11p.

Folder 4: 5

Statement of Gestapo employee at Camp Reichenau; also includes testimony of prisoners Petro Tschaika, Gregorij Nesterow, Victor Simogulow on Papek's cruelty.

Schott, Martin

1945 June 15

23p.

Folder 4: 6

Report on and statement of SS Unterscharfuehrer Martin Schott, an accomplice to the hanging of six Russian and two Polish prisoners at Camp Reichenau; includes testimony of Petro Tschaika, Josef Papek, Michel Zurziko, and Victor Schumacher.

Weelaid, Ago

1945 June 4

2p.

Folder 4: 7

Statement by Estonian SS guard at Innsbruck-Reichenau.

Perpetrators: reports

1944-1945

5 items

Beetz, Hildegard

1945 Aug. 18

5p.

Folder 5: 1

Report from Lt. Col. Berding, Headquarters 12 Army Group, SCI, on Beetz (a.k.a. Felizitas and later known as Hilde Purwin), "executive and agent" of Amt VI, Sicherheitsdienst (foreign intelligence department of the Security Service); believed to have the diaries of Count Galeazzo Ciano and deemed an excellent intelligence source on SD activities in Italy.

Gerstein, Kurt

1945 Apr. 26

17p.

Folder 5: 2

Lengthy intelligence report and deposition on First Lieutenant Kurt Gerstein (Head of Technical Disinfection Services for the SS); an anti-Nazi eye-witness to mass gassings. Gerstein was head of "disinfection" procedures, with intimate knowledge of gas chambers and the prussic acid used at Belsen, Auschwitz, Mauthausen, and Oranienburg and an eye-witness to multiple gassings of KZ-inmates. Includes listing of anti-Nazis with whom Gerstein associated in Berlin; testimony on the use of prussic acid; and a transcript of a letter from the "German Company for the Control of Vermin," regarding the storage and use of "disinfectant," June 9, 1944.

Sommerhof, Franz Xavier

1945 May 6

3p.

Folder 5: 3

Chilling statement by Waffen SS Unterscharfuehrer Sommerhof detailing his participation in mass killings of thousands perpetrated in Pleskau (Pskov) and KZ-Oranienburg. "PS -- I beg mild judgment in my case, since I am basically a good-hearted man. I am a great animal lover, and have never hurt an animal."

Walter, Hans

1944 Nov. 10

14p.

Folder 5: 4

Interim report on Hans Walter, SS officer and head of the Police Prison and Security Work-training Camp in Posen; arrested Oct. 4 and committed suicide on night of Oct. 9-10, 1944. Report of murderous activities at work camp and police prison in Posen (Poznan) details dozens of specific murders he perpetrated: written in part by SS Judge Gerhardt Wiebeck. Marked "Confidential": appears to be a translation of a document associated with Wiebeck's investigation into Walter's activities from Nazi authorities.

Wiebeck, Gerhardt

1945 May 23

4p.

Folder 5: 5

Report by Agent George Hochschild on Wiebeck, a member of the SS Police Court on internal investigations on camps and operations, looking for corruption.

Political prisoners: depositions

1945

18 items

Bielenberg, Peter

1945 July 11

3p.

Folder 6: 1

Statement by an anti-Nazi activist describing plot to assassinate Adolph Hitler, with kinds of communication within the group, names of participants, and further plans. Incomplete, with OSS report on German opposition to Hitler mentioning Bielenberg.

Cerrini, Fritz

1945 May 28

2p.

Folder 6: 2

Secretary to Prince Frederick Leopold, transferred to Dachau, describes life in the camps.

Celmins, Gustavs

1945 May 15

6p.

Folder 6: 3

Statement of Latvian underground member arrested by the Gestapo, describing treatment at Flossenbürg, deaths and other abuse.

Dragic, Hinke

1945 May 16

7p.

Folder 6: 4

Statement of Yugoslavian Air Force Lt. Colonel, describing his arrest and treatment in concentration camps (including Flossenbürg), noting food allotments, beatings, murder and deprivation

Hamm, Anton

1945 May 22

2p.

Folder 6: 5

Statement by Catholic priest arrested in August 1943, sent to Dachau, describing atrocities at the camp.

Heberlein, Margot

1945 June 1

3p.

Folder 6: 6

Statement by spouse of German embassy employee in Spain, arrested and sent to Dachau, where she had "privileged" treatment, describes treatment of male prisoners in particular.

Horthy, Nicholas de

1945 May 31

4p.

Folder 6: 7

Statement by Hungarian Minister to Brazil arrested in October 1944 in Budapest, describes being taken to Mauthausen where he witnessed crematorium in full operation.

Leopold, Frederick

1945 May 26

3p.

Folder 6: 8

Statement of Prince Frederick Leopold, describing his persecution at hands of the Nazis, beginning in 1934 through his arrest and transfer to Dachau in October 1944.

De Miranda (no first name provided)

1945 Oct. 25

1p.

Folder 6: 9

Statement describing bludgeoning murder of Social Affairs and Deputy Burgermeister of Amsterdam at Amersfoort.

Neuhausler, Johann

1945 May 23

4p,

Folder 6: 10

Canon of Catholic Church details anti-Nazi activity of the church between 1932 and 1941, when he was arrested. Details torture and medical experiments and names of perpetrators in Sachsenhausen.

Plettenberg, Gisela

1945 June 1

3p.

Folder 6: 11

Statement of Ravensbrueck inmate describing conditions and treatment of female prisoners, names of perpetrators.

Punder, Hermann

1945 May 30

3p.

Folder 6: 12

Deposition of suspect in July 1944 attempt on Hitler's life, interned at Frostenberg and Buchenwald.

Schmitz, Richard

1945 May 28

7p.

Folder 6: 13

Statement of former Mayor of Vienna, arrested in 1938 and sent to Dachau. Describes events through 24 April 1945.

Thomas, Georg

1945 July 14

11p.

Folder 6: 14

Interrogation of former Wehrmacht general, arrested on suspicion of being anti-Nazi; describing camp atrocities at Flossenburg, medical experiments on camp inmates; war criminals; names in the Nazi hierarchy.

Thyssen, Fritz

1945 May 23

4p.

Folder 6: 15

Statement by early member of Nazi party and financial backer who ended up in the camps, liberated by Americans.

Visintainer, Wilhelm

1945 May 23

12p.

Folder 6: 16

Detailed statement by Red Cross worker interned in Dachau from May 1941 to April 1945, with descriptions of life and death there.

Vermehren, Isa

1945 May 25

2p.

Folder 6: 17

Detailed statement by 27 year old woman describing extreme conditions in Ravensbrueck between April 1944 and March 1945; page 2 missing.

Wauer, Paul

1945 May 21

9p.

Folder 6: 18

Statement by a Jehovah's Witness arrested in 1938. Detailed account of his life in Sachsenhausen between 1938 and 1945.

Prisoners of War: depositions and reports

1945

8 items

Gray, David

1945 May 30

5p.

Folder 7: 1

Affidavits by American soldier on his captivity near Berga.

Head, Henderson

1945 June

3p.

Folder 7: 2

Statement regarding beatings, torture, and difficult living conditions of prisoners of war.

Mueller, Paul, Report on the treatment of an American prisoner of war at police headquarters

1945 May 25

2p.

Folder 7: 3

Statement by SS Police Paul Mueller about a beating death of an unidentified American aviator.

Record of deaths

undated

1p.

Folder 5: 4

Includes names of prisoners of war Glee Moore, Franklin Reed, Carl Revinski, Elmer Riffle, dates of birth, death, places of burial and cause.

Salerno, Joseph T.

1945 June 1

3p.

Folder 7: 5

Statement regarding beatings, torture, and difficult living conditions of American prisoners of war.

Stott, Donald H.: file on death of American aviator in Austria

1945 Apr. 16-July 5

43p.

Folder 7: 6

Report and exhibits relative to killing of downed American aviator in Wiesbaden, Austria, including depositions from villagers witnessing the event (Aumueller, Brueck, Dorman, Ecker, Holzl, Savter, Lebert, Leitner, Milli, Pansergrau, Ranke, Storeif, Weiermann); study of crash site; medical examiner's report; etc.

Susman, Milton K.

1945 Apr. 18

2p.

Folder 7: 7

Statement by American soldier describing discovery of bodies of several American soldiers and demolished tank near Dusseldorf, Germany.

Volfre, William

1945 June 5

6p.

Folder 7: 8

Transcription of debriefing interview with American soldier on his experiences as a prisoner of war

Perpetrators' depositions

1945

1 item

Nazi and S.S. hierarchy charts

Folder 9: 1

This folder contains eight section of a map representing the Nazi hierarchy, with Himmler's name at the top.

Administrative information

Access

The collection is open for research.

Provenance

Gift of Cathy Abrams, 2013.

The materials in this collection were bequeathed by Edmund Franz to David M. Berke. According to Berke's daughter, Cathy Berke Abrams, her father told his children that Franz handed the briefcase -- apparently untouched since the late 1940s -- to him personally, saying, "I'd like you to have this. You'll know what to do with it."

Berke originally donated the papers to Kent State University in 2002, and the originals of these are now archived at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. In honor of the anniversary of the 100th Birthday of her father, Cathy Berke Abrams donated these copies to the Institute for Holocaust, Genocide, and Memory Studies at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, who have collaborated with the Department of Special Collections and University Archives to digitize this material and make it as widely available to researchers as possible. The Berke Family provided funding to assist in digitization.

Digitized content

All images in the collection have been scanned and are available online through our digital repository, Credo.

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Search terms

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United States. Army. Counter Intelligence Corps

United States. Office of Special Services

World War, 1939-1945--Atrocities

World War, 1939-1945--Prisoners and prisons

Contributors

Berke, David M. [main entry]

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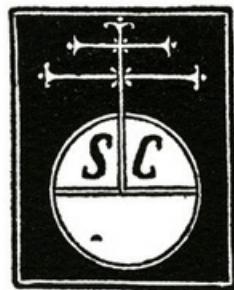
Depositions

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