The Abwehr :

From German espionage agency, to centre of resistance against Hitler

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The Project:

My research for Dr. Vourkoutiotis has mainly involved searching the microfilmed finding-aids for the German Captured Records archive located in Washington, D.C. The task requires me to scan the microfilmed data sheets for information relevant to the project, and then summarize that info for the Professor. The process has greatly familiarized me with the everyday work of a professional historian, and some of the necessary research steps for a historical monograph. The project has also furthered my knowledge of German history, especially regarding the different espionage organizations at work during World War II.

This work is in preparation for Dr. Vourkoutiotis's eventual trip to the archives in Washington D.C. where he will locate the important documents relating to the Abwehr. The research completed by myself in Ottawa will enable him to visit the archives already aware of what relevant documents exist, and where to begin in his search for primary sources. The final outcome of the research product will hopefully be a monograph by Dr. Vourkoutiotis giving the first comprehensive account of the history of the Abwehr.

An example of a microfilmed data sheet index (with information relevant to this project circled) is pictured below. There are thousands of such index pages in the microfilmed records, available in the Morisset Library.

THE AMERICAN HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION
COMMITTEE FOR THE STUDY OF WAR DOCUMENTS 4.
and
THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE
(National Archives Microcopy No. T-175 Roll No. 404)

Collection: World War II Records Division
Record Group No. 1010
Serial: 404, continued
Frames:
Item:

Provenance:

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Notes:

EAP 173-b-16-12/63 (begins frame 2926931). Folder of Stapost. Saarbrücken, containing: copy of order issued by OKW/WFSt/A. Ausl. Abw., outlining procedures for utilization of radio equipment captured from enemy agents to feed false information to enemy intelligence, Apr 1943, with RSHA/IV A 2 letter of transmittal ordering Gestapo agents to cooperate by immediate notification of the Army when such capture had been made, Jun 1943; copy of directive of Chef der Ordnungspolizei on the radio monitoring system of the uniformed police, Aug 1943; copies of communications dealing with the same subject and with information concerning enemy preparations for chemical warfare, Sep-Dec 1943.
EAP 173-b-16-12/64 (begins frame 2926959). Mimeographed manual of unknown provenance, entitled Richtlinien für die Durchführung des Abwehrschutzes im Ruhrbergbau, part A of which deals with organization, part B with security measures, and part C is a guide outline for setting up a security plan, Sep 1939; also included are several supplements dating between Feb 1940 and Jan 1941.
EAP 173-b-16-12/65 (begins frame 2927077). Folder of section of Stapost. Kiel, responsible for security of war production plants, containing: printed manual issued by OKW to Army security officers in armament plants, May 1940; correspondence with other Gestapo offices and with armament firms pertaining to counter-sabotage, control of foreign labor, air-raid defense and clean-up measures, plant relocation, and records of investigations of suspected sabotage or cheating on quality of production, the last group includes technical material and pictures, Oct 1944-Mar 1945.
EAP 173-b-16-12/66 (begins frame 2927191). Folder of uncertain provenance, possibly of a war-plant security office, containing directives issued by OKW/Abw., Gestapa, and RSHA/IV E 2, respectively, dealing with security measures in war production plants, 1935-1944.
EAP 173-b-16-12/67 (begins frame 2927303). Photostat of a file memorandum of unknown provenance, describing a meeting of plant security officers of the Essen area, 20 Mar 1944.
EAP 173-b-16-12/68 (begins frame 2927307). Folder containing W.B.Verw.(U) copy of W.Befh./Niederlande/Chefintendant circular prescribing standard operating procedures for maintenance of military security, 15 Mar 1941.

Wolfe, 1961

GSA WASH DC 59-538 NA-322 JULY 1956

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About the Abwehr:

The name "Abwehr" in German can be translated literally as "defence." However, despite its name, the Abwehr became one of the forefront intelligence gathering establishments in Nazi Germany. The organization was tasked with gathering information on the country's enemies, primarily using field-based agents. The Abwehr fell under the administration of the Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (Supreme Command of the Armed Forces) and interacted heavily with other German espionage agencies such as the Sicherheitsdienst (Security Service of the SS and Nazi Party).

During World War II, under the direction of Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, the Abwehr was implicated in numerous espionage functions outside of Germany. It participated in both intelligence gathering and sabotage against the Allies. Such functions were also undertaken by other German agencies such as the Sicherheitsdienst, leading to open competition between such organizations.

Despite the Abwehr's work in World War II, it is widely purported to have also worked against Hitler while under Canaris. Abwehr agents were accused of having direct contact with the Allies, and attempting to undermine the German war effort and Nazi control of the country. Due to this duplicity, the Abwehr was dismantled in 1944 and its functions were absorbed by the Sicherheitsdienst.

Wilhelm Canaris:

A veteran of World War I, Admiral Wilhelm Canaris of the Kriegsmarine took over command of the Abwehr in 1935 (pictured right). He oversaw a restructuring of the organization in which he ensured key positions were staffed by officials who shared his quiet opposition to Nazi ideology and atrocities. Among such colleagues was Colonel Hans Oster who, along with Canaris, was eventually implicated in a plot against Hitler's life.

Historical evidence widely suggests that Canaris actively worked contrary to Hitler and Nazi war efforts throughout his time as leader of the Abwehr. He is thought to have had direct contact with British officials with whom he shared information. Canaris is also said to have aided some Jewish refugees from Germany in their flight from Nazi persecution.

In 1944, Canaris's actions were finally noticed by Nazi party leadership, and he was relieved of his duties. He was eventually executed for his actions as a presumed traitor in 1945 along with Hans Oster. Canaris always maintained that he had acted against Hitler's atrocities, but for the greater good of the German people.