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SELECTED NAVAL ATTACHE REPORTS
RELATING TO THE
WORLD CRISIS, 1937-1943

On the three rolls of this microfilm publication are reproduced photostatic copies of selected naval attache reports, 1937-43, from six major European capitals and Tokyo, relating to diplomatic, political, and military conditions. These photostats, copied from naval attache reports in the files of the Office of Naval Intelligence, are part of the Records of the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Record Group 38.

History of the Collection

On July 14, 1943, President Franklin D. Roosevelt requested from Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox "copies of the despatches of our Naval Attaches which estimate or express any opinion regarding the probability or improbability of an outbreak of war, or which refer in any way to the estimates of potential military strength of the countries involved." Roosevelt wanted copies of the reports received from Germany, Japan, Italy, Bulgaria, Austria, France, and Belgium between January 1937 and the time the American attaches left those countries; from England between January 1937 and the outbreak of war in September 1939; and from the Soviet Union between January 1937 and the time of his request. One month after Roosevelt's request, Secretary Knox transmitted to the President negative photostatic copies of the reports relevant to his request, with two exceptions: There had been no naval attaches in Bulgaria and Austria during the period specified by the President and, consequently, no reports existed; and the reports on the Soviet Union submitted to the President covered only late 1941 to the middle of 1943. Navy Department personnel had selected the transmitted reports from among the many attache reports on file at the Office of Naval Intelligence; divided them into two subseries; bound them into numbered volumes arranged by attache post, with one or more volumes for each post; numbered the bound copies of the reports; and prepared two volumes of summaries as finding aids to the reports.

The Navy Department made at least two sets of negative photostats of these reports. The copies sent to the President are now part of the President's Secretary File in the custody of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, N.Y. The reports herein reproduced were the copies retained by the Navy Department in 1943 and subsequently accessioned by the National Archives and Records Service (NARS).

Duties of a Naval Attache

During this period (1937-43), a naval attache accredited to a particular country or countries, served as a member of the U.S. diplomatic mission but was not a diplomatic officer. His paramount duty was collecting naval intelligence, and, in this regard, he received orders from the Office of Naval Intelligence in Washington, not from the chief of the American diplomatic mission of the country to which he was accredited. The chief of the mission supervised him on matters of protocol, general procedures, and responsibility within the American mission. The attache and the chief shared information of interest to their respective superiors in the State Department and Navy Department. A naval attache gathered information on the strength, organization, tactics, personnel, and technology of the naval forces of the countries to which he was assigned and also on broader diplomatic, military, and political matters. He sent this information to the

Office of Naval Intelligence where it was analyzed, compared with information from other sources, and used in determining American plans and policy. Although the attache gathered his information from a variety of sources, his two principal sources were official publications and contacts with officials of the governments to which he was accredited. His other sources included press reports, parliamentary and other open political debates, contacts with other foreign attaches and with foreign businessmen, clandestine sources, and personal observation.

Arrangement

The naval attache reports reproduced in this microfilm publication are arranged in two subseries, "Estimate of Potential Military Strength" and "Probability of an Outbreak of War," thereunder by post of the attache, and thereunder by date. Letter symbols have been employed to identify the post from which the reports originated. The symbols used for the "Estimate of Potential Military Strength" subseries are:

- A. London
- B. Paris
- C. Brussels
- D. Rome
- E. Berlin
- F. Moscow
- G. Tokyo

The symbols used for the "Probability of an Outbreak of War" subseries are:

- H. London
- I. Paris
- J. Brussels
- K. Rome
- L. Berlin
- M. Moscow
- N. Tokyo

Summaries

A volume of summaries, which serves as a finding aid to the reports but which also includes information derived from despatches that were not reproduced for President Roosevelt, precedes the reports of each subseries. The two volumes of summaries consist of resumes and abstracts of, or brief quotations from, the reports and despatches.

Letter and number symbols in the left margins of the volumes of summaries facilitate use of the reports. The symbols for each report consist of a letter followed by two sets of numbers set off by hyphens. The letter indicates the subseries and the attache post from which the report originated; the first number, the volume in which it is bound; and the second number, the number given the report at the time it was selected for reproduction. In addition to these notations, if the resume for a given report is based on a portion of the report and not on the entire report, the page or pages from which this information is derived is noted within parenthesis at the end of the resume. For example, the marginal notation K-2-77 with (3) at the end of the resume means the relevant information came from the third page of the 77th report in the second volume of reports on the "Probability of an Outbreak of War" from the naval attache in Rome.

The abbreviation "DIS," appearing in the left margin, indicates that the abstract or precis is derived from a despatch. Often the abbreviation is followed by (S), (C), or (R), which indicates the original classification of the despatch--secret, confidential, or restricted.

Security Classification

None of the documents reproduced in this microfilm publication is now security classified. When created, however nearly all were marked "secret," "confidential," or "restricted. In 1973 the Declassification Division of NARS, using guidelines provided by the Navy Department, reviewed and declassified all documents in this series. NARS staff members have stamped the documents with this declassification authority: "DECLASSIFIED, E.O. 11652, Sec. 3(E) and 5(D) or (E), NND 730043."

As a further security-precaution, and to protect the anonymity of the attaches, the Navy Department attempted to obliterate names of all the authors of the reports when it reproduced them for the President. In most cases, but not all, this effort was successful.

The Naval Attache Reports

The naval attache reports reproduced in this microfilm publication vary in length, accuracy, source, and type of information. Entire reports were reproduced even if only parts of them were relevant to President Roosevelt's request. Because the titles "Estimate of Potential Military Strength" and "Probability of an Outbreak of War" were broadly construed, some reports were included in both subseries. In many cases, enclosures referred to in the reports were not reproduced for the President and are thus not included in this microfilm publication. The documents herein reproduced do include, however, a few letters that are not standard attache reports.

Subject Content of the Reports

I. Estimate of Potential Military Strength

A. London

Reports relate mainly to the expansion of the Royal Air Force and Royal Navy from 1937 to 1939. Technical data (number, cost, weight, and speed) of ships and planes are included with more general information on rearmament.

B. Paris

These reports are more politically oriented than the London reports. Many deal with French politics and military policy as reflected in the French press and in the Chamber of Deputies debates. Several are on the civil war in Spain and Spanish politics. A few reports describe such military topics as delays in aircraft production, the role of the French Navy in national defense, and the building of warships in Italy. Although the attache reports herein reproduced are dated from January 1937 to August 1941, 13 despatches included in the volume of summaries cover the period from August 1941 to December 1942.

C. Brussels

These reports are mostly concerned with the organization and strategic policy of the Belgian Army. The importance of coastal and frontier defense is reflected in the concern about a possible German invasion in late 1939 or early 1940.

D. Rome

Reports from Rome cover a broad range of subjects: the aircraft and shipbuilding program; military operations in the Ethiopian campaign and during the first years of World War II; and internal conditions, including public feeling toward the war, Fascism, and Germany, after September 1939.

E. Berlin

These reports deal primarily with military subjects: construction, strength, armament, and organization in the German Army, Navy, and Air Force. Quite a few reports are concerned with German submarines. The mobilization in the fall of 1938, during the Czech crisis, is also extensively reported. The reports after September 1939 discuss such subjects as German naval organization, operations, and casualties.

F. Moscow

These reports are dated later (1941-43) than the reports from the other attaches. They contain information on Soviet naval strength and ship types, including copies of silhouette ship recognition charts. One report (F-1-3) describes the trip of an American naval officer in May 1943 from Seattle, Wash., to Moscow, via Alaska and Siberia.

G. Tokyo

These are detailed reports on Japanese naval activities, including strength, ships, personnel, pay, budget, building program, and potential for expansion. Some reports cover overall Japanese naval policy and naval cooperation between Japan and other powers, especially Germany and Italy. Others contain information on economic and financial matters in Japan, such as the Japanese oil situation. Still others describe Japanese activities in China and Manchuria, including a report (G-2-32) on a visit by the Tokyo attache to Shanghai in November 1938. After 1940 the reports are broader in coverage, particularly those relating to U.S.-Japanese diplomatic relations. One interesting report (G-3-73), dated September 27, 1940, is entitled "Japanese Air and Naval Based Within Range of Philippine [American] Operations."

II. Probability of an Outbreak of War

H. London

Included in these reports are detailed descriptions of the preparations at the American Embassy for the safety of the staff during the Czech crisis of August-September 1938. Construction of air-raid shelters, use of gas masks, and evacuation procedures are also described. Other reports discuss Nazi activities in Austria immediately following the 1938 Anschluss and the European political situation during the summer of 1939.

I. Paris

The attache reports from Paris state French opinion on a variety of European diplomatic-political questions. They also transmit information from other European countries under such headings as "The International Situation from the Austrian Point of View" (I-1-6). Much of the reporting after September 1939 is on overall

French military strategy, policy, and operations; some evidence shows that Anglo-French military cooperation during 1939-40 was poor. Although the last attache report in this series (I-1-72) is dated August 6, 1940, five of the despatches in the pertinent volume of summaries discuss events from June 1941 to October 1942.

J. Brussels

These reports convey the determination of Belgium to keep out of the war after September 1939. The reports also transmit information from other attaches on Finnish, French, Italian, and German views of the European situation.

K. Rome

Most of these reports relate to Italian relations with other European countries, both friendly and unfriendly. Several contain information exchanged among foreign military and naval attaches in Rome. After the outbreak of war, quite a few of the reports are on military operations. As do the reports in the D subseries, these reports include details about internal conditions in Italy, especially attitudes of the people.

L. Berlin

Reports before September 1, 1939, include much information on such subjects as Anschluss, Munich, and German-Soviet relations. There is some discussion of internal German politics; the first report (L-1-1) is about the relief of von Blomberg and von Fritsch as a result of the Army vs. Party struggle of February 1938. The reports after September 1939 relate more to military subjects, especially submarine operations. These reports also analyze and attempt to project future German intentions. The report for April 5, 1941 (L-1-28), for instance, describes the German military buildup in the East and gives an impending invasion of Russia as the likely reason for it.

Volumes 1 and 2 are entitled "Berlin War Diary" and cover the personal activities of the attache as well as subjects of political and military significance. Information on weather, morale, holidays, rumors, war news, and visits to other European cities are entered in the diary.

M. Moscow

The three reports in this section are mostly personal observations on how to get along with the Soviets and contain little of real military or political significance. The 29 despatches cited in the volume of summaries do include substantive information, especially on Soviet policy in the Far East during 1942-43.

N. Tokyo

Many of these reports discuss Japanese activities in China and Manchuria, including the Japanese-Soviet war of 1938, and analyze Japan's intentions throughout the Orient. Several reports describe the Panay Incident of December 1937 and the Japanese response to it. Most of the 1940 and 1941 reports are concerned with Japanese reactions to American intentions and policies. Some consideration is given to internal Japanese politics, especially the role of the Army and Navy in making foreign policy.

Related Records

NARS has accessioned from the Navy Department a large series of naval attache reports and indexes, 1900-39. These are part of the much larger body of Office of Naval Intelligence files in Records of the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Record Group 38, from which many of the reports in this microfilm publication were originally selected for President Roosevelt.

Other related records include military attache reports for the same time period, which are indexed by country and filed in the general correspondence of the Military Intelligence Division in Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, Record Group 165. The decimal file of the Department of State in General Records of the Department of State, Record Group 59, contains political and economic information on many subjects discussed in these naval attache reports. Some duplicate copies of these reports can be found in the Military Intelligence Division and State Department records.

Timothy K. Nenninger wrote these introductory remarks.

CONTENTS

<u>Roll</u>	<u>Description; Dates</u>
	Correspondence relating to President Roosevelt's request and Navy Department response, July-Aug. 1943.
1	Estimate of Potential Military Strength Summaries Documents A - Naval Attache, London Volume 1. Reports 1-77; Jan. 12, 1937-Sept. 20, 1938 Volume 2. Reports 78-141; Oct. 1, 1938-Aug. 2, 1939 B - Naval Attache, Paris Volume 1. Reports 1-59; Jan. 27, 1937-June 3, 1941 C - Naval Attache, Brussels Volume 1. Reports 1-10; Jan. 6, 1937-Jan. 16, 1941 D - Naval Attache, Rome Volume 1. Reports 1-47; Jan. 22, 1937-June 14, 1939 Volume 2. Reports 48-87; Aug. 18, 1939-Nov. 15, 1941 E - Naval Attache, Berlin Volume 1. Reports 1-63; Mar. 30, 1937-Oct. 7, 1941
2	F - Naval Attache, Moscow Volume 1. Reports 1-9; Oct. 25, 1941-July 1, 1943 G - Naval Attache, Tokyo Volume 1. Reports 1-27; Jan. 18, 1937-June 9, 1938 Volume 2. Reports 28-55; Aug. 26, 1938-Jan. 16, 1940 Volume 3. Reports 56-98; Feb. 13, 1940-Sept. 5, 1941 Probability of an Outbreak of War Summaries Documents H - Naval Attache, London Volume 1. Reports 1-9; Mar 17, 1938-Aug 30, 1939 I - Naval Attache, Paris

- Volume 1. Reports 1-72; Mar. 9, 1937-Aug. 6, 1940
- J - Naval Attache, Brussels
 - Volume 1. Reports 1-12; Sept. 20, 1939-Apr. 22, 1940
- K - Naval Attache, Rome
 - Volume 1. Reports 1-49; Jan. 5, 1937-Apr. 18, 1940
 - Volume 2. Reports 50-90; Apr. 25, 1940-Sept. 23, 1941
- L - Naval Attache, Berlin
 - Volume 1. Reports 1-33; Feb. 7, 1937-Oct. 24, 1941
 - Volume 1. War Diary; Sept. 1, 1939-May 26, 1940
 - Volume 2. War Diary; May 27, 1940-Mar. 24, 1941
- M - Naval Attache, Moscow
 - Volume 1. Reports 1-3; Oct. 30, 1942-Jan. 30, 1943
- N - Naval Attache, Tokyo
 - Volume 1. Reports 1-57; Feb. 1, 1937-Nov. 7, 1939
 - Volume 2. Reports 58-97; Jan. 16, 1940-Sept. 22, 1941