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Postal & Telegraph Censorship Dept.,

23/7 Brooke Street, Holborn,

London, E.C.1, England.

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Censorship: Policy and Practice During the Second World War

Collection Summary

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CENSORSHIP: POLICY AND PRACTICE DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Censorship: Practice and Policy during the Second World War explores British postal and telegraph censorship throughout a pivotal era of modern history. **The collection contains over 17,000 images collated from Ministry of Defence files at The National Archives. It begins by surveying the first tentative steps that were taken, following the outbreak of conflict in 1939, to implement and to co-ordinate censorship.** Documents reveal how hastily-assembled censorship teams looked back to the First World War for lessons whilst adapting to technological developments that had occurred since. The work undertaken by censorship units — keeping a close eye on all communications that could reveal sensitive or dangerous information to the enemy — soon became one of the most important, if somewhat underappreciated, fronts in the so-called “secret war”.

Censorship became a wide-ranging, international endeavour. It involved not just Britain, but also the Dominions, colonies, Allies (including the USA), and neutral states such as the Republic of Ireland. **Censorship teams sprung-up across the globe, typically employing local people, especially women. They worked round the clock, ensuring that all correspondence was assessed, flagged (if necessary), and passed on swiftly. Policies, instructions, and official guidance poured out from London with a view to keeping the censorship system efficient and watertight.** Censors from a wide variety of backgrounds became adept at breaking codes and recognising suspect material, even if it was cleverly concealed.

Towards the end of the war and following the Allied victory, censorship units took on a new responsibility: monitoring communications amongst the populations in occupied territories, including Austria, Germany, and Italy. This was not merely a security measure; it also provided an important barometer of public morale — a way of appraising the attitudes of former enemy civilians. **As this fascinating collection illustrates, censorship was not only a tool that helped win the war; it was also a vital part of securing the peace that followed.**

This collection is a rich resource for students and researchers with interests in military and political history, the history of the British empire, international relations, and security and intelligence.

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