Inventory of the Kenneth Knox Collection D-547

Finding aid prepared by Brittani Orona
University of California, Davis General Library, Dept. of Special Collections
1st Floor, Shields Library, University of California
100 North West Quad
Davis, CA, 95616-5292
(530) 752-1621
speccoll@ucdavis.edu
© 2012
Title: Kenneth Knox Collection
Identifier/Call Number: D-547
Contributing Institution: University of California, Davis General Library, Dept. of Special Collections
Language of Material: English
Physical Description: 5.0 linear feet.
Date (inclusive): 1943-1997
Abstract: The Kenneth Knox Collection documents the trials of fifteen German Prisoners of War (POW) convicted of murdering four fellow prisoners: Johannes Kunze, Werner Drechsler, Hans Geller, and Horst Gunther in 1945. The collection also includes materials from Kenneth Knox's personal life. The collection contains trial transcripts, historic photographs of Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, signed confessions of the fourteen POWs, Army discharge papers and certificates of training for Mr. Knox, personal correspondence between Mr. Knox and various business partners, and newspaper articles relating to his research. Knox was particularly interested in secondary sources related to United States Military Barracks history and procedure as well as Holocaust and Far-Right ideology.
Physical Location: Researchers should contact Special Collections to request collections, as many are stored offsite.
Creator: Knox, Diane
Creator: Knox, Kenneth Ray
Biography
Kenneth Ray Knox was born on December 5th, 1947 in Wyndotte, Michigan. When Mr. Knox was young, his parents separated and he lived in a private orphanage in Texas until he was seventeen. After he left the orphanage, he lived with his mother for a year and then enlisted in the United States Army. He remained with the Army for the duration of his professional career. Mr. Knox worked as an Army Military Police and Correctional Supervisor, United States Army Recruiter, Chief Physical Security Inspector, and a Sandblaster for the Sacramento Army Depot. He retired after 25 years of service. Mr. Knox is married to Dianne Knox whom he met in Sacramento while stationed as an Army Recruiter. They have two children and currently reside in Elk Grove, CA. Mr. Knox is an active member of the Patriot Guard Riders, an organization that attends the funerals of military and law enforcement personnel.
Mr. Knox spent fifteen years collecting research material on the Johannes Kunze, Werner Drechsler, Horst Gunther, and Hans Geller murder trials. Research done by Mr. Knox helped bring the story of the fourteen German soldiers executed for the murders of Kunze, Drechsler, Gunther, and Geller to a wider audience. A book entitled, "Murder & Martial Justice: Spying, “Terrorism,” and Legalism in Wartime America," by Dr. Meredith Adams was published partially based on Mr. Knox's research. His ultimate goal in collecting the material was to publicize the separate trials and executions of the fourteen German World War II prisoners of war (POW). It is Mr. Knox's wish that the bodies of the fourteen men be removed from the Fort Leavenworth Military Prison Cemetery in Kansas, where they are currently buried, and repatriated back to Germany or removed to more honorable grounds.

The four murders, four trials, and fourteen executions featured in this collection took place between 1943-1945. The murders occurred in three different places: Pagago Park Prisoner of War camp in Arizona, Camp Gruber Prisoner of War camp in Tonkawa, Oklahoma, Camp Aiken Prisoner of War camp in South Carolina, and Camp Chaffee Prisoner of War camp in Arkansas. The trials occurred at Camp Gruber, South Carolina and Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. All executions took place at Fort Leavenworth between July and August of 1945. Johannes Kunze was murdered on November 4th, 1943 at the Camp Gruber Prisoner of War Camp in Tonkawa, Oklahoma. Kunze was a member of the African Corps and had been accused by his fellow inmates of sending vital tactical information to the U.S. Military. In a "kangaroo court" held in the Tonkawa POW Camp mess hall numerous German POW's physically attacked Kunze. Kunze died from his injuries. Although numerous men were involved in Kunze's beating only five men were tried and found guilty of his murder: Walter Beyer, Berthold Seidel, Hans Denme, Hans Scholmer, and Willi Scholz. All of the accused had been members of the African Corps. The trial was prosecuted by Leon Jaworski, a lawyer who would later become known for his involvement in the Watergate Trials. The five convicted were hung at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas on July 10, 1945.
Walter Drechsler was murdered on March 12, 1944 at Pagago Park Prisoner of War Camp in Phoenix, Arizona. He was beaten and hung by numerous other German U-Boat POW's who believed he was a spy for the U.S. Military. Seven men were tried for their involvement in Drechsler's murder: Helmut Fischer, Fritz Franke, Bernhard Reyak, Gunther Kuelsen, Otto Stengel, Heinrich Ludwig, and Rolf Wizuy. The seven POW's were executed on August 25th, 1945 at Fort Leavenworth.
Horst Gunther was killed on April 5th, 1944 at Camp Aiken, South Carolina. Gunther was strangled and hung by a tent rope over a stockade in the POW camp. Two men, Rudolf Straub and Erich Gauss, were tried at Fort McPherson, Georgia and hung at Fort Leavenworth on July 14, 1945.
The final trial involves the murder of Hans Geller on March 23rd, 1944 at Camp Chaffee Prisoner of War Camp, Arkansas. Hans Geller was beaten by Edgar Menschner, a fellow POW, on March 22nd, 1944. Geller died the following day. Menschner was tried for the murder and sentenced to death. His sentence was commuted to twenty years of hard labor on July 6th, 1945. He later returned to Germany. It is not known what happened to him after his return.

The trials and executions of the fourteen German POW's is remarkable because it is the only case of a mass execution of foreign POW's on U.S. soil. The fourteen were all executed after the end of the war when anti-German and anti-Nazi sentiment was rampant in the United States.

Sources: Telephone conversation with Mr. Kenneth Knox-August 14th, 2012, Richard Whittingham, “Marital Justice: The Last Mass Execution in the United States,” [Trial Transcripts 3:1, 5:1 and Trial Documents 9:1], Kenneth R. Knox Collection, D-547, Department of Special Collections, General Library, University of California, Davis

**Scope and Content**
The Kenneth Knox Collection spans the years 1943-1997, with the bulk of the collection spanning 1943-1945. The collection is separated into three series: 1. Personal Materials; 2. Trial Research; 3. Photographs. Personal Materials focuses on Kenneth Knox’s personal documents including correspondence from parties interested in his research, contractual documents from a studio movie deal, “Prisoners of Silence;” U.S. Army discharge papers and certificates of training; and employment records from the Sacramento Army Depot. The second series, Trial Research, makes up the bulk of the collection. It includes primary and secondary source research conducted by Mr. Knox. This series is primarily made up of photocopies of materials pertaining to the trial. These documents, including trial transcripts, are photocopied from the originals at the National Archives in Washington D.C. and the Harry S. Truman Presidential Library and Museum in Independence, MO. The documents include seventeen transcripts from the trials of fifteen German World War II POWs, all of whom (except one) were sentenced to death for the murders of Johannes Kunze, Werner Drechsler, Horst Gunther, and Hans Geller. The third series, Photographs, includes personal photographs of Kenneth Knox, historic photographs of Fort Leavenworth, and modern portraits of different, unknown military personnel.

**Arrangement of the Collection**
The collection is arranged into three series: 1. Personal Materials; 2. Trial Research; and 3. Photographs

**Related Collections**
The following collections at Special Collections may also be of interest:

D-379, Jerome J. Blume Collection, 1941-1945. World War II correspondence and memorabilia.

D-067, Aubrey S. Kenworthy Papers, 1946-1948. Mementos of the post-World War II Japanese war criminal trials in Manila and Tokyo; materials pertaining to prisoner-of-war camps in the Philippines; photographs, newspaper and magazine clippings, manuscripts, reports, and other documents.

MC214, Karla Thompson Papers, 1940-1959. World War II era photographs, scrapbook, and letters between Karla Kirchner Thompson, a young German woman and Herbert Fortner, a German airman.


Winder McConnell. Book Collection on the Waffen-SS.

**Access**
Collection is open for research.

**Processing Information**
Published materials, such as general books and government documents, have been separated from the collection. These have been reviewed and, where appropriate, added to the Shields Library general collection. A complete list of publications is kept on file at Special Collections.

Brittani Orona processed this collection under the guidance of Elizabeth Phillips, Manuscript Archivist.

**Acquisition Information**

**Publication Rights**
Copyright is protected by the copyright law, chapter 17, of the U.S. Code. All requests for permission to publish or quote from manuscripts must be submitted in writing to the Head of Special Collections. Permission for publication is given on behalf of the Department of Special Collections, University of California, Library, Davis as the owner of the physical items and is not intended to include or imply permission of the copyright holder, which must also be obtained by the researcher.

**Preferred Citation**

---

Inventory of the Kenneth Knox Collection D-547

Collection D-547
Inventory of the Kenneth Knox Collection D-547, Department of Special Collections, General Library, University of California, Davis.

**Separated Materials**

The collection contains four companion books that were donated by Mr. Knox. These books are currently housed at UC Davis University Archives and Special Collections in the Rare Book Collection.


**Subjects and Indexing Terms**

- Knox, Kenneth Ray -- Archives
- Courts-martial and courts of inquiry--United States
- Fort Leavenworth (Kan.)
- Prisoners of war--Germany--History--20th century
- Prisoners of war--United States--History--20th century
- World War, 1939-1945--United States--Prisons and prisoners

**Personal Materials 1966-1997**

**Scope and Contents note**

The Personal Materials series includes: personal inventory of Mr. Knox’s possessions dated October 18,1987; U.S. Army Discharge papers for Mr. Knox; income, earnings, and statement reports from the U.S. Army; a U.S. Military Pilot Aptitude Test for Mr. Knox; Unemployment records for Mr. Knox from the year 1992 , as well as itineraries from business trips to Reno, Nevada and Los Angeles, California. The series also includes Mr. Knox’s resume with loss prevention and fraud detection as his primary skills; notes about sand blasting and sand blasting standards at the Sacramento Army Depot; and a Civilian Performance Rating dated from 1989-1990 from his work as a Sand Blaster at the Sacramento Army Depot.

**Box-folder 1:1**

- Biographical 1966-1997

**Box-folder 2:1**

- Correspondence 1977-1995

**Box-folder 1:2**


**Box-folder 1:3, 1:4**

- Published Materials 1984-1991

**Box-folder 1:6**

- Envelopes undated

**Trial Research 1943-1993**

**Scope and Contents note**

The Trial Reserach series includes: verbatim trial notes and dialogue; description of criminal charges; signed confessions (in German); and signed death warrants by President Harry S. Truman. The series also includes: Holocaust Denial/ Far Right Rhetoric pamphlets; unpublished manuscripts by Kenneth Knox (“Prisoners of Silence,” “A Need to Know” and “Unhallowed Ground”); scholarly articles by Dr. Meredith Adams including “A Taste of Dachau: Angel Island and Byron Hot Springs during WWII,” “Murder and Martial Justice,” and “Military Experience and Martial Justices: The Drechsler Murder;” as well as a VHS copy of the History Channel’s “History Undercover: The Last Mass Execution.”
### Trial Transcripts 1943-1945

**Scope and Contents note**

The collection contains trial transcripts and documents from three trials. They are as follows:

- United States v. Edgar Menschner, German Prisoner of War, No. 58804, Company Eight, Compound B, Camp Chaffee Prisoner of War Camp
- United States v. Walter Beyer (8WG-49588), Berthold Seidel (8WG-49593), Hans Demme (8WG-49597), Hans Schomer (8WG-49620), and Willi Scholz (8WG-49691), German Prisoners of War, Camp Gruber, Tonkawa, Oklahoma
- United States v. Helmut Fischer (10G-1088-NA), Fritz Franke (10G-1083-NA), Guenther Kuelsen (10G-1073-NA), Heinrich Ludwig (7G-132-NA), Bernhard Reyak (106-1069-NA), Otto Stengel (6-112-NA), and Rolf Wizuy (10G-1072-NA), German Prisoners of War, Pagago Park Camp, Phoenix, Arizona

---

### Trial Documents 1943-1945

**Scope and Contents note**

The collection contains trial transcripts and documents from three trials. They are as follows:

- United States v. Edgar Menschner, German Prisoner of War, No. 58804, Company Eight, Compound B, Camp Chaffee Prisoner of War Camp
- United States v. Walter Beyer (8WG-49588), Berthold Seidel (8WG-49593), Hans Demme (8WG-49597), Hans Schomer (8WG-49620), and Willi Scholz (8WG-49691), German Prisoners of War, Camp Gruber, Tonkawa, Oklahoma
- United States v. Helmut Fischer (10G-1088-NA), Fritz Franke (10G-1083-NA), Guenther Kuelsen (10G-1073-NA), Heinrich Ludwig (7G-132-NA), Bernhard Reyak (106-1069-NA), Otto Stengel (6-112-NA), and Rolf Wizuy (10G-1072-NA), German Prisoners of War, Pagago Park Camp, Phoenix, Arizona

---

### Secondary Research 1973-1993

### Literary Productions 1991-1992

### Miscellaneous 1945-1994

#### Media Files undated

**Scope and Contents note**

Media files include three cassette tapes of unknown content. Two have hand written notations on the sides of them. The first is noted with "Ken and Margaret Gibson." The second is noted with "The Nazarene-Sholem ASC." The third cassette tape has no notation.

Media File also includes two VHS tapes. Of the two, only one has notation upon it. The VHS with notation on it reads: "The History Channel: History Undercover-The Last Mass Execution."

---

### Photographs undated

**Scope and Contents note**

The Photograph Series contains photos from Kenneth Knox's personal life, military and Presidential portraits as well as historic photographs of United States Disciplinary Barracks (USDB) at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. The Photograph Series also includes a photo of Mr. Knox posing at the California State Fair; noncommissioned staff from the 18th U.S. Infantry standing at attention at Fort Leavenworth on June 2nd, 1907; a photo of a military band taken in front of Fort Leavenworth on December 31st, 1913; a signed photography of President Jimmy Carter; and a photograph of damage done to the USDB glass check point at Fort Leavenworth.