

# What Did Your Library Do During the War?

A Look Back at Depository Libraries and the World War II War Effort, with a Brief Bibliography

Lou Malcomb

**A**fter some thirty years dealing with the Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP) as a reference librarian and later as head of Indiana University's Government Information, Maps, and Microforms Department, I still feel passionate about the role FDLP librarians play in maintaining documents collections and providing easy access to what our governments publish. Throughout my career as a documents librarian, I contended that documents librarians are stuck in the middle: between ensuring access to government information for our researchers and students, and working as an "agent" of the government to protect these collections. I am specifically remembering all the various recalls for specific documents from the Government Printing Office (GPO), a fundamental aspect of FDLP in working with agencies to get depository items. While cleaning up office files in anticipation of retirement a few years ago, I uncovered a few treasures I would like to share with my government documents colleagues.

One interesting file I found grabbed my attention, since it was labeled: "I.U. Library. U.S. Gov't Classified Material at I.U." The first letter has a note attached:

For your information, Fac. Library purposes, let us try not to become obliged to handle security materials in anyway. All handling (if necessary) shall be by H. L.

[Helen Lightfoot].

[Signed] RM<sup>1</sup>

Helen Lightfoot served as head of government documents at Indiana University Bloomington during this time period. The letter then describes the security agreement that the U.S. Air Force had with the university with the attachment: *Indiana University Standard Practice Procedures for Department of*

*Defense Security*, which includes details about handling mail, a chart for recording who handles dispatches, etc.

A second folder was more intriguing: "ASTP-Balkan Area Language Div. Restricted Material." The Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP) was established in December 1942 to contract for training of military personnel at various universities, with emphasis on professional and managerial skills. The file included a letter, dated January 4, 1944, to Dr. Robert Miller (then Director of the Indiana University Libraries, 1942-1972) concerning the university's Army Area Faculty and requested that War Department restricted materials be transferred to the "Documents Room in the Main Library." There was also a list of faculty members authorized to use the materials, broken down by the area of the world on which they were authorized to do research: General, German, Northern Division, and Southern Division.

To my delight, within that second folder were lists of the "restricted" documents. I had to check some of the titles to see if the libraries still owned these items; they do. Among the materials considered "restricted" or "confidential" in 1944 were:

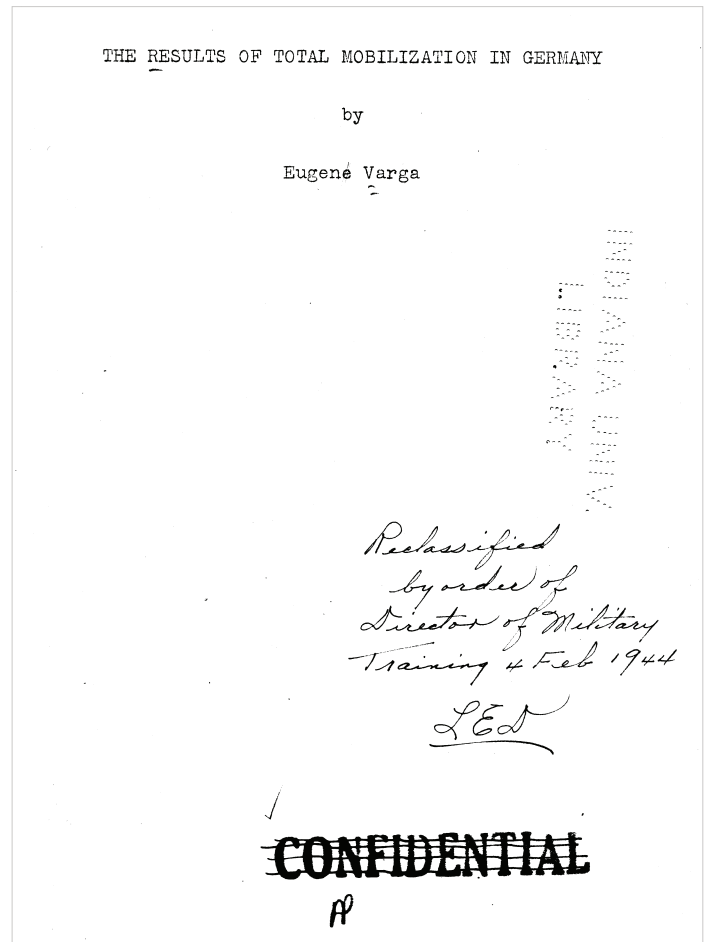
- *Central European Analysis no. 59*
- *Civil Affairs Handbook—Austria N 360-9*
- *FCC Special Report No. 114, February 3, 1944*
- *The German National Registration System*
- *Headline Bks no. 25*
- *Radio Moscow Review*
- *Radio Report on the Far East, no. 41*
- *The Results of Total Mobilization in Germany [illustrated below]*
- *Spotlight on the Balkans*

*The Civil Affairs Handbook on Greece, Section One on Geographical and Social Background* is now shelved in our offsite storage facility. It is still stamped “RESTRICTED” but is easily requested through our delivery service under W109.12:351-1 Prelim. Many of the other titles also showed up in either our print collections or in various digital resources such as FBIS.

These files, both of which will be added to the University Archives, inspired me to check our University Archives for related materials in either the library’s director files or at the university administration level. One box contained the information about ASTP, including a memo dated November 1944 giving a list of textbooks used at Indiana University for ASTP and other schools around the nation involved with the program: University of Akron, University of Dayton, University of Kentucky, Ohio State University, Ohio University, Purdue University, Rose Polytechnic Institute, and West Virginia University. I also checked the National Archives records for information related to ASTP (<http://www.archives.gov/research/guide-fed-records/groups/160.html#160.4.3>). The topic also provided an opportunity to read some related articles and books about libraries in wartime (see bibliography). For instance, I found ALA’s *ALA Bulletin* to contain numerous articles with relevant quotes:

But there is another thing that the universities are now engaged in tremendously and it has to do with the war. They are centers of research for many defense projects. I suppose no one who has not gone into that question has the slightest idea of the magnitude of the program of research which is going on, on the campuses and in the laboratories of a great many universities of the United States, and universities can say nothing about it, either in terms of sums of money or in terms of projects, because this is confidential—completely confidential. But it is fair to say that facility after facility on campus after campus is turned rather completely into research in defense projects. Of course, defense projects are just the projection of projects that have been going on in these laboratories—in physical and chemical and biological and engineering laboratories everywhere.<sup>2</sup>

The rapid survey of a number of colleges and university libraries of different types which the writer made at the request of the Committee on War Activities of the Association of College and Reference Libraries brought to light various forms of war service in the academic libraries of the country. These services fall generally into three classes: the aid to research in governmental fields essential to the war effort and to



The Results of Total Mobilization in Germany

the armed forces; the service to students and faculty; and the adult education of the wider community surrounding the institution.<sup>3</sup>

But perhaps my favorite quote (because it actually mentions depository libraries) is this one:

Section 3 of O.W.I. Regulation Number Three shall not apply to libraries designated by law as depositories of official publications or to bona fide libraries which have been receiving this service. Whenever possible government departments and agencies should send copies of all printed and processed government publications to libraries. The Office of War Information will advise or request all Federal departments and agencies concerning distribution to libraries.<sup>4</sup>

A comprehensive title-by-title review of the “classified documents” used for ASTP to verify that libraries still own these documents or that they have been digitized for the Hathi Trust would take some time. At any rate, I encourage other librarians

to check their archives for similar jewels, part of our profession's illustrious past. I remain amused by the fact that the government and the University trusted the "documents librarian" to provide for the security of these documents, and question whether I could have fulfilled this obligation had some "lowly" undergraduate student asked for one of them. I plan to continue to read about the heroic deeds our predecessors performed in order to provide those "documents to the people," even in difficult times.

**Lou Malcomb** (malcomb@indiana.edu), Librarian  
Emerita Government Information, Maps, and Geology,  
Indiana University Bloomington Libraries.

## References

1. Robert Miller, memorandum, Indiana University Bloomington University Archives.
2. Clarence A. Dykstra, "Universities and the War." *ALA Bulletin* 36, no. 8 (August 1942): 492–99, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25691429>.
3. Evelyn Steel Little, "The Campus in Wartime," *ALA Bulletin* 37, no. 6 (June 1943): 179–82, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25691646>.
4. John Mackenzie Cory, "Libraries and the Office of War Information," *ALA Bulletin* 37, no. 2 (February 1943): 38–41, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25691596>.

## Bibliography

Note: These are some of the sources I found most useful. It is not intended to be comprehensive, but might encourage other librarians to explore the topic.

*Armed Services Editions*. New York: Council on Books in Wartime, 1943–1947. 1322 v., <https://lccn.loc.gov/53016500>.  
Ballou, Robert O. *A History of the Council on Books in Wartime, 1942–1946*. New York: Council on Books in Wartime, 1946.  
"Written by Robert O. Ballou from a working draft prepared

by Irene Rakosky. The members of the Council's History committee were: Marshall A. Best, George A. Hecht, and Lovell Thompson, with Chester Kerr consulting."—Intro.  
Corrigan, Maureen. "Review of *When Books Went to War* by Molly Guptill Manning." *Washington Post*, January 30, 2015. [http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/book-review-when-books-went-to-war-by-molly-guptill-manning/2015/01/30/e2c93afe-a575-11e4-a7c2-03d37af98440\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/book-review-when-books-went-to-war-by-molly-guptill-manning/2015/01/30/e2c93afe-a575-11e4-a7c2-03d37af98440_story.html).  
Cory, John Mackenzie. "Libraries and the Office of War Information." *ALA Bulletin* 37, no. 2 (February 1943): 38–41.  
Dykstra, Clarence A. "Universities and the War." *ALA Bulletin* 36, no. 8 (August 1942): 492–99.  
Herge, Henry C. *Wartime College Training Programs of the Armed Services*. Washington: American Council on Education, 1948. "With chapters on special phases by Sidney L. Pressey [and others] for the Commission on Implications of Armed Services Educational Programs."  
Liebetau, Eric. "Review of *When Books Went to War* by Molly Guptill Manning." *Boston Globe*, December 22, 2014. <https://www.bostonglobe.com/arts/books/2014/12/22/book-review-when-books-went-war-the-stories-that-helped-win-world-war-molly-guptill-manning/YdKQOruD5atjXC4pSRHzyH/story.html>.  
Little, Evelyn Steel. "The Campus in Wartime." *ALA Bulletin* 37, no. 6 (June 1943): 179–82. [www.jstor.org/stable/25691646](http://www.jstor.org/stable/25691646).  
Long, Fern. "Part II. America and the War: This Is Our War." *ALA Bulletin* 36, no. 11 (October 1, 1942): 630–44. Includes mention of several government publications, especially in the area of civil defense.  
Manning, Molly. *When Books Went to War: The Stories That Helped Us Win World War II*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014.  
Wagner, Ralph D. "'No-Can-Tell' Missions Helped Win World War II: Manuel Sanchez: Librarian behind the Lines." *American Libraries* 20 (November 1989): 962–64. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25631727>.  
*A War Atlas for Americans*. New York: Published for Council on Books in Wartime by Simon and Schuster, 1944.