THE ARCHIVES
OF THE
UNITED
NATIONS
WAR CRIMES
COMMISSION

A guide for researchers
OVERVIEW

- brief intro to the UNWCC
- contents of the archive
- what each type of document looks like
- best practice in searching
THE UNWCC

an overview
UNWCC BY THE NUMBERS

- operational 1943-1948, with 17 Allied members
- 36,529 accused individuals
- 8,178 cases opened
- over 2,000 trials between Fall of 1945 – March 1948

- Nuremberg and Tokyo Trials (1945-6)
- UNWCC-supported trials (1945-1948, minimum 1993 reported, plus >30 submitted after UNWCC finished counting)
- ICC trials (concluded by death, conviction, acquittal or inadmissibility) (2002 - July 2015)
- Post-Cold War UN-supported trials (1993-July 2015)
UNWCC STRUCTURE

- Main bodies of interest - Committees
- Often abbreviated ‘CI, CII, CIII’ etc
- Committee I (dealing with specific cases) and Committee III (dealing with laws and ideas about how prosecutions should work) particularly interesting to researchers.
THE HOLOCAUST AND THE UNWCC

- rough estimate - approximately 760 of these charge files deal with the persecution of Jews (ranging from individual mistreatment to camps)
- eyewitness (?) reports from camps, before the end of the war
- Charge files only deal directly with war crimes cases (i.e. not German persecution against German Jews).
- discussed in its minutes, some trials/cases
WHAT WE HAVE

- most (but not all?) of the Commission’s files
- some already accessible on legal-tools.org (ICC), or in the National Archives
- OCR’d versions, therefore roughly text-searchable (and more easy to navigate given the scale of the archive) … but this is not a perfect solution.
= 455,079 pages
made the following statement in evidence:

"A prisoner, No. 70, was imprisoned in Section C. He told me: 'One night this year about the 28th December, I was taken to an interrogation at Victoria Terrace about half past twelve. When I arrived, I was brutally pushed into a room where there were six or seven policemen, among whom were two or three with truncheons. They only put one question to me, and I answered, they said I was lying. They produced two truncheons, a big one and a smaller one, and ordered me to sit on a stool. They said: 'You are going to be tortured.' I was told to sit on the stool but kept running up and down the truncheons whilst a third kicked me on the shin and punched me with clenched fists. The three other policemen stood by inviting them. I fell off the stool and they ordered me to get up again. Whilst I was trying to get back on to the stool by using my hands and arms, they hit me with truncheons over the hands. I did not manage to get up to my feet before I fell again and hit the stool with my head so that I regained consciousness. Then, again, I had to climb up on to the stool, they used the truncheons as before. Mollar's blow went side and hit the stool so that it fell to pieces. They produced another stool, but when I could not manage to get on to it, Mollar took the stool and hit me with it right over the heart so that I fainted for a second time. They again threw water over me and when I came to, a man was sitting astride me whilst I lay on my back. He twisted my arms and my hands and finally took hold of my hair and punched me hard on the floor. At this moment No. 70 was brought in and compelled to witness the rest of the torture. The policeman began again to hit me with the truncheons whilst I lay on the floor, and they kicked me on the body. I fainted for the third time, when I came to myself again, I was lying on my back. Mollar now jumped on to my stomach whilst Mollar took off my shoes and hit me on the soles of my feet. Meanwhile Bernard dragged me along the floor by the hair. The latter was left with lumps of hair in his hands. The fourth policeman sat astride me all the while: Tell the truth, you damned pro-English scoundrel. When they had finished with this, they cut two into a stove to make them reach boiling points under my nails. I pretended to faint, but I knew not the last trial with the red-hot wire. I was then thrown into a small room where I had to sit on the floor whilst the policeman held a council of war. To see if I were still conscious, they came into the room and gave me a kick on the back so that I rolled over twice. After a while, they came into the room again and kicked me in the leg and dragged me through all the rooms and down the stairs from the third floor so that my head bumped on the steps. I was then thrown into a car and telephoned to a doctor who came up to 24. The whole time I was being tortured, I never said a word.'

Then No. 70 returned to the prison from the interrogation, witnessed No. 30, a corporal with three question marks shaved by the guard. No. 70 and I lived in the same cell and so I went out with him. I saw No. 9 and the German guard carry No. 70 up the stairs to section C. This was about three o'clock. In the cell about six o'clock, I went out to take a look about the cell, I saw No. 30 in white, yellow and red all over his body. His face was not recognizable. It was swollen and bare wounds and marks. He had nothing and vomiting, and had signs of fever. No. 70 got no

List suggested by Prof. Loeper, in the Course of the proceedings of Sir Arnold Balfour's Commission.

1. Crimes against person and property committed without any pretext of legal authority or order, i.e. crimes of private lust including murder, manslaughter, infliction of grievous bodily harm, torture, false imprisonment, blackmail, rape, theft and pillage on a large scale.

2. Murder, infliction of grievous bodily harm, and torture committed under cover of legal authority or in obedience to superior orders.

3. Participation in and execution of judicial sentences clearly contrary to international law and resulting in death, bodily disablement or prolonged deprivation of liberty.

4. Ordering of or permitting or participation in massacres of civilians population or prisoners of war.

5. Ordering of or permitting or participation in mass executions of hostages.

6. Ordering of or permitting or participation in mass executions. Or other crimes intentionally committed as soon as possible in his view the accused's responsibility for the extermination of Jews; read over bringing a charge against him his Government from which it resulted in extermination.

List the accused on sufficient evidence as to liability for that policy in due course.
WHAT’S IN THE ARCHIVES?

- Reels 1 - 32 - **charge files** (inc. withdrawn charge files, lists of war crimes suspects)

- Reels 33 - 36, 41 - 43 - **UNWCC Committee documents** (inc. deliberation on war crimes charges, indices, meeting minutes, correspondence)

- Reels 37 - 40 - **UNWCC publications** (inc. misc documents by national offices, lists of war criminals)

- Reels 42 - 48 - **CROWCASS documents** (tracing of war criminals)
- Reels 48 - 50 - **South East Asia material**

- Reels 50 - 115 - **national trial reports** (incomplete and stylistically varied reports from national authorities)

- Reels 116 - 170 - **Yamashita Trial and reports from the IMTFE**

- Reel 171 - **miscellaneous finding aids, photographs from war crimes exhibitions**

- NDX 1 - 9 - **index of all perpetrators**
ANATOMY OF COMMON DOCUMENT TYPES
CHARGE FILES

- submitted by member states to UNWCC (wildly varying levels of completeness …)
- details of the accused, location/details of the crime, evidence available (sometimes inline in the Charge File), preliminary legal argument
- usually include the UNWCC’s status determination
- ordered chronologically (some missing)
Title/status sheet

- not always present for each charge file!
- gives name(s) of accused
- gives the ruling by Committee I (Facts and Evidence), and date the ruling was made (see: (Reel 33, 34) Committee I (Facts and Evidence) Minutes for details and reasoning)

  - **A**: prima facie case against the accused - full endorsement to prosecute.
  - **B** (later, **C**): insufficient evidence to identify them at present; often further evidence used to reinforce the charge.
  - **W**: would be listed as witness to the crime, but no specific crime against them
  - **S**: would be listed as ‘suspect’ - identified by the evidence, but less of a case against them
UNWCC reference number.

Takes the format:

[unique charge number allotted to charge by UNWCC] / [initial of country bringing charge] / [initial of nationality of accused] / [unique charge number allotted to charge by individual country, chronologically]

So this - '29/P/G/9' - is the 29th case received by the UNWCC, submitted by Poland against German Nationals, and the 9th such case by Poland.
Date of receipt in Secretariat

When the UNWCC Secretariat in London received the charge file from the National Office of a member state.

Not to be confused with when the Charge File was sent, or when the UNWCC made a ruling on it.
Details of accused

- name, rank, location, date

- sometimes (especially in concentration camp cases) this is a lengthy list on a subsequent sheet
**Type of crime**

- sometimes gives national law broken by accused
- usually refers to UNWCC ‘Versailles List’ of war crimes

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**UNITED NATIONS WAR CRIMES COMMISSION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of accused</th>
<th>Rank and unit, or other official position of accused</th>
<th>Date and place of commission of alleged crime</th>
<th>Number and description of crime in war crime list</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KEPKE, about 31 of age, from Zoppat</td>
<td>Both the offenders were German guards in the camp for forced labour at Unterbuchenau near Danzig</td>
<td>September to October, 1939 - in Unterbuchenau, Danzig.</td>
<td>Murder and maiming / Torture of civilians</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**SHORT STATEMENT OF FACTS.**

The offenders inflicted torture with particular cruelty upon Polish civilians confined in the concentration camp for forced labour, and shot dead two Jews.

*Transmitted by Polish War Crimes Office*

Officer in Charge.
LIST OF WAR CRIMES

drawn up by

The Responsibilities Commission of the Paris Peace Conference in 1919

(i) Murder and massacres — systematic terrorism.
(ii) Putting hostages to death.
(iii) Torture of civilians.
(iv) Deliberate starvation of civilians.
(v) Rape.
(vi) Abduction of girls and women for the purpose of enforced prostitution.
(vii) Deportation of civilians.
(viii) Interfering with civilians under inhuman conditions.
(ix) Forced labour of civilians in connection with the military operations of the enemy.
(x) Usurpation of sovereignty during military occupation.
(xi) Compulsory enlistment of soldiers among the inhabitants of occupied territory.
(xii) Attempts to denationalise the inhabitants of occupied territory.
(xiii) Pillage.
(xiv) Confiscation of property.
(xv) Exaction of illegitimate or of exorbitant contributions and requisitions.
(xvi) Debasement of the currency and issue of spurious currency.
(xvii) Imposition of collective penalties.
(xviii) Wanton devastation and destruction of property.
(xix) Deliberate bombardment of undefended places.
(xx) Wanton destruction of religious, charitable, educational and historic buildings and monuments.
(xxi) Destruction of merchant ships and passenger vessels without warning and without provision for the safety of passengers and crew.
(xxii) Destruction of fishing boats and of relief ships.
(xxiii) Deliberate bombardment of hospitals.
(xxiv) Attack and destruction of hospital ships.
(xxv) Breach of other rules relating to the Red Cross.
(xxvi) Use of deleterious and asphyxiating gases.
(xxvii) Use of explosive or expanding bullets and other inhuman appliances.
(xxviii) Directions to give no quarter.
(xxix) Ill-treatment of wounded and prisoners of war.
(xxx) Employment of prisoners of war on unauthorised works.
(xxxi) Misuse of flags of truce.
(xxxii) Poisoning of wells.
Short Statement of Facts

- offers a brief overview of the details of the case
- sometimes blends into the next page’s summary.

The offenders inflicted tortures with particular cruelty upon Polish civilians confined in the concentration camp for forced labour, and shot dead two Jews.
Particulars of alleged crime

- expanded version of ‘short summary of facts
- often includes details of witnesses, evidence, specific events.

After the Polish port of Gdynia was occupied by the German forces in the middle of September, 1939, the Germans arrested there a great number of Poles and put them into the camp for forced labour.

A part of the interned Poles was confined in the concentration camp of Unterbuchsbau near Danzig where they were forced to work in the fields.

According to the depositions of four of the Poles confined in that camp / we name them for reasons of secrecy Nr. 41, 54, 59 and 62 / it has been ascertained that the German guards of the camp at Unterbuchsbau, especially the senior guard KEPKE and the guard BAUMANN were torturing the prisoners by beating and kicking them without any reason.

Among others the senior guard KEPKE, whilst controlling on September 28, 1939 the effectiveness of the work, kicked the witness Nr 41 in his breast.

One day in October, 1939 the witnesses Nr. 41, 54, 59 and 62 saw how the guards KEPKE and BAUMANN were beating a Polish student of Cracov with the butt-ends of their rifles and kicking him until he became unconscious. The name of this student could not be established.

The same persons witnessed how KEPKE and BAUMANN shot dead two Polish Jews from Gdynia on October 30, 1939. The names of these victims could not be established either.
Evidence and case notes

- includes details on the evidence (sometimes entire witness statements, sometimes references to where it’s stored)
- notes on the legal context of the case
- some countries are better at filling this out than others …
UNWCC DOCUMENTS

- Documents produced by the UNWCC
- Minutes of meetings by each Committee, and the UNWCC as a whole
- Related material - poorly (chronologically) ordered, but often contains valuable research material
  - Indexed by the commission with ‘[Prefix] / [Number]’. So, II/23 is the 23rd document produced by the Enforcement Committee (Committee II).
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Wide range of documents, chronologically ordered. ‘A’ documents are typically associated with actions, and progress updates, while ‘C’ documents are associated with Committees.

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Miscellaneous information and documents produced by each community. Chronologically ordered.
OTHER UNWCC DOCUMENTS

- Documents by the Research Office
  - materials collated by the UNWCC late in, and towards the end of the war
- Publications related to war crimes collated by the UNWCC 1944-1948
- Correspondence with national offices (incomplete?)
- Lists of war crimes
UNWCC registry of what accused war criminals were sought by member states

also includes what accused war criminals were already in custody

alphabetically organised files, slightly blurry scans, but include often-useful biographical data
SOUTH-EAST ASIAN FILES

- files relating to war crimes and atrocities in South, South-East, and East Asia
- custody records, outcomes of war crimes trials, and biographical details (including service histories) of detainees
- very mixed filing system
the UNWCC acted in a supervisory/support role for national trials, that then reported back

owing to the early closure of the UNWCC, not all UNWCC-supported cases are going to be included in this list

levels of detail vary hugely across different country’s reporting styles
Committee III regularly produced summaries of the results of trials reported in to it

Contains details of accused, trial location, verdict, and sentence

Somewhat cumulative/chronologically ordered
Countries sent reports back to the UNWCC, using varying levels of detail:

- Australian - transcripts, detailed
- British - transcripts, detailed
- Canadian - transcripts, detailed
- Chinese - Chinese language, some commentary (most Chungking trials stored separately, missing from us)
- Czechoslovak - Czech language, summary of outcomes
- French - French language, moderate levels of detail in a standard template
- Greek - English translated summaries of Greek-language documents, trial narrative
- Netherlands - English language translations (including suggestions of more), semi-transcripts
- Norwegian - English language, narrative summary of trials
- Polish - Polish language full transcripts (almost certainly not all of them)
- American - transcripts, detailed, includes very extensive details on the trial of Yamashita,
IMTFE TRIALS

- partial transcript of the International Military Tribunal for the Far East

- tried high-level leaders accused of participation in the waging of war and the commission, aiding, and abetting of atrocities

- somewhat disorganised full transcript of court proceedings, evidence, and legal opinions
NDX files - index of all accused

- divided by nationality, then alphabetically ordered
- not searchable, but subdivided up by name
- includes brief case summary, UNWCC Case ID, case rulings, date, and location.
- occasionally includes data on current status/outcome of the case, or identifying information.
RESEARCH TECHNIQUES IN THE UNWCC ARCHIVE

How do we actually navigate the archive?
HOW TO SEARCH THE UNWCC ARCHIVES

- Targeted search - use common sense to find a relevant file name, then look through it

- OCR/text search - search for key words or terms across one or multiple files

- Cross-reference index - use one of the indices to find a topic - NDX files, lists of accused, and Committee I minutes to find accused perpetrators, or the UNWCC’s own index files to find discussions of a particular topic
TARGETED SEARCH

- Find an appropriately titled reel/pdf subsection, and page through it!

- Peculiarities in file organisation - especially in the Commission’s own documents - mean that there’s often interesting material in sections where you wouldn’t expect it.

- Valuable for increasing familiarity with the archive - what is exceptional for it, what is commonplace, how the organisation worked.
OCR / TEXT SEARCH

- All files (except NDX and handwritten files) have been run through Optical Character Recognition software.

- This places a searchable machine-generated text layer behind the images.

- For technical reasons, this is of very variable quality!

- Can search files for keywords, names, terms.
OCR / TEXT SEARCH TIPS AND TRICKS 1/2

- The OCR software is best at picking out distinctive-looking words.
  - Not many words ‘look like’ torture for example, so searches for this tend to be accurate for this, but rape could be read by the machine as rope or rare.
  - Doesn’t pick up words used interchangeably (e.g. in French documents, israelites vs. juifs).
  - Tendency to produce false negatives - mitigated, but not completely solved, in cases where there is a cluster of similar words (e.g. a Holocaust case will probably use the word ‘Jew’ quite a few times) - in this case, scroll back and forth to find references.
often tripped up by proper names (which aren’t always consistently spelled in the archive)

names (and other words!) aren’t always spelled correctly, especially if they’re not ones that English speakers (who don’t speak German) would be familiar with

- try using fragments of names/words - ‘Groen’ for Gröning’ etc. in your search

- if you don’t find what you’re looking for with one method, looking for other ways to the same destination can be helpful.
most programs allow you to search within a single file, but Acrobat allows you to search for all examples of a keyword across multiple files

- create a subfolder, and copy all the files you want to search into it
- go to the ‘search’ (not ‘find’) option in the menu, and select ‘All PDF Documents in <your folder>’
- this can take a while to process, but is useful for pulling results from a large number of files
- clunky interface in earlier versions of Adobe Acrobat
INDICES

- some of the UNWCC archive isn’t just searchable, but also indexed for key topics

- this, combined with a good understanding of how the UNWCC archive is organised, and the use of other search approaches. is a useful tool for finding topics of interest in:
  - meeting minutes
  - UNWCC operational documents
  - specific perpetrators in charge files
INDICES - NDX/CHARGE FILES

- files labelled NDX*** ***-***
- broken up into 1,000 page groups, titled with the surnames of the accused
- not searchable
- not foolproof - most complete for German cases - but very good!
- contains name, crime, location, Committee I ruling and, most importantly, UNWCC file number
- this is useful for searching through charge files, and identifying specific perpetrators in them
INDICES OF OPERATIONAL DOCUMENTS

- (Reel 33) Index to UNWCC minutes and documents Oct 1949
  - UNWCC main meeting minutes, A and C documents, Committee I-III documents and minutes, etc. 108 pages just of detailed indexing

- (Reel 36) Index to the documents of the Research Office 1944–1948
  - What the UNWCC’s informational clearinghouse knew at different points during the war, and what material it was passing to other agencies about camps, war crimes and crimes against humanity

- (Reel 37) War Crimes News Digest Oct 1945 - Mar 1948 + Index
  - UNWCC monitoring of what other war crimes prosecutions were doing, including Nuremberg and national trials
of State, the latter informed the Chairman that "the United States Government regrets that it has not been in a position thus far, to make a final decision with regard to the appointment of a United States officer to fill the mentioned position, and that it does not wish to preclude the Commission, if it so desires, from obtaining the services of an officer of another Government." The Chairman regretted the delay.

MEMORANDUM FROM COMMITTEE II ON INTEGRATION OF AGENCIES CONCERNED WITH WAR CRIMINALS (D.92)

Brigadier POSTER (S.H.A.E.F.) gave particulars regarding the methods adopted by the armies under General Eisenhower's command for the identification of war criminals and for the investigation of war crimes and collection of evidence in regard to them. He requested that the information which he gave should not be allowed to pass outside the circle of members of the Commission as its publication in any form would defeat the object of some of the measures which were in operation.

Brigadier POSTER subsequently replied to questions and, after being thanked by the Chairman, left the room.

draft of PROPOSAL BY DR. EDER CONCERNING INVESTIGATION OF OFFENS COMMITTED IN BUCHENWALD, BELSEN AND DACHAU (C.102)

The Secretary-General read the proposal.

The CHAIRMAN considered that Brigadier Poster's statement did not conflict with any principle or proposal in Dr. Eder's scheme. The scheme might, of course, have to be modified to bring it into harmony with the arrangements which it was possible for S.H.A.E.F. to make, but it seemed probable that countries like Czechoslovakia could secure facilities for making their own investigations in camps where this would be useful.

In any case he felt sure that it would be possible to come to a practical arrangement with S.H.A.E.F.

Dr. EDER said he had nothing to add.
EXPLANATORY NOTE

The archives of the United Nations War Crimes Commission, transferred in May 1949 to the United Nations Archives, include several series of documents of major importance. Most of these, including the minutes and documents of the Commission itself and of its committees, were indexed by the War Crimes Commission. This index, which appeared in six parts, has been consolidated in a single document by the United Nations Archives and published as United Nations Archives Reference Guide No. 11, "Index to Minutes and Documents of the United Nations War Crimes Commission, 1945-1948."

The papers of the Research Office of the War Crimes Commission were not covered by the original index, however. The United Nations Archives has now prepared the attached index to the major publications series of the Research Office, as listed below. The "War Crimes News Digests" was indexed separately (although incompletely) by the War Crimes Commission. The present index covers the following documents:

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NOTE: The Roman figures refer to the serial number of the News Digest; the Arabic figures to the number of the page.

The sign / refers to the heading of a section. - R.O.

ABETZ, Otto,
handed over to the French

III. 2.