

M2087

SELECTED GERMAN DOCUMENTS FROM THE  
RECORDS OF THE AMERICAN EXPEDITIONARY FORCES  
(WORLD WAR I)

Timothy Mulligan prepared the Introduction and arranged these records  
for microfilming.

National Archives and Records Administration  
Washington, DC  
2005

## INTRODUCTION

On the nine rolls of this microfilm publication, M2087, are reproduced approximately 9,300 pages of selected German military records for the 1914–1918 period that were captured by United States forces and incorporated within the Records of the American Expeditionary Forces (World War I), 1917–23, Record Group (RG) 120. The materials reproduced here constitute a part of those original German documents approved for restitution to the Bundesarchiv following the latter's request and subsequent negotiations with the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA). Most of the original German documents captured during World War I will remain in NARA custody, and those reproduced on M2087 will serve as NARA record copies for the originals returned to Germany.

## BACKGROUND

Maj. Gen. John J. Pershing assumed command of the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) on May 26, 1917, as designated by General Order 1 of Headquarters AEF, and immediately announced the formation of a headquarters staff. Following transfer to France, the Headquarters of AEF was formally organized on July 5, 1917, into a General Staff, an Administrative and Technical Staff, and other smaller components by General Order 8, Headquarters, AEF. Within the five sections of the General Staff, the Intelligence Section maintained responsibility for intelligence on German forces, in addition to duties for censorship and the gathering and dissemination of information. As a result of a reorganization in February 1918 (delineated in General Order 31, GHQ, AEF), Pershing's headquarters became the General Headquarters (GHQ), AEF, with an Assistant Chief of Staff now heading the newly designated Second Section, G-2 (Intelligence), with the same duties as before. This organization remained intact through the remainder of the war.

Directives issued by the Second Section, G-2, stipulated that all captured German documents should be forwarded to GHQ, AEF, for examination and dissemination of their content. Within the Second Section, the Artillery Material, Economics, and Translations Section (designated G-2-A-2) was charged with the translation and dissemination of information from captured German documents. Until September 1918, the Translation Subsection (G-2-A-2-c) processed the relatively small number of captured documents. With the St. Mihiel offensive in September 1918, the volume of captured materials rapidly increased, leading to the establishment of a new subsection devoted entirely to captured records, the Enemy Documents Subsection (G-2-A-2-e). By the end of November 1918, G-2-A-2-e had classified over 1,200 documents, some of which were translated. Some documents were forwarded by G-2-A-2-e to the most relevant intelligence section or army unit, the rest were retained and later used as the basis for the publication *Histories of Two Hundred and Fifty-One Divisions of the German Army Which Participated in the War (1914–1918)* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1920).

With the disbanding of the AEF after the war, responsibility for the captured German records transferred to the Historical Section of the U.S. Army War College. During the interwar period the Historical Section established a reciprocity program with the German archives that resulted in the transcription of an additional 96,000 German documents by 1940 (these materials are discussed in the “Related Records” section below). The Army Special Staff Historical Division replaced the Historical Section and produced a history of American participation in the First World War based, in part, on the documents received from the German archives, eventually published in 1948 by the Historical Division, Department of the Army, as *The United States Army in the World War, 1917–1919*. That same year the Historical Division transferred its collection of Allied and German operational records, including the captured documents, to the National Archives.

The collection of captured German documents was accessioned by NARA as part of the records of the Artillery Material, Economics, and Translations Section within the Second (G-2) Section of General Headquarters, AEF, and designated as Entry No. 92 within the Records of the American Expeditionary Forces (World War I), 1917–23, RG 120, as described in NM-91, “Preliminary Inventory of the Textual Records of the American Expeditionary Forces (World War I), 1917–23, Part I,” (Record Group 120). In 1984 the National Archives undertook the Captured German Records Preservation Project to preserve both the original documents and the order imposed on them by the AEF. The Project included the placement of the documents in new folders, the preparation of a folder listing of contents, and a cross-reference list for the document numbers used in the accompanying subject card index to the captured German documents.

In 2003 the Bundesarchiv approached NARA regarding the possible return of a variety of original German documents incorporated within American-provenance record groups. The captured documents located within RG 120 were deemed of particular significance in view of the loss of large quantities of World War I-era German military records over the course of World War II. NARA reviewed the materials and in 2004 approved the return of those documents representing the highest-level German military commands (from the War Ministry through the corps-level field commands), with microfilm copies to be retained by NARA. The records in question represented approximately 14 percent of the collection of captured German documents. When a detailed review subsequently revealed the extensive amount of preliminary preservation work necessary prior to filming, and in view of the limited researcher use of the records, NARA determined to microfilm a sample of the records to be returned. The sample consists of all documents originated by the German War Ministry and the Army High Command, together with a sample of German army- and corps-level field commands.

## **RECORDS DESCRIPTION**

The captured documents were originally grouped by the AEF according to the German office of origin, which was generally indicated at the top of the first page of each

document. The records were then arranged by German organizational hierarchy, by number for numbered formations, and by type of record, all of which was incorporated within a filing scheme of numerical “Case” and “Folder” designations apparently applied to most G-2 Section records. Thus, records of the highest German command levels (including the War Ministry, the Chief of the General Staff of the Field Army, and the Quartermaster-General) were designated as Case No. 13-1, Folder Nos. 6–38; records of German army group and most army-level commands, as Case No. 13-2, Folder Nos. 1–57; and records of remaining army-level commands, all designated army detachments (*Armee Abteilungen*), and most army corps-level commands, as Case No. 13-3, Folder Nos. 1–55. The documents within each folder were arranged chronologically. Each folder bears a title to its contents prepared by AEF authorities, which usually represents a mix of English- and German-language terms with no particular consistency.

In fact the actual provenance of the records, as indicated by the receipt stamps and other internal evidence, consists of the German division-, regiment-, and battalion-level field commands that received these documents. In particular, the German 2nd *Landwehr*, 7th Reserve, 13th *Landwehr*, and 77th Reserve Divisions and their component units furnished a disproportionate number of the captured documents, a result of these formations’ virtual destruction by American forces during the 1918 campaigns. The 77th Reserve Division, for example, spent the 1915–17 period entirely on the Eastern Front before its transfer to France in April 1918, and thus served as the source for many documents of higher-level commands in the East (e.g., *Kaiserlich Deutsche Südarmerie*, *Armee Abteilung D*) that never opposed U.S. or Allied forces in France.

Approximately one-half of the records consist of materials originally issued by components of the German Army High Command (the War Ministry, the Chief of the General Staff of the Field Army, the Quartermaster-General, and other authorities), including some early materials of the postwar *Reichswehr*. Most of the remainder comprise records issued by the headquarters of the German Third through Seventh Armies, with a particular emphasis on records of the Fifth Army, which confronted U.S. forces in the Meuse-Argonne campaign during the period September–November 1918. The remaining materials constitute fragmentary records of provisional army, army detachment, and corps commands. Most of the documents are dated during the 1917–18 period, but included are materials dated as early as 1914 and as late as 1919.

The documents themselves represent a mix of printed, typed, and mimeographed copies of directives, orders, guidelines, instructions, reports, and sample forms, accompanied by some original handwritten correspondence. Many of the mimeographed copies are also in handwritten format, requiring a familiarity with German handwriting of that period as well as of the language. Reflecting paper shortages of the era, the files include a significant number of half-sized pages (approximately 6 by 8 inches or less). Many of the mimeographed items are so faint as to be illegible. A number of pages have suffered tears, fraying, or other physical damage. Some

duplication of materials is evident, particularly of issuances from higher-level headquarters; where this occurs the duplicates usually accompany the originals.

Many of the documents were annotated in hand by their German recipients, including what appear to be file numbers that likely indicate their original organization within German field command records. A few, however, bear three-digit numbers centered at the top of the document's first page, which reflect those documents' inclusion in a partial subject index prepared by AEF G-2 authorities (described in the "Related Records" section).

A majority of the records concern military administrative, personnel, or logistical matters. For field commands, the *Verordnungsblatt* (official gazette) at the army level and the *Korps-Tagesbefehle* (Army Corps daily bulletins) at the corps level represent common examples of these administrative issuances pertaining to promotions, awards, decorations, furlough policy and procedures, equipment, clothing, pay, and health and hygiene. The same materials, however, also provide notices of men posted as "absent without leave," reductions in rations or provisions, suggestions for economizing war materials or planting frontline vegetable gardens, and the adoption of specific morale-boosting measures for the ordinary soldier, all of which document the deterioration of Germany's strategic situation during the war. A number of documents describe special food and religious provisions for Jewish soldiers serving in the army.

The folders identified as "Miscellaneous Papers," however, often contain significant documentation relating to German tactical doctrine, military technology, intelligence activities, and combat operations. Among these are guidelines for the employment of artillery; specific instructions regarding the designation and use of gas artillery shells and on the combating of Allied tanks; notes on the coordination of aerial spotters with artillery; interrogations of captured Allied personnel and translations of captured Allied documents; notes and directives regarding German communications security; and reports of "lessons learned" in specific operations and campaigns on the Western Front. No war diaries for the commands whose records are described here, however, are included.

A descriptive sheet is provided at the beginning of every microfilmed folder with an identification of the "Case" and "Folder" designation, the folder title, a description of the contents, and the number of pages. Copies of these descriptions are duplicated at the beginning of each roll.

The Appendix provides a glossary of common First World War German-language terms, titles, and abbreviations pertinent to the records here described.

## RELATED RECORDS

### RECORDS OF THE AMERICAN EXPEDITIONARY FORCES (WORLD WAR I), Record Group (RG) 120

The remainder of the captured German documents series, which will be retained by NARA, include extensive documentation of World War I German divisions and smaller-sized units and commands, as well as some personal records, documents of Austrian divisions, and occasionally the war diary of an infantry regiment (e.g., that for *Landwehr Infanterie-Regiment 36* of the 5th *Landwehr* Division). These are also arranged according to the numeric “Case” and “Folder” filing arrangement described earlier. The series also includes some duplicate original copies of the records filmed here, located in Case No. 20-1, Folder Nos. 1–34.

AEF G-2 authorities prepared a partial subject card index series (*NM-91*, Entry 91) to the captured German documents, arranged by arm or branch of service and thereunder by document number. The document number was handwritten and centered at the top of the first page of the German document in question. In addition to the document number, the cards provide a translated title of the German document. The Captured German Records Preservation Project prepared a cross-reference list that matched the subject index numbers with “Case” and “Folder” numbers. The evidence indicates that only a very small number of the documents microfilmed were included within the partial index.

Elsewhere among the records of the GHQ, AEF, Second Section (G-2), are English translations of foreign-language documents, 1917–1919 (*NM-91*, Entry 86), which include many translations of captured German documents as well as some original captured documents. Access to this series is provided by a card file of foreign-language documents translated (*NM-91*, Entry 85), arranged by translation number. Additional translations of captured German documents are also located among the formerly security-classified records of the Radio Intelligence Section relating to the solution of enemy codes and ciphers and the decoding of intercepted messages, 1917–1918 (*NM-91*, Entry 105), and German official communiqués and German wireless messages intercepted by the AEF, 1917–1918 (*NM-91*, Entry 106).

AEF G-2 records also include histories of German and Austrian divisions, 1917–1918 (*NM-91*, Entry 82), which provide extensive intelligence data on German and Austrian combat formations, their composition, strength, and combat history. Closely related are several series of records originated by the Dissemination and Filing Subsection (G-2-A-8) pertaining to German forces in France, including daily intelligence summaries, 1918–1919 (*NM-91*, Entry 134); daily summaries of information, 1918–1919 (*NM-91*, Entry 136); daily summaries of intelligence, 1918 (*NM-91*, Entry 138); and daily summaries of information for divisional headquarters, 1917–1918 (*NM-91*, Entry 139). Translations of German air doctrinal publications and interrogations of captured German aviation personnel are located among the Air Intelligence Section’s (G-2-A-7) general correspondence, 1917–1919 (*NM-91*, Entry 111).

Among the records of the AEF's G-5 Section, the Army Intelligence School's Miscellaneous Records, 1917–1919 (*NM-91*, Entry 383), are numerous reference materials pertaining to the German Army. These include translations of captured German documents, an original German document (January 1918) on Allied gas ammunition, and copies of lectures and essays on German military forces and the exploitation of captured documents and papers.

Approximately 3,000 original German maps from the World War I period are located among the cartographic records of RG 120 in the custody of NARA's Cartographic Section (NWCS). Descriptions of these maps are provided in *Preliminary Inventory No. 165, Cartographic Records of the American Expeditionary Forces, 1917–21* (Washington, DC, 1966), pp. 58–63.

#### RECORDS OF THE WAR DEPARTMENT GENERAL AND SPECIAL STAFFS, RG 165

Among the records originated by the Army War College's Historical Section, a series of German military records relating to World War I (identified as Entry 320 in *NM-84, Preliminary Inventory of the Textual Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs*), generally arranged by German army, corps, and unit, constitutes the most significant collection of German military records for the First World War in NARA custody. From 1920 to 1940, the Historical Section cooperated with the German Reichsarchiv in transcribing copies of approximately 96,000 original German documents of field commands, principally for those that confronted U.S. Army forces in France, 1917–18, but including some documentation dated as early as 1914. These records include copies of war diaries and accompanying reports of German armies, corps, and divisions, as well as some records of the Army High Command, and thus complement the captured German documents series in RG 120. Duplicate copies of these materials were donated to the Bundesarchiv in 1976. Access to the records is provided by a series of name and subject card indexes and other finding aids to German military records relating to World War I (*NM-84*, Entry 319).

Additional intelligence information on the German Army in World War I, including translations of postwar German articles and essays relating to the war, are located among the formerly security-classified correspondence and reports of the Military Intelligence Division (MID), 1917–1941 (*NM-84*, Entry 65). These records are arranged according to a complex filing scheme that includes a master file number, followed by an alphabetical and/or numerical suffix; much of the documentation for the German Army during the war is located under master file numbers 2016 and 2553. Several series of card indexes provide access to the contents of these records, particularly subject entry "Army, German" in the formerly security-classified subject index (*NM-84*, Entry 58).

#### NATIONAL ARCHIVES COLLECTION OF FOREIGN RECORDS SEIZED, RG 242

Scattered among the nearly 70,000 rolls of microfilm of captured German and related records are reproductions of various German military records from the World War I period. Descriptions of most of these records may be found among

the published *Guides to German Records Microfilmed at Alexandria, VA*. (Nos. 1–99; Washington, DC, 1956–present). The most significant collection consists of a 15-volume history of German intelligence operations during World War I, prepared between 1927 and 1942 by *Generalmajor a.D.* Fritz Gempp (the “Gempp Monographs”), described in *Guide No. 80, Records of the German Armed Forces High Command (Part VI)*, pp. 61–67. Examples of descriptions of other materials are located in other *Guides* as follows:

*Guide No. 12, Records of Headquarters of the German Army High Command (Part I)*, provides references to German and Austrian military records from World War I held by the German Army *Heeresarchiv* (pp. 4–17);

*Guide No. 29, Records of Headquarters of the German Army High Command (Part II)*, includes World War I references to records of German railway units (pp. 25–31), military historical studies (p. 36), data on munitions production and gas warfare (pp. 49 and 57), and action reports intended for training use (p. 87);

*Guide No. 30, Records of Headquarters of the German Army High Command (Part III)*, includes references to numerous historical studies and lectures relating to World War I operations prepared for the use of the *Kriegsakademie* (pp. 62–63, 73, 79, 84–86, 88, and 91), as well as registers of officers serving in the Prussian Army and an alphabetical listing of Prussian officers killed in the war (pp. 204–05).

Extensive documentation of the Imperial German Navy during World War I is reproduced on National Archives Microfilm Publication T1022, *Records of the German Navy Received from the Naval History Division, 1850–1945*. Finding aids to these records are provided on T1022 rolls 1–2, with more detailed finding aids in preparation.

#### RECORDS OF THE FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION (FBI), RG 65

Additional original World War I-era German records are located among “Dr. Heinz F. Albert Papers” (A1, Entry 35). A collection of official and personal materials seized at the German consulate in New York in 1917, the series primarily documents the prewar and wartime trade, business, and financial activities of German consular representative Dr. Heinz Albert and those of his predecessor, Erich Hossenfelder. Incorporated among these, however, are a number of naval and military records, including the war diary of the sloop S.M.S. *Geier*, 1 August–15 October 1914 (interned in Hawaii); colonial and military records pertaining to the Japanese siege of the German colony at Tsingtau, China, 1914; the personal journal and accompanying papers of a German officer captured at Tsingtau and repatriated; and some correspondence and papers of the German military attaché in Washington, DC, Col. Franz von Papen, 1914.

Mitch Yockelson assisted in the identification of related records described here.



## **APPENDIX**

### **GLOSSARY OF SELECTED GERMAN TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

*Alarmklingelanlage*: alarm bell system, used in frontline positions

*Allgemeines Kriegsdepartement*: General War Department, a component of the War Ministry (*Kriegsministerium*) that provided general guidance to all the various service branches within the German Army, initially with 8 subordinate sections but later expanded to 14 sections

A.O.K.: Abbreviation for *Armeeoberkommando*, the designation for the headquarters of a numbered German Army or named Army Detachment (*Armee Abteilung*)

*Arendt-Stationen*: term used in 1917–18 for the monitoring and decryption of Allied radio and telegraph communications, and for providing communications security for German radio and telegraph systems

*Armee Abteilung*: Army Detachment, term used for a provisional army command, usually followed by the name of its commander or a letter designation; generally smaller in strength and armament than a numbered Army command

*Armeekorps*: Army Corps composed of regular army divisions (see also *Generalkommando* and *Reservekorps*)

*Aufklärungs-Offiziere*: term applied to officers charged with maintaining troop morale and combating defeatism

*Beauftragter des Generalquartiermeisters West*: Deputy Quartermaster General for the Western Front, post established in January 1917 under Ludendorff with responsibility for the administration and economic exploitation of occupied Belgium and northern France

*Besondere Anordnungen*: special orders or special directives

*Blaukreuz*: “Blue Cross,” codename derived from the symbol used on gas artillery shells to indicate diphenylchloroarsine (used in combination with high explosives), and later for shells carrying diphenylcyonoarsine gas (see also *Gelbkreuz* and *Grünkreuz*)

*Chef des Generalstabes des Feldheeres*: Chief of the General Staff of the Field Army, the designation of the Chief of the General Staff in wartime and the senior authority in the Army

*Erkundungsergebnisse*: literally “reconnaissance results,” usually used as an intelligence summary of enemy dispositions and intentions

*Ersatz Reserve*: “supplementary reserve,” term applied to military service for Prussian males fit for active service but excused for family or economic reasons, or because of minor physical disabilities; during the war this category supplied many replacements to frontline units, and the designation “Ersatz” also denoted a number of field units (up to divisions in strength) formed from this category

*Etappen-Inspektion*: “Area of Communications” (or “Lines of Communication”) Inspectorate, designation for the rear-area command attached to every numbered or named army, responsible for the smooth flow of supplies and men to the front, the evacuation of wounded and furloughed personnel, and civil administration

*Fahndungen*: “in pursuit of,” term used to identify military personnel considered “absent without leave” and subject to military discipline

*Feldartillerie*: “field artillery,” term used to denote artillery organic to infantry and cavalry formations, generally of lighter calibers (see also *Fussartillerie*)

*Feldstärke*: “field strength,” term applied in 1918 as a category for reckoning the combat strength of field units, no longer in use by World War II

*Feuerwalze*: rolling (artillery) barrage

F.K.: *Feldkanone*, field gun (artillery)

*Fussartillerie*: “foot artillery,” artillery intended for attachment to a corps- or army-level headquarters, generally of a heavier caliber and with a greater concentration of howitzers than for field artillery

*Garde*: Guard formations, elite units in the Prussian Army originally charged with the protection of the King, and a designation applied to specific divisions and corps during World War I

*Gelbkreuz*: “Yellow Cross,” codename derived from the symbol used on gas artillery shells to indicate dichlorethylsulphide (“mustard gas”), and later for the use of ethyldichloroarsine (“Yellow Cross I,” later redesignated “Green Cross III”) (see also *Blaukreuz* and *Grünkreuz*)

*Generalintendant des Feldheeres*: the General Staff position for overseeing administrative and supply services in the field army

*Generalkommando*: “General Command,” designation used for the headquarters of a corps, and which over the course of World War I assumed greater significance with the erosion of the traditional corps structure

*Generalquartiermeister*: Quartermaster General (officially “First Quartermaster-General”), the title of the position created for General Erich Ludendorff, who served as Deputy to Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg as Chief of the General Staff after August 1916

*Gouvernement*: term applied to German military government in an occupied area (e.g., the *General-Gouvernement in Belgien*, literally “Government-General in Belgium”)

*Grabenstärke*: “trench strength,” a category for measuring the strength of frontline units in terms of combat soldiers present for duty in companies and platoons (excluding headquarters staff, runners, cooks, etc.)

*Großes Hauptquartier*: “Great Headquarters,” collective term for the Kaiser and his senior commanders and chiefs-of-staff, situated at different locations during the war (e.g., at Bad Kreuznach, September 1917–March 1918, and at Spa, Belgium, March–November 1918)

*Grünkreuz*: “Green Cross,” codename derived from the symbol used on gas artillery shells to indicate diphosgene, and later for other phosgene variants (see also *Blaukreuz* and *Gelbkreuz*)

*Heeresberichte*: Army Communiqués, generally issued on a daily basis

*Heeresgruppe*: a group of army-level commands combined under a single operational headquarters

*Instandsetzungswerkstätte*: designation as of March 1917 for specialized repair workshops for the frontline repair and restoration of weapons and equipment

*Intendant* (or *Militär-Intendant*): Intendant, usually a civilian official appointed to temporary military rank as a staff officer responsible for administrative, supply, and/or financial matters

*Jahrgang*: for periodical issuances, the year of issue, generally used to denote one numbered volume

*Kriegsanleihe*: War loan, a means of raising additional money for the war effort through subscription to specific and successive war loan drives, similar to the U.S. “buy bonds” campaign in World War II

*Kriegsministerium*: Ministry of War, responsible for the general administration of military affairs but not operational command

*Kriegsneurotiker*: term for soldiers suffering from war-related psychoses and trauma

*Landsturm*: “home guard,” a category of military service in Prussia that preceded and followed service in the regular army, the reserves, and the *Landwehr*, applied to men aged 17 to 20 (1st class) and aged 39 to 45 (2nd class); the term was also applied to specific wartime battalions and regiments formed from these groups that performed various duties, some of which saw frontline service

*Landwehr*: a category of military service in Prussia that followed the regular army and the reserves, applied to men aged 27 to 32 (1st class) and aged 32 to 38 (2nd class); the term was also applied to specific wartime formations formed from these groups, initially as brigades but later elevated to divisions

l. F. H.: *leichte Feldhaubitze*, light field howitzer

*Luftstreitkräfte*: air forces

*Meldehund*: term for military dogs employed in carrying messages

*Minenwerfer*: trench mortar or trench artillery of various calibers, operated by combat engineers rather than infantry or artillery

*Nachrichten-General*: “Signals General,” designation for a senior communications officer (numbered 1–3) responsible for wireless communications along a major sector of the Western Front, representing an evolution in the communications command structure after September 1917

*Reichswehr*: designation for the German Army from 1919 to 1935

*Reservekorps*: Army Corps formed of reserve divisions, and therefore lacking in some weapons complements the firepower of regular army divisions (see also *Armeekorps* and *Generalkommando*)

*Seite*: page

s. F. H.: *schwere Feldhaubitze*, heavy field howitzer

*Soldatenheime*: rest and recreation facilities for German soldiers in rear areas

*Sperrfeuer*: (artillery) barrage

*Tagesbefehle*: Daily bulletins, typically issued by corps- and division-level commands, regarding military administrative, logistical, personnel, and organizational matters

*Vaterländische Unterricht*: “patriotic education,” title of a periodical issued by the General Staff to improve soldier morale

*Verordnungsblatt*: official gazette, typically issued by higher-level commands through the army-level, governing various aspects of military administration, personnel, equipment, and logistical matters

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