About the keyword search

The online search in the collections list of the International Tracing Service offers an overview of the more than 21,000 individual historical collections kept in the ITS archives (as of 2007). Because this inventory is not a typical archival search tool, some information about how it was created and how to use it can be helpful.

Preface

The on-line search is based on a chronological listing of the collections in the lists of the archival holdings. All the collections were recorded chronologically according to the entry into the ITS archives. Some sub-collections have only a few pages, whereas others can contain tens of thousands of pages. Because of the chronological sorting, it can happen that documents that have a similar provenance or are similar in type are found in different sub-collections.

What can I find using the on-line search?

Originally conceived as a data registration tool, the list offers simply a raw sketch of the archival units and not a more in-depth view of the contents of the sub-collections. It is not a complete catalogue, but rather a means to help the researcher gain an initial idea of whether the information looked for might be found there. The index offers primarily a short description of the content of the sub-collection. For this reason many of the collections may also contain documents for which there is no information provided in the short description.

What is not to be found using the online-search?

The on-line search in the collections list doesn't come close to capturing every document, but rather the focus is on the individual collections. Researching the paths of persecution of Nazi victims is also not possible using the on-line search, because, due to legal and technical reasons, the on-line search cannot access the ITS databank with all its digitized documents. For research of this kind in the ITS databank, interested persons need to come to Bad Arolsen or to one of the partner institutions that have a copy of the digital databank.

How exactly does the search work?

Research can be conducted in German or English using place names (e.g. Auschwitz, Vienna), the names of companies and organizations (e.g. Krupp, SS), specific Nazi terminology (e.g. re-settlement, Fountain of Life), general terms (e.g. prison, hospital) as well as key terms that appear in the descriptions.

- • When a number of words are entered in the search, the search engine establishes a link and shows all the collections in which the descriptions contain the terms given (e.g. Dachau prisoner)

- Please do not use connecting words (and/or), as the search engine will also look for these.
- If words are entered with quotation marks (e.g. "Jewish prisoner"), the exact phrase will be searched for.
- A search can be made using the first part of a key phrase or key term. An asterisk (*) must be included at the end of the word or term given. A search for the term "labor*" will also yield results such as laborer, labor camp. The function can also be used for numbers (e.g. 195*).

What will be shown in the search result?

The search engine shows a list of the collections that correspond to the search criteria, in chronological order according to their registration date at the ITS. The list shows the description of the collection in German, followed by an English translation. The online search result consists of up to ten information fields for each individual collection. For those collections recorded after June 2000 that arrived digitally, there are minor differences. The absolutely essential information fields remain the same, however.

The information fields are:

- document category (according to the timeframe in which the collections were registered)*
- Access number (a randomly assigned number for processing purposes, not suitable as search field)
- a short description of the entry
- The origin of the collections (which organization or individual provided the materials or which is the source archive of the document copies stored elsewhere)
- the date of entry (the date on which the collections were registered at ITS)
- The number of pages in the collection (is shown within a certain collection of the file heretodate for files)
- Number of names that appear in the collection
- sorted under (the physical storage area where the collection in the ITS-Archives in Bad Arolsen is filed)
- Type of document (whether the documents in the collection are originals or copies. In the case of some documents which were registered as copies, it involves "transcripts", "photocopies", "re-enlargements" and "microfilms")
- Registered in the CNI (an occasional, but not consistently done annotation to show that the names found in the collections have been registered in the Central Name Index. This information field is as a field unsuitable for search purposes.)

*There are seven selection points for the „document category": prior to 1955; between May 1955 and September 1974; between September 1974 and April 1987; between May 1987 and October 1994; between 1995 and 1999; after June 2000; general documents. "General Documents" is a small but interesting part of the ITS-collection (approx. two percent of the total archive material). It involves non-personal information files with original documents, copies as well as translations into German of published works for use by the ITS staff.