Captured German Military Maps of WWII: The Results of a Preliminary Survey from the Thomas R. Smith Map Collections, University of Kansas Libraries

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In the wake of Allied advances into Germany in 1945, teams of young geographers working for the OSS Cartographic Division’s Map Information Section went in search of German geographers and maps. They interviewed geographers and mapmakers and found maps by the hundreds of thousands. The maps that were not of immediate strategic value were shipped back to Washington, D.C. (Smith and Black 1946; Wilson 1949, 306).

Many of these captured maps were eventually distributed to American Universities via the Army Map Service depository channels and through the Library of Congress Geography and Map Division’s summer internship programs. Beyond the initial studies related to this topic (Fisher 1946; Smith and Black 1946; Wilson 1949) little subsequent work has been done. Nonetheless, exceptions include Rose and Willig’s (2004) study on the preparations made by German geologists for Operation Sealion. Also, Tatham’s (1978) survey of captured German maps held in the Map Room of King’s College, London.

This poster introduces a survey of these materials that is initially focused on the T. R. Smith Map Collections, University of Kansas Libraries. The primary objectives of the survey are to: 1) explore and document the extent and intensity of mapping; 2) explore the varieties and innovations of mapping conducted by the German military circa 1939-45; 3) explore the provenance of the maps themselves.

Preliminary results confirm what one may expect in regards to extent and intensity of German mapping. Areas of the most intense mapping include: France, the Low Countries, the United Kingdom, Norway, the Balkans, and the Soviet Union. Tatham (1978, 25) identified four forms of thematic or specialized mapping: Missweisungs- und Nadelabweichungs Karte (Magnetic deviation and variation map), Volkstumskarte (Nationalities map), Befestigungskarte (Fortifications map), and Baustoffkarte (Building material map). In addition to these, several others have been located in the T. R. Smith Map Collections, such as Bildplankarte (Photographic map), Fliegerausgabe (Pilot’s edition), Militärgeographische Einzelangaben (Military map), Panzerkarte (Tank map), Stadtplans (City plans), Stereokarte (Stereographic map), nautical charts, and various communications (telegraph/phone) maps.

Occasionally, the provenance of the maps may be traced using the “ownership” stamps on the sheets. Original owners include national agencies France, Greece, and the Soviet Union captured by the German Army, German Agencies, Universities, individuals, and military units. Intermediate owners generally include one or more of the following: the Army Map Service, OSS, the Department of State, or the Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division. The final owner is the University of Kansas Libraries, T. R. Smith Map Collections.

References
