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PSYCHOLOGICAL WARFARE AND PROPAGANDA IN WORLD WAR II: AIR DROPPED AND SHELLED LEAFLETS AND PERIODICALS



This publication collection consists of over 1,000 air dropped and shelled leaflets and periodicals created and disseminated during the Second World War. The majority of items in this collection were printed by the Allies then air or container dropped, or fired by artillery shell over German occupied territory. Many leaflets and periodicals have original publication codes and were printed in over 10 languages. Only shelled leaflets, Germans to Allies (115 items), are in English.

Date Range: 1939-1945 (predominantly 1942-1945)

Content: 9,730 images

Source Library: McMaster University Library

Detailed Description:

Following World War I, many Americans believed that the U.S. was pressured into WWI by false, manipulative propaganda laced with lies from both the British and the Germans. However, as J.A.C. Brown, noted psychiatrist and author of *Techniques of Persuasion: From Propaganda to Brainwashing*, articulated, "propaganda is successful only when directed at those who are willing to listen, absorb the information, and if possible act on it, and this happens only when the other side is in a condition of lowered morale and is already losing the campaign". Therefore, the use of airborne leaflets was a way for World War II enemies to psychologically attack one another in a different way than in previous wars. Distribution of Airborne leaflet propaganda was used by both allied and Axis forces in the Second World War.

Airborne leaflets printed during WWII were "factual, in the main truthful, and served to create a reputation for reliability both in supplying information and refuting German accounts which we said to be untruthful". Also, these leaflets were distributed in many ways. "Secret agents actually within the enemy countries were called upon to help by distributing leaflets (often purporting to come from within Germany itself or from a neutral country), by writing slogans or attaching posters or slips of revolutionary nature to buildings, and by spreading those demoralizing rumors, to which people are much more susceptible when frustrated, perplexed, or kept in ignorance of what is actually going on", in addition to being released from planes,

shells, and balloons. However, oftentimes the leaflets did not reach their intended targets because they were dropped over lakes, rural areas, etc. from such a high altitude.

Although leaflets were seen as being an effective tactic in manipulating troops when morale was low, "during the early months of the war, leaflets or pamphlets were scattered over enemy territory by aircraft and balloons but it was more than doubtful whether these had any useful effect, their obvious defects being that few can have reached their targets and, being printed, they were sometimes out of date by the time they were ready to distribute. The front-line distribution of leaflets was quite another matter and these were dropped by aircraft or fired by shells, the messages they bore being less careful about the general principles of consistency and frankness and only truthful about matters on which the enemy had contradictory information". It was found that psychological warfare was not effective when distributing surrender leaflets to an enemy which currently had a high morale amongst its troops. Despite the pitfalls to airborne leaflets ineffectiveness on opposing sides with high morale, enemies used this tactic "to cause the men to begin talking to each other about their poor military position, their desire to stay alive for their families' sakes, and the reasonableness of honorable surrender", which often led men to desert their troops.

A total of approximately 6,000,000,000 leaflets were distributed over the European continent by aircraft or shelling during leaflet operations, which began when the Royal Air Force dropped leaflets over Kiel on September 3-4, 1939, and continued on an increasing scale until the unconditional surrender of Germany in May 1945. During this time, the objectives and methods of this leaflet distribution underwent considerable changes in order to keep pace with the developments of war.

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Air Dropped Leaflets (by country or geographic arrangement):

Belgium

Czechoslovakia

Denmark

Finland/USSR

France

Germany

Greece

Holland

Hungary

Italy

North Africa

Norway

Poland

Romania

Syria-Lebanon-Dakar

USSR-Germany

Vichy Occupation

Yugoslavia

Shelled Leaflets

Allies to Germany

Germany to Allies

Air Dropped Periodicals

Belgium

Channel Islands

Denmark

France

Germany

Greece

Holland

Italy

Norway

USSR - Germany

Shelled Periodicals

Feldpost