

Ammon Shepherd  
AHA Conference New York City 2009  
January 3, 2009

## **Nazi Tunnels**

Many history projects start out as a lucky break or a fortuitous find. Such was the case with finding the documents I used for this project. A few semesters ago I was in a course dealing with history and memory; the issues, and means of dealing with personal and public memory in the historical profession. A fellow classmate, Becky Erbleiding, who works at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, sees most collections and documents that come into the museum. She got to know my interests in German history through that course, so when Professor Petrik later mentioned the map class that was happening concurrently to the memory class, Becky was eager to share knowledge about a new collection of documents that had come through her office a couple of years previously.

The collection consists of documents obtained by Samuel Goudsmit, an American immigrant originally from The Hague, Netherlands. "From 1944 to 1946, he was detailed to the War Department as Chief of Scientific Intelligence of the Alsos Mission, which moved with the advancing Allied forces in Europe to investigate the German atomic bomb project."<sup>1</sup> □ Samuel Goudsmit had collected several documents from Nazi Germany regarding the *Jägerstab* (the Airforce), and the Nazi desire to move the construction of airplanes and ammunitions to bomb proof underground facilities. Begun in the summer of 1944, the plans called for nearly three million square meters of underground or partially underground bunkers and tunnel systems. Secrecy of this project was so great, that the two departments who were to utilize these grand underground factories, the Reich Air Ministry and the Ministry for Arms and War Production, often inspected the same locations without knowing it.

Particularly important to me, in this collection, were several documents that contained maps and

---

1 United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, "The Samuel and Irene Goudsmit collection, 1944-1985 (bulk 1944-1945) Finding Aid," July 31, 2006, RG-10.228M, Small collections.

architectural descriptions of several planned tunnels. During two visits to the museum, I was able to scan in all of the maps and drawings, and many of the documents containing correspondence between Nazi officials and those in charge of building and overseeing the tunnel projects. Working with these documents for this project can be summarized into two categories: the technical task of editing the images and using the book creating software; and the theoretical/historical task of making sense of the documents.

Technically, the documents were in great shape. Scanning the documents was relatively easy, if not a bit repetitive (with over 100 pages available to scan). There were only a few that needed some lightening of the background color to bring out the details. Two of the documents were large maps of Germany and surrounding countries with circles and letter-number notations indicating the prospective tunnel sites. For these images, it was necessary to redraw and retype these circles and codes in order for them to show up in the finished product. I used Photoshop for all of the editing. The most difficult aspect of the book creation was getting the images and text into the book software, and having things line up. As my colleagues have and will attest, it was a major frustration. I began by inserting the pictures I wanted to use, and thought would be most appropriate. As I added the story, I found that some images needed to be replaced, which altered the layout, and therefore messed up the text flow. It was quite frustrating, but was overcome by completing the text (something that probably should have been done first) and then inputting the images.

Another issue I ran across was that of copyrights. Since the book has been published, and perhaps for commercial gain, it was imperative that rights be obtained to use the images in the book. Images of the Nazi tunnel documents were held in copyright of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, which held no restrictions for use. I found two images of former tunnels converted into a present day museum. The rights for these images were also easily obtained with proper citing. Initially, I intended to discuss how the Google Earth software made inspecting and locating tunnel sites much easier and helped to visualize the terrain where these tunnels were located. Obtaining the rights

for these images was much more difficult because it required contacting the numerous agencies who actually had taken the satellite images. I determined that it was much easier to rewrite part of the text, rather than hunt down and request permissions that would potentially be denied. It also took several weeks to obtain an initial reply from Google. One lesson to learn is to leave plenty of time for getting copyrights. Using the images in this presentation fall under fair-use laws, so you are the lucky few who will get to see these Google Earth Images. (You can, of course, locate these places with your own copy of Google Earth and view them any time you like. I will try to make them public under the title “Nazi Tunnels”.)

One of the biggest challenges came in creating an historical work from the documents. A cursory search on the Internet found no book results, but a number of websites with information about Nazi tunnel and bunker projects. Several of these sites listed reference works. With that information, I was able to track down two books, both published in German, about the building of these particular Nazi tunnels. Being somewhat conversant in German, I found the two books to be usable and just what I needed. Fortunately one was easily obtained through inter-library loan. The other was purchased through a German antique online bookstore. To date, these are the only two scholarly and book forms of information I have found on these tunnels. Being a novice historian, I relied heavily on the work of other historians. It would have proved a daunting task, neither would it have been feasible, to conduct original archival research for this project, so the two books and the several websites were welcome finds.

That there seems to be little known, or at least written, about these tunnels turned into a fortunate advantage. After discussion with my dissertation advisor, Dr. Marion Deshmukh, and a number of other German historians, it was concluded that discovering the history of these tunnels presented a great topic for a dissertation. This was what any historian could wish for, highly interesting, original documents that have been little studied. It is my intent, now, to discover all there is to know about these tunnels and write my dissertation on the subject.

This class brought to the fore a very important topic in regards to the way historians do history. For me, it opened my mind to the possibility of sources, other than text, that can be used for serious historical research. A number of other historians, and scholars in other fields, agree that there needs to be a paradigm shift in ways that we look at the past and the tools we can use to interpret history. Lloyd Brown, in his work *The Story of Maps*, describes the importance of maps in two separate time periods. Maps provided an incomplete picture of the world during those time periods. Brown paints a very different world than what we now enjoy. Until recently, all of the earth was not available in the form of a map. In 1939, as Europe entered another war, those with any map collection worth any consequence brought out their maps and stitched together a map of the world. Invaluable details and locations were sought to help win the war. The only way to get a description of the world was through these hand drawn maps. Those of the time realized, though, that the complete world had not been mapped. Parts were missing.<sup>2</sup> Even in Mr. Brown's time period (originally 1949, revised in 1977), a complete and total map of the world was unavailable. Satellite images which were available, were top secret and not available to the public. In our time period we can easily, and in 3D, travel to any point on the globe and view it in detail. We take for granted that Google Earth, Microsoft's Virtual Earth, and other programs, and countless satellite and aerial images give us a fairly detailed view of our whole terrestrial home. Such programs have transformed fields like geography, geology and cartography, but how have historians improved their study with such tools?

Geography professor John Pickles, in his work *A History of Spaces*, describes the many different levels with which to use maps. While speaking to geographers, his remarks show how historians can view and interpret maps in unique ways. "At one level, the map and the mapping exercise can be seen as the careful scaling and coding of worldly objects and spaces for particular purposes," states Pickles. "the topographic map enables accurate assay of and navigation through the landscape; the geological map identifies regions of similar surface and subsurface rock, along with

---

2 Lloyd Arnold Brown, *The Story of Maps* (New York: Dover Publications, 1979), 3.

boundary features such as faults and fracture zones; the architectural plan identifies the inner and outer spaces of built objects to guide the builder, lawyer and owner; and the street map identifies property boundaries, public infrastructure and official names for buildings, streets, and public and some private spaces.”<sup>3</sup> □ Maps of this sort tell us information. When this information is viewed in relation with time, it becomes valuable for those who study the past. Indeed, Pickles shows that maps form a way to see what is important and unimportant to the cartographer during that time. “At another level,” continues Pickles, “the map has emerged as a tool (or technology) embedded in lives in the modern world - a way of *cataloguing* the 'important' (and ignoring the 'unimportant') features of the earth's surface and the social world; a way of *accounting* for the resources, objects and public infrastructure of the earth's surface; and a tool for the *representation* and *territorialization* of space. That is, by tracing genealogies of mapping, I ask how the map emerged as a tool of a science wedded to representational thought and observer epistemologies; how the mapping impulse emerged and changed from pre-modern to modern forms; how the map serves as both scientific tool and cultural icon; and how the map has served various roles within the experience of modernity.”<sup>4</sup> □ A “genealogy of maps” tells the history of what was important to the creators. Just as historians must decide what information is most important to include in their writings, a cartographer must decide what icons and information, what lines and spaces, are most important to his or her story. Therefore a “genealogy of maps” can provide important clues into the social and cultural aspects of a time period.

What is historical writing but attempting to recreate past realities with words? Cartography is very similar. Cartographers try to recreate reality through symbols; lines, shapes and images. It is telling on the history profession that we are not included in Pickle's list of fields that are increasingly seeing the importance of maps in their study. Maps provide a "new analytics and a new view of modelling reality." He continues, "it is comparatively easy to visualize maps as representation models

---

3 John Pickles, *A History of Spaces: Cartographic Reason, Mapping, and the Geo-Coded World* (London: Routledge, 2004), 20

4 Ibid.

of the real world, but it is important to realize that they are also conceptual models containing the essence of some generalization about reality. In that role, maps are useful analytical tools which help investigators to see the real world in a new light, or even to allow them an entirely new view of reality."<sup>5</sup> Writing history is precisely what Pickles defines as maps, albeit historians seek to model a past reality. Maps can provide, just as they do for cartographers, an analytical tool for seeing past realities in a new light. One way maps help shed this new light is by allowing historians to discover new relationships.<sup>6</sup>

In the end, maps can provide an alternative way to gather historical data. As we broaden our source of sources, we deepen our understanding of history. It becomes more full, applicable to more areas, and enlightens our minds to more information. □

---

5 Ibid., 27

6 Ibid., 32