

## EXCAVATING WARTIME SOUND HERITAGE OF GERMANY, ITALY, AND JAPAN: CAPTURED AXIS SOUND RECORDINGS IN THE WASHINGTON, D.C. AREA AND THEIR DOCUMENTATION

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### Abstract

This article treats the presence of captured sound recordings from the former Axis powers (Germany, Italy and Japan) that were seized by United States military forces as part of a mass collection of enemy archival materials at the end of World War II which are held today at major heritage institutions in the Washington, D.C. area. Focusing on the recorded sound collections at the Library of Congress in Washington, and the National Archives at College Park, Maryland, we first consider the limited clues available as to the provenance of the captured collections, which have become increasingly ‘mixed’ in nature, including other historical radio and sound recordings related to World War II. In addition to offering insights into the contents of the collections, we outline the challenges they have faced since they were first accessioned during the mid-1940s, and later managed, preserved and partly catalogued at each institution. We close with a critical evaluation of the current condition of the collections and the potential for improved documentation, contextualization and accessibility of these materials, many of which seem to be unique recordings not available elsewhere.

**Keywords:** radio archives; sound recordings; provenance; World War II; Nazi Germany; United States

### Introduction

As part of the TRACE Project (Tracking Radio Archival Collections in Europe), we have sought to ‘track the traces’ of European radio archival collections as they have been produced, displaced, relocated, and reused from the 1930s to today.<sup>2</sup> During the course of our research we have worked at a number of archives in Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, the Czech Republic and the United Kingdom, often tracing the movements of sound recordings produced by Nazi Germany and either captured or abandoned in 1945. In April 2023 we extended our investigations to the United States to review the ‘Captured German Recordings’ held at the Library of Congress (LoC), Washington D.C., and the ‘National Archives Collection of Foreign Records Seized’ (Record Group 242) at the National Archives (NARA), College Park, Maryland.<sup>3</sup> Both of these institutions inherited collections of sound recordings that were captured by American military forces as part of the mass collection of enemy archival material between 1944-1946. The treatment of these collections in the post-war period is illustrative of some of the challenges facing AV heritage institutions, and for researchers

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2 To learn more about the TRACE project, see <https://trace.humanities.uva.nl/>.

3 The ‘Captured German Recordings’ are held at the Recorded Sound Research Center (RSRC), Library of Congress, though no online information is available on the RSCS website (<https://www.loc.gov/research-centers/recorded-sound/about-this-research-center/>); online information for the ‘National Archives Collection of Foreign Records Seized’ (Record Group 242) can be viewed at: <https://www.archives.gov/research/holocaust/finding-aid/military-rg-242.html>.

seeking to use them.<sup>4</sup> While most of the seized paper documents were returned to West Germany or destroyed by mutual agreement, and much of the captured film stock has been studied, the various efforts made over the years to better document these sound collections have not been entirely resolved.<sup>5</sup>

### 1. Complicated Provenance and Mixed Collections

As our previous research has shown, Nazi German authorities dedicated substantial resources to sound archiving as well as paper documentation. The largest bodies responsible for sound archiving were centered around broadcasting organizations, notably the Zentral Schallarchiv (Central Sound Archive) of the RRG (Reichs-Rundfunkgesellschaft or German National Radio Board) and an abortive spin-off project of the Reichsschallarchiv (National Sound Archive); yet there were also a number of other departments responsible for recording and archiving non-broadcast activities such as political speeches and party events (Dethlefs and Birdsall, 2021; Birdsall and Harrison, 2022). Bodies such as the Reichsautozug ‘Deutschland’ (RAZ), itself part of the NSDAP propaganda office in Munich (Figure 1) made such recordings for Nazi party leader Adolf Hitler’s personal archive and for the NSDAP Hauptarchiv (Nazi party archives) in Munich, and recordings were also used as a source from which speeches could be transcribed for the archival record or for publication.<sup>6</sup> As such, there were multiple sound collections held at different institutions across Germany, meaning that where provenance information was not recorded – as was largely the case with these collections eventually formed in the US – it is no longer possible to tell with accuracy where the recordings originated.

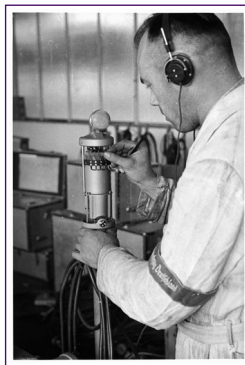


Figure 1. Technician repairing a recording microphone for the Reichsautozug Deutschland (RAZ), Munich, April 1937. Photographer: Heinrich Hoffmann. Photo courtesy of Bayerische Staatsbibliothek München, <https://bildarchiv.bsb-muenchen.de/metaopac/search?id=bildarchiv88073&View=bildarchiv>.

4 For an early overview of some of the material taken and the institutions storing it, see Weinberg, 1952; see also Grimstead, 2022.

5 Files at NARA document the reviewing and indexing of seized files in the 1960s. In consultation with the Bundesarchiv in Koblenz, West Germany, the originals were either returned to Germany or pulped. See, for example, Binder 29 in RG 242 ‘National Archives Collection of Seized Enemy Records, 1941-’, Berlin Document Center (BDC) Administrative Records’ Box 12, NARA, College Park; see also Eckert, 2012. For film history resources, see Serene, 1996.

6 The RAZ was part of the NSDAP propaganda office (Reichspropagandaleitung) in Munich; at the end of World War II, one of its leading officers, Hermann Schäfer, helped to bury over 500 discs and 43 tape recordings in sealed boxes in southern Bavaria which came to the Bundesarchiv in Koblenz in 1961. Most of the files of the NSDAP propaganda office’s Munich branch office are said to have been destroyed prior to the arrival of US troops in Munich in late April 1945. See Epping-Jäger, p. 149; Granier, Henke and Oldenhage, 1977: pp. 355-356, 771-772; Peterson and Smith, pp. 2-3.



Figure 2. Photos of the Nazi party archives (NSDAP Hauptarchiv), located on Barer Strasse 15 in Munich, 1935/1936. Photographer: Heinrich Hoffmann. Photo courtesy of Bayerische Staatsbibliothek München, <https://bildarchiv.bsb-muenchen.de/metaopac/search?id=bildarchiv70985&View=bildarchiv>.

Neither NARA nor the LoC hold provenance information for these collections beyond the US government department from which they were accessioned, and it is possible that the donating departments (e.g., the War Department, in the case of NARA) did not record how the material first came to them. Given the huge amount of archival material that was brought back to the US and the confusion of its collection and packing, it would not be surprising if no records were retained regarding the institution or location from which each collection was taken. Former Hoover Institution curator Agnes Peterson noted that the ‘havoc, disorganization, and collapse of the German civil government scattered collections and destroyed materials’ (Peterson and Smith, 1977: p. 3). However, there are surviving clues which suggest that at least some of these recordings are from the NSDAP Hauptarchiv (Figure 2), which was a key target for document collection following the arrival of US forces in Munich in late April 1945 (Heinz and Peterson, 1964; Auer, 2017).<sup>7</sup> This lack of information on provenance also makes it difficult to distinguish subgroups within collections. In the case of NARA, we know that different groups of records were added at different times (one group in 1947, an additional batch in 1962, see section 3.1 for details) but each is submerged into the whole, with no obvious differentiation. The collection at the LoC has also accumulated additions along the way, although these do tend to remain separated (one advantage of none of these recordings appearing in the online catalogue is that the paper copies of lists remain clearly separate as distinct subgroups). Under the umbrella of ‘Captured German Recordings’ at the LoC are included not only domestic German recordings, but also German monitoring recordings of Allied broadcasts. The collection has become something of a catch-all for wartime broadcasts of any type, some of which are very unlikely to have been captured from Germany, but the lack of provenance information makes this impossible to prove.

7 Some discs in the LoC collection are stamped ‘NSDAP Hauptarchiv’, and NARA holds other documentation from the same archive.

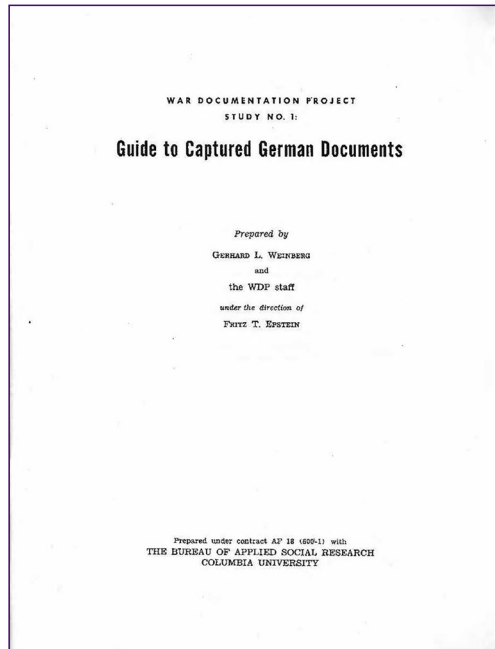


Figure 3. Title page of Gerhard Weinberg's *Guide to Captured German Documents* (1952), created as part of the War Documentation Project (WDP), under contract by the Columbia University Bureau of Applied Social Research. Reproduced with permission from Gerhard Weinberg.

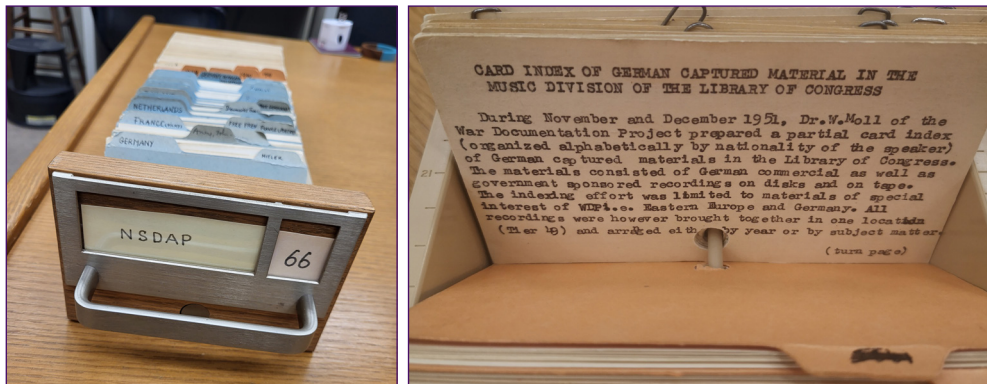


Figure 4. Drawer 66 'NSDAP', Recorded Sound Card Catalog Supplement, LoC Recorded Sound Research Center, created in 1951 by Dr. Wilhelm Moll, War Documentation Project, Columbia University.

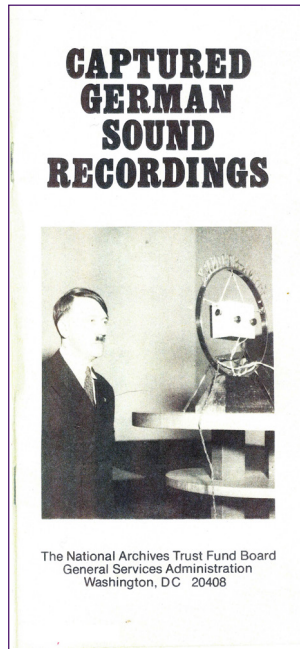


Figure 5. Cover for pamphlet designed to help 'the public and scholarly community' with a photo of Adolf Hitler's first speech as Reich Chancellor on German radio, dated as January 1933. Agnes F. Peterson and Bradley F. Smith, *Captured German Sound Recordings* (Washington: National Archives Trust Fund Board, 1977).

Over the years, various efforts have been made to document sound collections such as these, and make them more accessible to researchers. The first great push was the War Documentation Project, which published its first findings in 1952 to 'answer a long-standing requirement for the systematic research exploitation of the vast masses of captured documents which came into the hands of the United States Government during and after World War II' (Weinberg, 1952: pp. iii, 35-38) (Figure 3). As part of this project, Dr. Wilhelm Moll produced a card index of one portion of the collection at the LoC, which was later written up into a draft finding aid (Figure 4).<sup>8</sup> While there are individual paper lists for some of the associated collections of recordings also available as digital scans, none are featured in the LoC's online catalogue, and a portion of the collection has never been catalogued at all. For the NARA collections, the Hoover Institution reviewed much of it as part of its project on the speeches of Heinrich Himmler, as many are included in the collection. Following this, the same team compiled a pamphlet entitled *Captured German Sound Recordings* (Figure 5), published by NARA, in the hope of guiding other researchers towards this resource (Peterson and Smith, 1977: p. 5; Smith and Peterson, 1974). However, as only three of the approximately one thousand recordings have been digitized, and only these three recordings are visible in the online catalogue, most details of the collection remain inaccessible and access to them is conditional on in-person visits to NARA's College Park facilities.

8 See drawer 66 'NSDAP', Recorded Sound Card Catalog Supplement, LoC Recorded Sound Research Center, created in 1951 by Dr. Wilhelm Moll, War Documentation Project, Columbia University. See also 'World War II Finding Aid [draft]', Captured German Recordings Subject File, LoC Recorded Sound Research Center.

## 2. Content

### 2.1 Content of NARA Holdings

Record Group (RG) 242 contains around one thousand recordings, of which only three are digitized and available online.<sup>9</sup> Other German and Italian recordings in the collection can be identified by consulting lists held in preservation binders at the Moving Image and Sound Preservation Branch, and can then be requested for digitization and listened to. The Italian recordings date from 1925-1941 and include speeches mostly by Benito Mussolini but also Pope Pius XII, Galeazzo Ciano, Rodolfo Graziani, Ermete Zacconi and others (Fascists, military figures, members of the Italian royal family and some cultural figures), and some choral music. The German recordings are largely speeches by leading Nazis (primarily Himmler, with some Hitler, Joseph Goebbels, Albert Speer, etc.), recordings from party events and celebrations, and some music. The collection also includes German monitoring of US and UK broadcasts and English-language code messages. The NARA's collection of World War II War Crimes Records – Records Group 238 (RG 238) additionally contains unidentified RRG radio recordings of speeches and music, and the Nuremberg interrogations of Hermann Göring, Rudolf Hess, and Joachim von Ribbentrop.<sup>10</sup>

### 2.2 Content of LoC Holdings

The card index created in 1951 (see Figure 4 above) describes sound recordings relating to Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, India, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Vatican City, and Yugoslavia. Some of these recordings, for instance in the case of Czechoslovakia and Poland, are of broadcasts from governments of Nazi-occupied countries in exile in London, and may have been sourced from German radio monitoring recordings.

In the case of German captured recordings, most of the materials were grouped together according to a LoC 'library work order' (LWO) number, for which the first group is the 'NSDAP file' with the number LWO 5495 and the second group LWO 5774.<sup>11</sup> Among the recordings from the period 1933-1945, there are speeches by Nazi leaders Artur Axmann, Herbert Backe, Hitler, Göring, Goebbels, Robert Ley, von Ribbentrop, Baldur von Schirach, Speer and Eberhard Taubert; there are also recordings of French, Belgian and speakers of other nationalities, possibly sourced from BBC and London exile radio. A third group (LWO 6944) includes speeches of party leaders, and German radio propaganda reports pertaining to military victories in Norway, Denmark, Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg and France in 1940-1941, including military reports (*Heeresberichten*) and news reports (*Neueste Nachrichten*). Most of these recordings are likely to be original captured radio recordings.

9 For the three recordings, containing addresses by Hitler, Himmler and Mussolini, see the NARA online catalogue listing: <https://catalog.archives.gov/search?availableOnline=true&recordGroupNumber=242&typeOfMaterials=Sound%20Recordings>.

10 See Records Group 238 (National Archives Collection of World War II War Crimes Records), <https://www.archives.gov/research/holocaust/finding-aid/military/rg-238.html>.

11 In the past, the 'library work order' (LWO) referred to a group of recordings that were processed for preservation by means of tape duplication. In the present day, these LWO numbers function as shelf numbers, with all LWOs held at the Library of Congress having the status of preservation copies, and documented in the Library's MAVIS database system.



Other materials are included in later LoC duplication projects, such as ‘German Tape Dupe Project’ (LWO 6548) initiated in 1971, and ‘Deteriorating Discs Duplications Project’ (LWO 4241).<sup>12</sup> The content of the former consists primarily of German-produced English-language international programming intended for Allied soldiers in North Africa (such as a recording of ‘Voice of the Belligerents’, mainly from 1943) in which English-speaking propagandists speak (e.g. William Joyce, known as ‘Lord Haw-Haw’) or the contents of Allied broadcasts from London are quoted by presenters out of context (e.g. statements made by UK politician Megan Lloyd George, NBC correspondents Edward R. Murrow and Morgan Beatty, or Canadian journalist Hamish McGeachy). It also includes a February 1945 speech by Goebbels. It appears likely that this group consists of recordings seized from Germany. The latter, the ‘Deteriorating Discs Duplications Project’ (LWO 4241), appears to hold seven captured recordings from Germany (wartime speeches by Goebbels, Hess, von Ribbentrop and Admiral Lützow) and one recording of a Mussolini speech from 1940. In this case, it is unclear whether these recordings pertain to originals from Germany and Italy, or are derived from recordings made by Allies while monitoring Axis broadcasts.<sup>13</sup>

For Italy, the LoC card index offers a selection of 25 recordings covering the period February 1941 to September 1943, consisting of speeches by Mussolini as well as politicians such as Ciano, Alessandro Pavolini, Camillo Pellizzi, Pietro Badoglio, Graziani and Dino Grandi, as well as roughly 10 radio programs described as ‘News and comments’ (from Rome). Three items are listed as ‘unidentified’ in terms of content and date. There are several instances of German words used in the metadata, which raises questions about the provenance of the materials as potentially sourced from German collections.

For Japan, the index cards describe a selection of 20 recordings dated between January 1942 and March 1945, primarily originating from ‘Tokio’ (the German spelling of Tokyo), most likely off-air radio recordings created in Germany and seized by the Allies along with the Captured German Recordings. These recordings include speeches delivered in Japanese and German by Japanese diplomats and statesmen such as Hiroshi Oshima (Ambassador to Germany), Shigenori Togo (Foreign Minister), Masayuki Tani, Mamoru Shigemitsu, and Hideki Tojo, and a recording from an opening session of the Japanese parliament. Other materials include an encoded message from Tokyo to Rome (including discussion by Japanese and Italian speakers), a German-Japanese exchange program, and a 1945 recording of German propagandist Erwin Wickert on radio from Tokyo.

### 3. Institutional Stewardship: How the Collections were Preserved

#### 3.1 NARA

The first batch of captured sound recordings were transferred to NARA from the War Department in July 1947 (Accession File, undat.). Some 525 discs of ‘Sound recordings of speeches of Axis leaders and other propaganda material, captured by American Forces in the European Theater of Operations’ were allocated to RG 242 and confirmed to be the first of several batches. Several years after the Nuremberg Trials ended in 1949, two recordings were added to RG 238 and 319 recordings were transferred to RG

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12 For more information about the LoC ‘German Tape dupe project’ (11 August 1971) and how discs and tapes were reformatted to standard 10-inch open-reel preservation tapes (between 1971-1978), see Behl, 2017: p. 3.

13 For German radio recordings dated between 1929 and 1939 it would be possible to cross-check these with archival catalogues created by the German radio board RRG in Berlin: RRG (1936); RRG (1939).

242. A total of 844 items (743 discs and 101 tapes) in RG 242 was reviewed by NARA in 1962, as part of a process of reformatting and systematically organizing the recordings. However, many of the discs were badly scratched or in incomplete sets, and little substantial progress was made at the time (Accession File, undat.; Peterson and Smith 1977: pp. 10-11). In 1971, Peterson and Smith returned to the collection as part of a project to assemble and document the speeches of Himmler and in the process, produced documentation that reorganized the catalogued recordings in RG 242 into three categories (Speeches; Ceremonies; Monitored Broadcasts and Miscellaneous), with a view to making them more accessible to researchers (1977: p. 10). They followed this up by publishing a short pamphlet on the collection summarizing its content and history (Figure 5).

In addition to the German recordings, RG 242 also contained a number of Italian items which posed additional difficulties in terms of their format. While tape recordings could be relatively easily reformatted, the Italian collection was largely held on metal stampers (some positive, some negative) which were not so easily transferred to a new medium (Accession File, undat.). In 1980, NARA approached an external contractor who proposed a detailed preservation plan to clean the oxidizing metal discs, select the best preserved, and compile the best possible version of the full original recordings onto tape. By using bi-pointed radial styli, the negatives could be played without the need to either make a pressing or electroplate a new positive, thereby minimizing risk of damage to the negative master. This proposal was expensive but some within NARA's Recording Services advocated for it, arguing that they had not yet found evidence that these recordings had been preserved elsewhere and 'If there was a doubt, there is none now – this collection is of tremendous historical value' (Accession File, undat.). Although internal documents show that the proposed project was approved in mid-January 1981, this decision was reversed just over a week later when the LoC offered to share equipment and it was determined that much of the work could then be done in-house. However, optimistic predictions that the project could be largely completed within one year were shown to be ill-founded: a September 1983 proposal explained that little progress had been made due to staff shortages and, given that the metal parts were deteriorating further through oxidation, they should be offered back to Italy in exchange for either disc pressings or tape recordings. Despite these plans, NARA today still holds the metal masters for the Italian recordings, a combination of negatives, positives and galvanos (metal stampers), along with a full set of preservation copies on tape (more than one thousand items), and reference copies that are available for listening (Accession File undat.).

### 3.2 Library of Congress

The materials that are today referred to as the 'Captured German Recordings' collection at the LoC are quite diverse in nature. The name of the collection is somewhat of a misnomer as it has become a catch-all for a wide variety of wartime-era recordings in the LoC Recorded Sound Research Center. Some of the materials are pressings from matrix discs captured in Germany, most likely from the NSDAP Hauptarchiv in Munich, rather than the German radio board (RRG); a further large portion of the sound materials appear to be radio monitoring recordings from different countries, as well as Voice of America broadcasts made during wartime and a handful of CBS recordings of Nazi speeches.

Between mid-1945 and 1946, staff members of the LoC had been actively involved in the 'Mission to Europe', coordinated with the US War and State departments, to acquire print publications, many of which became part of the 'German captured documents



collection'.<sup>14</sup> The 1946 Librarian of Congress annual report noted that the European Mission had been attached to the Documents Control Center in Frankfurt, with staff detachments in Berlin, Munich, Stuttgart and Vienna, leading to 17,000 print publications from the German Army and one million publications from Nazi Party sources arriving in Washington DC in its first year up until mid-1946 (Annual Report, 1947: pp. 264-265; Downs, 1949). Particularly in Bavaria, located in the American Zone, those working for the team started to acquire materials far beyond the original brief of the LoC Mission, spanning pamphlets, posters, periodicals, newspapers and newspaper clippings, as well as sound recordings of Nazi speeches (Peiss, 2019: p. 116).<sup>15</sup>

Such sources indicate the involvement of the LoC Mission in the large-scale acquisition, sorting and shipping of seized materials from military, party and other sources. LoC Music Division employee Richard S. Hill, in Germany during 1946 for the European Mission, was given the task to secure 'music books, scores, and recordings of the war-time period', and has been described as being particularly dedicated to this task, later estimating that between 50 and 75 percent of Germany and Austria's wartime-era music publications were acquired during the LoC Mission (Peiss, 2019: 121; Hill, 1946; Epstein, 1981). Even though little detail is offered on the seized sound recordings that were directed to the LoC's Music Division, the Annual Report for 1945/46 indicates that an in-house Recording Laboratory had been set up with both fixed and portable recording equipment to allow for concerts, public events, folklore and also 'important radio broadcasts' to be captured (Annual Report, 1947: p. 213).

Despite this growing sensitivity to the importance of sound recordings and radio materials in the LoC Music Division, later correspondence by Richard S. Hill from the 1950s notes that their 'phonorecords' had 'not yet been brought under control' and remained uncatalogued (Hill, 1956). In late 1951, the captured German recordings in the Music Division were inventoried in a card index prepared by Dr. Moll from Columbia University's War Documentation Project (WDP). In an explanatory note on the first card index of the sound recordings, Moll describes the content of the recordings as 'German commercial as well as government sponsored recordings on disks and on tape', and for which the disc recordings were placed at the LoC in numbered cardboard boxes, yet 'only a small part of the tape recordings were identified'.<sup>16</sup> In terms of content, Moll notes that he organized the materials in the index card box according to the speaker's nationality, and that 'the indexing effort was limited to materials of special interest to WDP, i.e. Eastern Europe and Germany'.<sup>17</sup>

This 'partial' card index is therefore reflective of the particular needs and interests of the researchers working on the War Documentation project, and in 1952, fellow Columbia University employee Gerhard Weinberg published the *Guide to Captured German Documents* (Figure 3), which provided an overview for future researchers of the

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14 For the LoC finding aid for the German Captured Documents Collection, see <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/eadmss.ms011148>.

15 For the role of the US Office of Military Government for Germany and Bavaria, and use of the former Nazi Party headquarters in Munich for military collecting of confiscated items, see Lauterbach, 2019.

16 See index card (dated 28 March 1952), in drawer 66 'NSDAP', Recorded Sound Card Catalog Supplement, LoC Recorded Sound Research Center.

17 Moll, and other members of the Bureau of Applied Social Research (BASR) at Columbia University, continued to study captured German and Soviet records during the early 1950s, as part of the World War II Records Center based in Alexandria, Virginia. See the BAR Ms Coll/Bureau ASR finding aid, [https://findingaids.library.columbia.edu/ead/nnc-rb/ldpd\\_4078124](https://findingaids.library.columbia.edu/ead/nnc-rb/ldpd_4078124); see also Wolfe (n.d.).

‘vast masses of captured documents’ and noted the ‘large number of captured German recordings and monitored broadcasts, both on disk and tape’ (Weinberg, 1952: pp. iii, 35-39). Nonetheless, Hill’s 1956 correspondence indicates that

[U]nique archive material such as the captured German documents remains completely uncataloged, stored for the most part in the boxes in which they were received from the Department of Defense.... [M]any of the boxes of tapes bear no description of their contents and the records no labels. The compilers of that list [from 1952] took play-back equipment into the stacks and spent several weeks identifying much of these materials for their catalog, and we do not have sufficient staff to detail anyone to repeat this procedure (Hill, 1956).<sup>18</sup>

In later correspondence, Hill offers a further assessment that some of the collection ‘may be unique, and most of it extremely rare’ and he notes that the scarcity of the material is also suggested by ‘the attempts made by various German organizations to obtain the return of these recordings to Germany’ (Hill 1956). While it is unclear if any copies were sent to Germany in the ensuing period, staff from the Bundesarchiv, Koblenz (West Germany) visited Washington in the 1980s to microfilm remaining captured German documents, after which time they also made arrangements for the repatriation of films as well as sound recordings and their associated production components (Engineer’s notes, as cited in Behl, 2017: p. 3).

Overall, it seems it was only with an institutional change – the creation of the Recorded Sound Division in the early 1970s – that the materials moved out of the Music Division and an effort was made to preserve the sound recordings. Between 1971 and 1978 the discs and tapes were copied onto standard 10-inch open-reel preservation tapes by the LoC’s Magnetic Recording Lab in a series of ‘work orders’ (LWO) (Behl, 2017: p. 3). In addition, in 1973 the acting head of the Recorded Sound division Robert Carneal arranged for studio technician Edward R. Tittel to investigate the metal stampers (disc negatives) to ascertain their contents and to assess the possibility of creating vinyl disc pressings. Tittel reported back in November 1973 that they included four speeches by Hitler, one by Goebbels and one by Himmler (Tittel, 1973). LoC records indicate that these discs were pressed in 1974-1975, along with another two sets of 39 single-sided, vinyl 78 rpm discs, which include the matrix number from the metal stamper. As a 2017 memo by former LoC reference librarian Harrison B. Behl (2017: p. 3) indicates,

There is no evidence that anyone at the Library [of Congress] has listened to these discs and verified that they all represent unique material. It seems likely that each disc has a unique matrix number, but it is possible that the range of matrix numbers might also include other recordings... Listening to the recordings themselves will be the only way to conclusively identify the contents.

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18 This correspondence was with a member of the public enquiring about acquiring copies of these recordings for his ‘own personal use’, which he had discovered via a LP release ‘Hitler’s Inferno, in Words, in Music – 1932-1945’ (1953) from the Audio Rarities label, and an NBC Project XX television documentary *The Twisted Cross* (1956), which can be seen today via the Internet Archive: <https://archive.org/details/thetwistedcross>.

Thus, while Tittel was able to cross-reference the matrix numbers on the stampers using lists with matrix numbers sourced from the Bundesarchiv in Koblenz, it is unclear whether he was able to accurately verify the contents of the recordings, leaving some remaining uncertainty about the exact nature of the recordings held today in the LoC on 78 rpm discs and open-reel preservation tapes.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, the language requirements needed for listening to the materials, not only in German, Italian or Japanese, but also at least another 15 (mainly European) languages, presents a major challenge.

#### 4. Current Situation

As we have sought to show, the captured sound collections from the former Axis powers of Germany, Italy and Japan that are held in Washington, D.C. today are of a diverse and complicated provenance. At the time of their confiscation by Allied forces and transfer to collection centers they were held on various carriers, in multiple languages, comprising various types of content, acquired from an unknown number of institutional sources and deposited to the LoC and NARA at different moments over time. While past catalogues and matrix numbers sometimes helped US-based archivists in identifying recordings, it appears that both identification and the risk of mistaken identity have remained a persistent challenge.

Since the bulk of the recorded sound materials have remained uncatalogued from the 1940s to the present, both access and contextualization remain difficult for those interested in studying the contents of these collections. At NARA, three items from RG 242 are digitized and visible in the online catalogue; tape recordings can be listened to on site at College Park, Maryland, upon consultation of tape lists in the audio preservation binders, and they can also be accessed via digitization reproduction request services. Similarly, the LoC has its tape materials stored at an offsite facility but can arrange for 10 recordings per week to be digitized for users who visit their Recorded Sound Research Center in person. Overall, there has been a particular interest in the past for the German-language recordings, in particular Nazi leaders' speeches, as indicated by the researcher guides produced by Gerhard Weinberg in the early 1950s, the partial LoC card index by Wilhelm Moll, and the various researcher guides created by Agnes Peterson and her colleagues during the 1970s. This particular interest in Nazi leaders' speeches is reflected in the handful of recordings currently visible in online catalogues, such as the three speeches by Mussolini, Hitler and Himmler at NARA mentioned above, or the well-known 'Posen' speeches by Himmler held at the LoC.<sup>20</sup> However, for many of the other materials listed in the partial index card box at the LoC, it is potentially more difficult to discover their existence, particularly in the case of the non-German sound materials noted on Moll's NSDAP index box that pertain, for instance, to radio broadcasts likely created in Germany for Czechoslovak, Danish, Finnish, or Indian radio listeners.

In terms of future steps to better unlock these collections and improve access, we foresee that collaborations with international partners, such as the Bundesarchiv and German Radio Archive (Deutsches Rundfunkarchiv), will be instrumental. As noted with the above-mentioned examples of Italian and Japanese radio programs recorded and archived in Nazi Germany and included in the LoC NSDAP index card box, there is strong reason to believe that these materials are unique and have not been preserved by radio archives in either Italy or Japan. Beyond collaboration between international partners,

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<sup>19</sup> For details in the LoC online catalogue, see <https://lccn.loc.gov/2004653912>.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

in tandem with the digitization of the tapes and discs, we agree with LoC reference librarian Harrison Behl's assessment that it is essential to listen to all the captured recordings in order to check the full content and work towards their identification, description and inclusion in online catalogues.

## 5. Conclusion

This article has sought to outline the nature of the captured sound recordings related to the former Axis powers of Germany, Italy and Japan, which were largely seized in 1944-1946 and held today at the United States Library of Congress and the National Archives in the Washington, D.C. area. Drawing on our recent research on the history of radio and sound archives in Europe, in particular the legacy of archives created by the National Socialist regime in Germany, and the impact of German military occupations across Europe during World War II, we have sought here to understand the nature of the recorded sound collections that came to the LoC and NARA as a result of confiscations by US military forces, along with other vast caches of books, print, photographic and film materials. In researching these collections, we have come up against some of the same challenges of incomplete cataloguing, gaps in institutional memory, and ageing recording formats that we have encountered at European radio archives (Birdsall and Harrison, 2022; Harrison, 2024).

As we have shown, accurate provenance information is not available at either NARA or the LoC, although we have reason to believe that some materials were associated with the Nazi party's Munich-based archives, for instance the Reichsautozug 'Deutschland' (RAZ) recordings made for the NSDAP Hauptarchiv and also held at the Munich branch office of the National Propaganda Division (Reichspropagandaleitung). We have demonstrated the difficulties that poor provenance information and institutional documentation have created, as well as the mixed nature of the collections, while also pointing out what is currently known about the various efforts to document these sound collections thus far. We have offered further details on the content of the recordings, with particular attention to materials pertaining to Germany, Italy and Japan; but also pointed to the other types of multilingual and transnational recordings, for instance, those produced as exchange programs between the three Axis countries. We then focused on the stewardship of the collections at NARA and the LoC, with a particular interest in how the collections were managed, preserved, and made accessible from the 1940s to the present. Nonetheless, we also note substantial ongoing barriers to identifying those parts of the collections that have not been catalogued as well as a broader knowledge of the collections to those who would be potentially interested in them. In having outlined potential pathways for improving the accessibility and contextualization of these audio collections (e.g. digitization of recordings, full documentation in digital catalogues, metadata enrichment for multilingual content), we also hope that the present article will increase interest among researchers, archivists and heritage institutions.

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