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SAFEHAVEN REPORTS ON NAZI LOOTING OF OCCUPIED COUNTRIES AND ASSETS IN NEUTRAL COUNTRIES



It was within the context of evidence collection that the War Crimes Branch received copies of documents known as "SAFEHAVEN Reports." SAFEHAVEN was the code name of a project of the Foreign Economic Administration, in cooperation with the State Department and the military services, to block the flow of German capital across neutral boundaries and to identify and observe all German overseas investments. In order to coordinate research and intelligence-sharing regarding SAFEHAVEN-related topics, the War Crimes Branch received SAFEHAVEN reports from various agencies of the U.S. Government, as well as SAFEHAVEN-related military attaché reports, regarding the clandestine transfer of German assets outside of Germany that could be used to rebuild the German war machine or the Nazi party after the war, as well as art looting and other acts that elicited the interest of Allied intelligence agencies during the war. Another aspect of the SAFEHAVEN project was the restoration of looted art treasures to their rightful owners.

Date Range: 1944-1945

Content: 8,853 images

Source Library: National Archives (U.S.)

Detailed Description:

SAFEHAVEN Reports of the War Crimes Branch,

The War Crimes Branch was established in October 1944 as the national office for managing war crimes investigations and prosecutions. The functions of the Branch headquarters, located in Washington, DC, included formulating plans and policies for the war crimes investigation program of the U.S. and evaluating the conduct of the program throughout the world. The Washington office also served as a statistical center for the war crimes program, a collecting point for evidence available domestically, and a clearinghouse for evidence collected globally.

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The records reproduced in this collection consist primarily of SAFEHAVEN reports and letters, cables, and military attaché reports referring to specific SAFEHAVEN reports or SAFEHAVEN-related topics. Such topics include information on alleged art looting; business matters (including alleged patent transfers) pertaining to leading German industrial firms such as Bosch and I.G. Farben; and various Third Reich personalities.

This collection is arranged chronologically by date of cover letter or report, as appropriate, and, where possible, thereunder by report number. When SAFEHAVEN reports were received as attachments or enclosures to other documents, the date of the covering document was used to arrange the records.

Historical Description

As the tide of battle turned decisively in favor of the Allies on the eastern front with the Soviet victory in the Battle of Stalingrad in early 1943 and on the western front with the D-Day invasion in the summer of 1944, the focus of economic warfare against Germany also shifted. While maintaining the fundamental goal of blockading and defeating the Nazi regime, the Allies increasingly aimed their efforts at preventing the enemy from moving its resources outside Germany and precluding the regime's revival at a later time.

The goals of the U.S.-led SAFEHAVEN program (as it came to be known since its goal was to deny any "safe haven" for Nazi looted assets) were to block Germany from transferring assets to Switzerland and the other neutral nations, to ensure that German wealth would be available for the reconstruction of Europe and for the payment of reparations to the Allies, to enable properties looted by the Nazis in occupied Europe to be returned to their owners, to prevent the escape of key German personnel to neutral havens, and above all, to deny Germany the capacity to start another war. There was general agreement within the U.S. Government and with its Allies regarding these overall objectives. But internal differences among U.S. agencies meant the President never received consistent advice about how strenuously to push these SAFEHAVEN measures and how far to use wartime economic power to force Switzerland and the other neutrals to adhere to the program. Moreover, splits between the Allies exacerbated the problem.

The Allied SAFEHAVEN program was formally launched at the United Nations Monetary and Financial Conference at Bretton Woods in July 1944, the main business of which was the creation of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. The delegates also took up measures to prevent Germany from secreting assets in the neutral nations. The Conference adopted Resolution VI, which called for immediate measures by neutral nations to prevent any disposition, transfer, or concealment of looted gold or other assets from the occupied nations of Europe. Resolution VI quickly became the key element in the Allied SAFEHAVEN program aimed at the neutral nations.

Bureaucratic conflicts plagued the SAFEHAVEN program, the administration of which was shared by the State Department, the Treasury Department, and the Foreign Economic Administration (FEA). Great Britain, which depended upon wartime commerce with the neutrals and was intent on expanding its postwar trade, was reluctant to match the relatively more aggressive American approach. Partly for this reason, the SAFEHAVEN negotiations that the U.S. and Great Britain conducted with the neutral nations in 1944-45 proceeded slowly and deliberately.

The SAFEHAVEN program achieved many of its goals, including some success in preventing the diversion of Nazi assets abroad—and thus in precluding a postwar Nazi resurgence. The Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the U.S. wartime intelligence agency carved out of existing executive agencies by the President, gave the American SAFEHAVEN project a powerful tool for uncovering the secret underside of German economic relations with the neutrals. SAFEHAVEN provided the U.S. and Great Britain with unprecedented understanding of the wartime economies of the neutral states. It also set the scene for the postwar efforts by the Allies to achieve restitution and reparation payments for the compensation and recovery of nations that had been occupied by Germany.

Allied efforts to advance SAFEHAVEN objectives in Switzerland were especially critical, both because of that nation's location in the heart of Europe and its close financial and commercial ties with Germany. At the end of 1944, State Department senior officials, including Secretary of State Stettinius, reviewed U.S. relations with Switzerland. They concluded that Switzerland's traditional neutrality, its protection of American POWs and other interests, and its humanitarian efforts were of such importance that they overshadowed Switzerland's key role in financing what remained of German commerce. Therefore, they decided that the U.S. and its Allies should not take extreme measures to force Switzerland to comply with SAFEHAVEN objectives—or even to end trade in military goods with Germany and halt transshipments from Germany to Italy. The view of the diplomats at the State Department (shared by the British) was not one shared by FEA, Treasury, or the Justice Department, which favored far more aggressive action to gain Swiss cooperation. The Joint Chiefs of Staff also preferred definitive steps to throttle all commerce with Germany as well as to stop rail transshipments across Switzerland. All agencies deferred, however, to the State Department's diplomatic leadership.

The increasing certainty of the victory of Allied armies ultimately persuaded most of the neutrals to reduce or end trade with Germany and meet SAFEHAVEN objectives. According

to then-Under Secretary of State Dean Acheson, Switzerland was the slowest to do so. A potential breakthrough with the Swiss came in February 1945 when President Roosevelt's Administrative Assistant Lauchlin Currie led the American delegation to the Allied-Swiss trade and SAFEHAVEN negotiations. Great Britain and the U.S. welcomed liberated France into these talks, launching the triumvirate that would conduct all postwar negotiations on these issues. Currie and his colleagues seemingly achieved a substantial reduction in Swiss exports to Germany and acknowledgment of SAFEHAVEN objectives for the blocking of German assets in Switzerland. But following subsequent discussions with Reichsbank Vice President Emil Puhl, the Swiss reneged on its commitment to the Allies to stop German gold transfers and freeze German assets.

Congressional hearings designed to probe the conduct of SAFEHAVEN and to prod the Executive Branch into more aggressive action were held by Senator Harley Kilgore of West Virginia in the summer of 1945. Information from intelligence reports and the Kilgore hearings reveal the record of Swiss reluctance to completely break its ties with Germany even with the end of the War. Allied exchanges with the Swiss through the remainder of 1945 demonstrated Switzerland's unwillingness to embrace Allied proposals to turn German assets in Switzerland to the benefit of ravaged Europe and stateless victims of the Holocaust and other Nazi crimes.

Source: Slany, William Z., U.S. and Allied Efforts To Recover and Restore Gold and Other Assets Stolen or Hidden by Germany During World War II: Preliminary Study, U.S. State Department, 1997.

Source Note: RG 153, Records of the Office of the Judge Advocate General (Army), War Crimes Branch, SAFEHAVEN Reports