



Spring 2016

The RSHA Generation

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The RSHA Generation

Abstract

The Reichssicherheitshauptamt (RSHA) was once the capital of a vast empire of terror; a place where surveillance, persecution, and extermination became merely a quotidian, bureaucratic function and where the Schreibtischtäter could implement their deadly ideology from afar, or sometimes in person; a place where divisions of the SS less associated by the general public with Nazi crimes against humanity, such as the Sicherheitsdienst (SD) and Sicherheitspolizei (Sipo), would persecute and kill more people than the Gestapo and most other Nazi institutions of terror. The RSHA and its many offices became an outlet for many Nazi intellectual elites, who were educated at the prestigious institutions of Weimar and Nazi Germany. After the creation of the RSHA within the SS, these individuals through this apparatus and the opportunities presented by German military conquests were transformed from ideological academics to calculating exterminators of millions. Some made the transition behind a desk in Berlin, while others were committed to seeing the fruits of their labor first hand. These were the ‘true believers’ and most devoted followers of National Socialism.

Keywords

SS, RSHA, Holocaust, Perpetrators, Generation

Disciplines

European History | History | Military History | Political History

Comments

History Senior Thesis

The RSHA Generation
History 418
Professor Bowman
04/18/16
Sean Hough

The *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* (RSHA) was once the capital of a vast empire of terror; a place where surveillance, persecution, and extermination became merely a quotidian, bureaucratic function and where the *Schreibtischtäter* could implement their deadly ideology from afar, or sometimes in person; a place where divisions of the SS less associated by the general public with Nazi crimes against humanity, such as the Sicherheitsdienst (SD) and Sicherheitspolizei (Sipo), would persecute and kill more people than the Gestapo and most other Nazi institutions of terror. The RSHA and its many offices became an outlet for many Nazi intellectual elites, who were educated at the prestigious institutions of Weimar and Nazi Germany. After the creation of the RSHA within the SS, these individuals through this apparatus and the opportunities presented by German military conquests were transformed from ideological academics to calculating exterminators of millions. Some made the transition behind a desk in Berlin, while others were committed to seeing the fruits of their labor first hand. These were the 'true believers' and most devoted followers of National Socialism.

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Introduction

In the center of modern-day Berlin, long buried under portions of the Berlin Wall on Prinz Albrecht Straße, rests the foundation blocks of a once massive and imposing building, which once housed the office of the *Reichsicherheitshauptamt* (Reich Main Security Office). Today, the foundations are fully excavated and are on permanent display as part of the exhibition *Die Topographie des Terrors*. The exhibit centers on the roles the departments and key individuals of the RSHA played in perpetrating the Holocaust. Nazi institutions such as the RSHA, the SD, and SiPo, and even the *Einsatzgruppen* are not often associated with the crimes of the Third Reich by the general public, while the SS, SA and Gestapo are generally well known.¹ Even in academia, the RSHA often escapes notice, not being presented as the nexus of Nazi terror and perpetration. Individuals like Adolf Eichmann, Reinhard Heydrich, Heinrich Himmler, Adolf Hitler, and Joseph Goebbels and the SS as an institution take center stage in the historiography of Nazi perpetrators, but Nazi crimes are bigger than the few, big leaders of the National Socialist regime and more complex than a single umbrella organization.

In his analysis of the SS *Der Orden unter dem Totenkopf* (The Order under the Death's-head), historian Heinz Höhne mentions the RSHA frequently, but always pushes it to the background and does not appreciate its central role, referring to it as a 'shadow organization' performing menial, bureaucratic tasks.² To quickly achieve a concerted effort as immense as the Holocaust on the state and party level required an immense bureaucracy to manage the logistics of extermination on an industrial scale. By 1944, some three-thousand individuals were employed by the RSHA and every member, whether merely alphabetizing unsorted files,

¹ For the definitions of German terms and Nazi institutions, see Appendix 1B on page 37.

² Heinz Höhne, *Der Orden Unter dem Totenkopf: Die Geschichte der SS* (Gütersloh, Germany: Siebert Mohn Verlag. 1967), 237.

compiling reports from SD informants, or even calculating the logistics of transporting hundreds of thousands of people in a few days, contributed on some level to the Holocaust.³

A comparison one may make to conceptualize the RSHA is with the bureaucracy depicted in the dystopian film *Brazil*, in which the task of every technocrat within the massive bureaucratic workforce was so specific and convoluted that no one person could comprehend how his or her role contributed to the master plan. However, such a depiction could only be partly true if applied to perhaps the lowest rungs of the bureaucratic ladder, but certainly not to those on the middle or upper levels. The men of the RSHA knew to what common purpose they were working and devoted their careers to its completion.⁴ They were not ardent, anti-Semitic thugs as found in the SA, but the intellectual elite of German academia. All were university graduates and many had doctorates in history, political science, law, or medicine. Born primarily between 1900 and 1910, they were too young to have fought in the first World War, but became supporters of *völkisch* groups in their hometowns and universities in the 1920s and saw the *Machtergreifung* of 1933 as an opportunity to put into practice not only what they believed, but what they ‘knew’ as fact.⁵

Joining the SD throughout the 1930s, they perfected their rationale for supporting the racial state and justified the need for racial purity, but the RSHA converted theory into practice. The leadership of the RSHA was largely comprised of men of the same generation, experiences and education, which reared them to form the intellectual backbone of the Nazi regime.⁶ However, only through the creation of the RSHA and its ability to focus their efforts did these

³ Michael Wildt, “The Spirit of the Reich Security Main Office (RSHA),” *Totalitarian Movements & Political Religions* 6, no. 3 (December, 2005): 338.

⁴ Christian Ingrao, *Believe and Destroy: Intellectuals in the SS War Machine*, trans. Andrew Brown (Cambridge, UK : Polity Press, 2013), 85.

⁵ Michael Wildt, *An Uncompromising Generation : The Nazi Leadership of the Reich Security Main Office*, trans. Tom Lampert (Maidson, WI. : University of Wisconsin Press, 2009), 85-6.

⁶ Ingrao, *Believe and Destroy*, ix.

men transform from mere racial theorists, academics, spies, and lawyers to the architects of extermination and mass murder; the true believers and practitioners of Nazi ideology.

Historiography

Historians of the SS

Secondary sources focusing on the RSHA or individual leaders other than the big four (Hitler, Himmler, Goebbels, and Göring) have been non-existent until the last decade. On the other hand, the historiography on the SS as a whole is very rich and has been so since the immediate post-war years. One of the forerunners in SS historiography was British historian Gerhard Reitlinger, who published his book *The SS: Alibi of a Nation* in 1957. Writing a mere decade after the end of the war, while prosecution of Nazi criminals was largely slowing down in West Germany, Reitlinger presented an argument that reflected his historical environment. As part of his title *Alibi of a Nation* suggests, Reitlinger claimed that the SS became a convenient excuse for the German nation; only a small group of Nazi zealots were held responsible for war crimes and the German nation as a whole presented itself as passive followers and ignorant of Nazi crimes.⁷ Reitlinger charged both contemporary and future German historians to deconstruct this myth and not to allow the new German nation to avoid coming to terms with its recent history.

Despite his crusade against historical silence, *Alibi of a Nation* does suffer from some classic shortcomings: the entire narrative is told top down, focusing on the top leaders of the Nazi hierarchy and rarely including an analysis of lower level members of the SS let alone individual case studies; those who were committed Nazis are presented as members of the middle class who chose the lesser of two evils (Nazism vs. Communism); and each department of the SS is presented in a vacuum. Reitlinger stated that “the SD was fiercely independent even

⁷ Gerald Reitlinger, *The SS, Alibi of a Nation, 1922-1945* (New York: Viking Press, 1957), 451.

after being subsumed into the RSHA,”⁸ which undermines the significance of the RSHA and its ability to coordinate the various departments of the SS.

A decade later, German historian Heinz Höhne published his work *Der Orden unter dem Totenkopf*, which, similar to Reitlinger, was a comprehensive history of the SS and its role in Nazi crimes before and during the Second World War. Höhne devoted multiple chapters to an analysis of the SD and SiPo and a number of key individuals, along with an entire chapter on the RSHA, but these focused much more on their structural development and presented many integral figures, with the exception of Eichmann, Heydrich, and Himmler, as passive bureaucrats. At the heart of Höhne’s argument is an indictment of the petite bourgeois and upper middle-classes, which, in his view, constituted the majority of SS membership. However, in both his origins chapters of the SS and conclusion, Höhne presented a generational analysis of SS men, something missing entirely from Reitlinger’s book. Höhne argued that men of a similar, authoritative generational outlook contributed to creating an environment, in which the rule of law was subverted to the rule of will.⁹

Höhne was part of a new generation of historians who sought to distance themselves from the previous ‘fascist generation.’ Most of Höhne’s arguments on what led to the Nazi perpetration of crimes are structurally based, citing increasing radicalization through the SD, SiPo and Gestapo as their authority and responsibilities increased in size and scope. Yet he largely underestimated the significance of the RSHA, rendering it as mere tool of communication between Heydrich and the various offices of the SD and SiPo, even claiming that its only

⁸ Ibid., 40.

⁹ Höhne, *Der Orden*, 128.

physical existence was its printed acronym on every sheet of internal memorandums and correspondence.¹⁰

However, both Höhne and Reitlinger were at a disadvantage when they wrote their respective works. The office building, which housed the RSHA in the center of Berlin was completely destroyed by the end of the war and was paved over with the building of the Berlin Wall in August of 1961. Its foundations would not be re-discovered until after reunification. Hence, neither author had a precise physical location to associate with the RSHA. Cold war divisions also hampered research, as a large portion of RSHA documents were sealed in archives in East Berlin or Moscow, which forced both Reitlinger and Höhne to rely primarily on testimonies from the defendants at Nuremberg, such as Otto Ohlendorf and Franz Six. There were only a few individuals on trial who were former personnel of the RSHA and they intentionally downplayed the importance and role of their office in perpetrating the Holocaust.¹¹ Although Höhne was writing when social history was first coming into existence in academia, he and Reitlinger cannot be expected to have engaged in an approach that had not yet come to fruition. It would be a later generation of historians and researchers who would write the first comprehensive works on the RSHA and the generation of men who ran it.

Post-1990 Historians

Post-Cold War historians would not only have the benefit of access to more sources than previous researchers, but also the advantage of technology. In September of 1999, an article

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 237.

¹¹ The ploy did not work out in Ohlendorf's favor, as he was executed in 1951 for his role in the Holocaust. When Ohlendorf was tried at Nuremberg and he, like most of the defendants, argued that "it is inconceivable that a subordinate leader should not carry out orders given by leaders of the state." In its judgement, the tribunal decided that they had tried "but two Ohlendorfs: the student, lecturer, and scholarly analyst, and the head of an Einsatzgruppe responsible for the extermination of 90,000 people." "Allied Tribunal at Nuremberg." *Nuremberg Trial Proceedings Volume 4: (Twenty-Sixth Day Thursday 3 January, 1946: Morning Session. 2008)*, 353; Ingrao, *Believe and Destroy*, 200.

published in the journal *History and Computing* titled “Analysing the Sociography of the Membership of the Schutzstaffel in SS-Oberabschnitt Rhein” by Anne Becker and Detlef Mühlberger presented evidence that further refuted the long-standing belief among historians that the SS was purely a middle-class institution. According to a number of computer-based, statistical models and using SS registration records from the Rheinland, Becker and Detlef confirmed that around fifty percent of SS members before 1933 and forty-three percent after the Nazi seizure of power came from working and lower-class backgrounds.¹² Yet these percentages were not homogeneously distributed. In terms of the SS leadership, it was almost entirely comprised of individuals of middle and upper-class backgrounds, while SS-Death’s Head squads in concentration camps were overwhelmingly working-class.¹³ The RSHA men all came from middle-class backgrounds, but it is important to reaffirm their socio-economic standing with this new evidence in order to demonstrate how these seldom researched or mentioned individuals were important and privileged leaders among the SS as well. At any rate, the SS, and the Nazi Party as a whole, was represented by all socio-economic strata and such new findings would greatly inform scholarship on the SS in the new millennium.

In 2003, Michael Wildt published his book *An Uncompromising Generation: The Nazi Leadership of the RSHA*, which was one of the first (if not the first) analytical looks at RSHA personnel from a combined generational and structural perspective. Wildt argued that the four-hundred men (and one woman) in leadership positions at the RSHA, unlike the rest of the SS, were homogenous in background in terms of socio-economic status, education, and early participation with the Nazi party and other *völkisch* groups, and that they were not passive

¹² Anne Becker and Detlef Mühlberger, “Analysing the Sociography of the Membership of the Schutzstaffel in SS-Oberabschnitt Rhein,” *History & Computing* 11, no. 3 (October, 1999): 220-1.

¹³ *Ibid.*

Mitläufer, but the intellectual backbone of the Nazi party.¹⁴ However, prior to the creation of the RSHA in 1939, the efforts of these men were mostly in race, state, and racial-state theory. Only through the creation of the RSHA were their efforts focused and theories put to practice, often firsthand as leaders of *Einsatzgruppen* and *Einsatzkommandos* in eastern Europe. Wildt based his findings on twenty-nine individuals, most of whom had doctorates, published books and scholarly journals throughout the NS-era, taught at universities, *and* were members of the SS.

More recently in 2013, Christian Ingrao published the English version of his book *Believe and Destroy: Intellectuals in the SS War Machine*, originally published in 2010 in France, which took Wildt's method of a generational outlook and applied it to a much larger group sample of eighty-four individuals. Although not researching too deeply into the structure of the RSHA, Ingrao created a much clearer narrative of the experiences of this generation that separates them from the older generation of Nazis, which included Hitler and others who had fought in the First World War. While Wildt presented these individuals as more or less born psychopaths, Ingrao convincingly incorporated the impact of the trauma of war and defeat, even though they had not experienced combat, into the narrative of this generation as a historical and psychological starting point for their path towards Nazi ideology.¹⁵ Overall, Ingrao depicted this generation as being in the best position to provide intellectual and ideological justification for genocide during the Second World War.¹⁶ They were true believers of Nazi ideology at the start of their careers, did not require conversion, and provided a façade of academic integrity to Nazi policy and authority, which made them a perfect fit for membership of the SS intellectual elite.

¹⁴ Michael Wildt, *An Uncompromising Generation*, 9-10.

¹⁵ Christian Ingrao, *Believe and Destroy: Intellectuals in the SS War Machine*, 16.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 207-8.

Historical Background

The history of the generation of the RSHA is inextricably intertwined with the history and development of the SS. Heinz Höhne described its earliest beginnings as such: “the history of the SS begins where the chronicle of the National-Socialist movement is introduced; in the tumult of post-1918 Germany.”¹⁷ The *Freikorps*, especially the units that violently ousted the workers commune in Munich in 1919, became a quasi-feeder program for the future SS. In Munich elite groups known as *Stosstrupp* (strike force) or *Stabswache* (headquarters’ guard) formed from former *Freikorps* fighters as essential bodyguard units for Adolf Hitler and his entourage when they were in public.¹⁸ The first *Stabswache* formed in March, 1923 when a few “old fighters swore on their lives to protect Hitler from both external and internal enemies.”¹⁹

In the weeks leading up to the Putsch of November 9, 1923, Hitler personally created a new bodyguard group called *Stosstrupp Hitler* out of the former *Stabswache* and placed two men in command, Joseph Berchtold and Julius Schreck.²⁰ It would be Schreck who was tasked with forming *Stosstruppen*, which were renamed *Schutzstaffel* (protection squad) on April 4, 1925, in every German city that could be organized upon Hitler’s arrival and each group typically consisted of only ten men and one designated captain dressed in black to distinguish themselves from the larger SA units.²¹ Due to their small number, SS units were seldom noticed and dwarfed by the much larger, louder, and more violent SA. The purpose of the SS would begin to change drastically with the appointment of Heinrich Himmler as *Reichsführer-SS* on January 6, 1929.²² Himmler’s view on the future of the SS, as Reitlinger described, was that “all revolutions reach a

¹⁷ All translations are my own unless stated otherwise. Höhne, *Der Orden*, 19.

¹⁸ Reitlinger, *The SS*, 5-7.

¹⁹ Höhne, *Der Orden*, 23.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 25.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 28.

²² Reitlinger, *The SS*, 14.

stage when mob enthusiasm becomes too unwieldy and an inner bodyguard is called in to the protection of the new state at the cost of some heads.”²³ Himmler began to consolidate his position in Munich, Bavaria, and Germany as a whole through absorbing control of the local police and undermining his main rival, Ernst Röhm and the SA.²⁴

By 1931, the ranks of the Nazi party were beginning to swell, but the threat of infiltration grew as well, which would give Himmler the opportunity to weed out his rivals. The SS was by no means the first to have a security service, as both the SA and the political *Gauleiter* had some sort of information and surveillance squad.²⁵ Founded in 1931, The SD or security service was to be Himmler’s way around a number of hurdles to the consolidation of his power. Himmler placed a former Navy officer named Reinhard Heydrich, who had only marginal intelligence experience, at its head,²⁶ but nevertheless was quick to adapt it to Himmler’s purposes. Heydrich’s small SD had to out-compete the other Nazi intelligence services in spying on enemies of the party (Zionists, Communists, etc.), while simultaneously spying on them as well.

By summer of 1932, the SD managed to outpace much of its competitors and Heydrich, along with his deputy Werner Best, began recruiting young university graduates to ensure its prominent position as *the* intelligence service of the Party. As a result of the Röhm purge in June 1934, the SS not only brought down its major rival, the SA, but also fully subsumed and incorporated Göring’s Gestapo, giving the SS a full monopoly on German police and intelligence services.²⁷ The rapid growth of the SD and the massive influx of security and police forces necessitated the creation of the SS security police (SiPo) on June, 26 1936, which would also fall

²³ Ibid., 1.

²⁴ Höhne, *Der Orden*, 31-2.

²⁵ George C Browder, *Foundations of the Nazi Police State: The Formation of SiPo and SD* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2004), 22.

²⁶ Willdt, *An Uncompromising Generation*, 140.

²⁷ Klaus Fischer, *Nazi Germany: A New History* (New York: Continuum International Publishing, 2006), 335.

under Heydrich's control, but friction would immediately begin to arise between the SD and Sipo.²⁸ As both organizations were defined very loosely, there was a lot of overlap in tasks, and often diverging interests between the two.

As international tension escalated by 1938 and war seemed imminent, Himmler and Heydrich needed to increase cooperation and increase efficiency in both domestic and foreign espionage and surveillance and to focus energy on weeding out not just political enemies, but any racial or social 'undesirable,' for the creation of a racially pure state. Heydrich tasked Werner Best and leader of the *SD-Auslandamt* (foreign office) Walter Schellenberg with drafting plans for "the amalgamation of the police and intelligence services."²⁹ Best's plan called for total amalgamation, while Schellenberg proposed keeping the offices separate, but in close cooperation and within the same organization. Heydrich accepted Schellenberg's plan and titled the new creation the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* or Reich Main Security Office, which was officially created on September 27, 1939, nearly four weeks after the invasion of Poland.³⁰

It was no coincidence that the RSHA was created at the start of Hitler's war against Europe. Nazi Germany had commenced an arms buildup in the years leading up to September 1, 1939, and the creation of the RSHA was another necessary step in this process. The RSHA consolidation created seven offices to manage the tasks of the Nazi state: organization of SS personnel in SD and various police divisions (Office I), legal and administrative counsel (Office II), analysis of the state of German domestic life (SD-domestic, Office III), enemy intelligence (Gestapo-Office IV), crime fighting (Kripo-Office V), analysis of the state of foreign nations (SD-Foreign, Office VI), and ideological research and collection of enemy 'propaganda'

²⁸ Reitlinger, *The SS*, 40.

²⁹ Willdt, *An Uncompromising Generation*, 156.

³⁰ Höhne, *Der Orden*, 237.

(Library-Office VII).³¹ These seven offices and their broadly assigned tasks within the superstructure of the SS gave the RSHA unlimited authority both in Germany and the occupied territories. In Germany, agents, spies, and other individual contacts were the eyes and ears of the RSHA, but in the occupied territories, starting with Poland, the Wehrmacht and various SS organizations, such as the Waffen SS and the *Einsatzgruppen*, collected intelligence to be reported back.³² Every occupied territory had a few local offices of the SD or RSHA to facilitate contact between Berlin and the front at all times.

The infamous *Einsatzgruppen* were also inventions of the RSHA. Handpicked from their own staff and various police forces, these groups were in constant and direct contact with RSHA headquarters in Berlin.³³ During the war, the RSHA could be seen as the Nazi brain trust, formulating the plans of mass deportation, enslavement, terror, and murder to create a new racial, European order. As the war turned against Germany and Berlin was subjected to constant bombing, the RSHA ceased as a consolidated entity and operated out of a number of facilities until war's end.³⁴ The *Einsatzgruppen* and SS-Death's Head units provided the grunt work and gained infamy for their crimes, while many of those who orchestrated their operations remain less known; only a few faced judgment at Nuremberg and most received brief prison sentences and were released after only a few years. Some even offered their espionage services to the Western allies for the coming Cold War and were never tried.³⁵ They remained secretly committed to the ideology of National Socialism after the denazification trials until their deaths

³¹ Wildt, *An Uncompromising Generation*, 14-17.

³² RSHA Amt II, "Die Stellung der West-Ukraine und West-Weissrusslands in den UdSSR," *Internal Report of the RSHA Amt II Gegnerforschung* (Microfilm), Reel 4, File 17 (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum: 1940).

³³ "Tagesbericht der Einsatzgruppen." *Internal Report of the SiPo* (Microfilm), Reel 2, File 1, Frames 1-4 (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archive. 1939).

³⁴ Wildt, *An Uncompromising Generation*, 349-51.

³⁵ Richard Breitman, "Historical Analysis of 20 Name Files from CIA Records," (National Archives: April, 2001), accessed April 6, 2016.

decades after the war. It was an ideology they helped to craft. The RSHA and its *Einsatzgruppen* organizations provided opportunities for these architects to see their work in action and to take part in activities that they considered not only historic, but a scientific necessity. This was the work they had prepared for academically since they were students and psychologically since their youth.

An Aspiring Generation

Of the three-thousand employees of the RSHA, four-hundred were leaders of varying importance, but were nonetheless a rather homogenous group and shared relatively the same level of culpability. As case studies representing various levels of leadership within the RSHA, eight individuals will be the focus of this analysis: Reinhard Heydrich, Werner Best, Dr. Franz Six, Otto Ohlendorf, Walter Schellenberg, Dr. Helmut Knochen, Erich Ehrlinger, and Emil Augsburg. Heydrich, Best, Six, Ohlendorf, and Schellenberg represent the leadership of the RSHA while Knochen, Ehrlinger, and Augsburg characterize those in more functional roles and lower in the hierarchy. The eldest of this group, Best, was born in 1903 with Schellenberg, Ehrlinger, and Knochen being the youngest, all born in 1910, which puts this group between the ages of twenty-three and thirty in 1933 and thirty-five and forty-two in 1945. They grew up during the First World War and the years of the Weimar Republic, but entered their professional lives under the National Socialist regime. The men of this group shared many of the same experiences, which makes them a rather uniform collection. They were all born to a middle-class background and grew up in well-to-do neighborhoods.³⁶ The First World War, however, was their first common experience, which affected them collectively. They and their families greeted the war with “enthusiasm and a sense of determinism” in 1914.³⁷ “While this generation did not

³⁶ Ingraio, *Believe and Destroy*, 4

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

experience firsthand the physical violence and death and battle, the war was not a distant occurrence in their lives.”³⁸ They and their families might have experienced war-euphoria in 1914, but later on in life, they only recounted the harshness of those years.

In his memoirs, published in 1956, Walter Schellenberg recounted his experience at war’s end: “We lived in Saarbrücken, and when I was only seven, I had my first experience of an air raid when the French bombed the town. The hard winter of that year, the hunger, the cold and the misery, will always remain in my memory. The French occupied the Saar after the defeat of 1918, and our family business suffered.”³⁹ Many lost fathers to the conflict at a young age. Werner Best was eleven when his father died in 1914.

My father’s heroic death threw me back on myself when I was eleven. My mother collapsed and sought more support from her sons...As a result I was brought up by the family tradition rather than by the family itself...My father had left us a letter in which he commended our mother to us and exhorted us to become men, Germans and patriots...And from the age of fifteen, I felt responsible for the new direction Germany should take.⁴⁰

For Best, Schellenberg, and the rest of their generation, the war had left an indelible mark. They were not only traumatized by the realities of war, but also endured its defeat after being brought up in the image of German, masculine strength. Their fathers were the masculine ideal: serving the fatherland and dying heroically in combat. The idea that heroism and gallant death could be rendered worthless after defeat was a real source of psychological trauma. As powerless children, they saw their world crumble around them and they were determined to never allow themselves or Germany to fall into such a state again, a goal they “shared uncompromisingly.”⁴¹

³⁸ Wildt, *An Uncompromising Generation*, 21.

³⁹ Walter Schellenberg, *The Schellenberg Memoirs*, trans. Louis Hagen (London: A. Deutsch Publishing, 1956), 19.

⁴⁰ Ingrao, *Believe and Destroy*, 11.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

As teenagers and young adults, they attended universities, joined *völkisch*, student organizations, and in some cases began to meet one another. They discovered others with similar backgrounds and beliefs. Erich Ehrlinger attended the University of Tübingen in 1928 and briefly left in 1930 to join the SA at the age of twenty.⁴² In 1931, Ehrlinger returned to Tübingen to finish his undergraduate studies in law, where he came in contact with another student activist, and future RSHA member, named Martin Sandberger, who was a member of the *Nationalsozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund* (National Socialist German Students League) or the NSDStB.⁴³ Another acquaintanceship formed in Heidelberg between Werner Best and Franz Six. Best spent the immediate post-war years as an activist in the Rhineland, especially during its occupation in 1923 when he was arrested, but subsequently released, by French authorities.⁴⁴ Best finished his undergraduate and doctoral studies in law at Heidelberg as a member of the *Nationalsozialistischer Studentenbund* (NSStB) by 1927. As a lecturer at the university, he came into contact with Franz Six, also studying at Heidelberg and a member of the NSStB.⁴⁵

The largest network of future RSHA men was in Leipzig, where Otto Ohlendorf, Emil Augsburg, Helmut Knochen, and at least eight others attended university between 1928 and 1932.⁴⁶ The most prominent, right-wing student group in Leipzig was the Black Hand, which was led by Heinz Gräfe, also a future member of the RSHA.⁴⁷ These various student organizations often participated in rallies, conducted political and intellectual discussions on race and law, promoted National Socialist ideology, and worked to exclude Jews and other ‘outsiders’

⁴² Wildt, *An Uncompromising Generation*, 49.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁴⁴ Ulrich Herbert, *Best: biographische Studien über Radikalismus, Weltanschauung und Vernunft, 1903-1989* (Dietz Verlag: 1996), 31-4.

⁴⁵ Ingraio, *Believe and Destroy*, 25.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 30-1.

⁴⁷ Wildt, *An Uncompromising Generation*, 61.

from university life. They provided opportunities for these young men to make intellectual and professional contacts with like-minded individuals. These organizations also provided a point of departure for membership in the SS, but it would be their post-undergraduate, intellectual pursuits that earned the attention of Heydrich and his newly formed SD.

What attracted the interest of Heydrich were clear demonstrations of intellectual status, zeal, and ambition, as well as a pre-existing belief in Nazi dogma that did not require indoctrination. Such was the case with Walter Schellenberg, who entered the SS in 1933 and did not require indoctrination, as his first job was to do the indoctrinating.⁴⁸ Schellenberg received his bachelor's degree in law from the University of Bonn for the explicit purpose of eventually "joining the foreign service," but he first joined the SS and worked on its behalf as a lecturer, pontificating on the corruption of the Catholic Church and the need for German law to be founded in *völkisch* values.⁴⁹ It was after one of his lectures in spring 1934 that he would be approached by two professors from the University of Bonn, who offered him a position, on behalf of Heydrich, in the SD. Schellenberg joined immediately and worked his way into the SD's foreign office.⁵⁰

Another individual who entered in this same fashion was Emil Augsburg. From the Leipzig network, Augsburg gained the attention of Heydrich's recruiters for his knowledge of and interest in the Soviet press and intelligence service. Augsburg was born in 1904 in Łódź, then a part of the Russian empire, to a *Volksdeutsch* family and grew up speaking German, Polish, and Russian.⁵¹ His entry into the SD's foreign office (and simultaneously the SS) in 1934 was essentially assured because of his knowledge of Russian and Polish and his doctoral thesis

⁴⁸ Schellenberg, *The Schellenberg Memoirs*, 22.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Richard Breitman, *Historical Analysis of 20 Name Files from CIA Records*, (National Archives: April, 2001), accessed April 6, 2016.

displayed his useful knowledge-base.⁵² While writing his doctoral thesis *The State and Political Significance of the Soviet Press in its Historical Development*, he spent ample time gaining intimate knowledge of the Soviet press and Soviet propaganda, which made his services indispensable for clear, ideological reasons.⁵³

Werner Best also entered the SS and SD in 1931 due to his intellectual pursuits. Having entered the SS and SD earlier than most among this sample group, Best garnered not only Heydrich's interest, but also Himmler's. His devout activism in the Rhineland along with his doctoral work brought not only another intellectual zealot into the fold, but also helped to seal the perception of the SS as an elite organization with connections to the best and brightest. Best's thesis, albeit a solid academic treatise on labor and employment law in Weimar Germany, was appropriated by the SS to give it a positive association with academia.⁵⁴ Best simultaneously entered the SD as Heydrich's deputy and would play a critical role in establishing the 'legal' foundation for a secret, political police service, and administering the Gestapo after its absorption into the SD.⁵⁵ Although committed to the *völkisch* principles of Nazi law, Best would later fall out of favor with both Himmler and Heydrich because of his insistence that the SS was not above the law of the state.⁵⁶ Nonetheless, for Schellenberg, Augsburg, Best, and the rest of the new SS intelligentsia, the Nazi regime and particularly the SS offered opportunities to become the elite of new society; one that they would help to build through their service to *Volk* and *Staat*. As a cohort with a common source of trauma in the First World War, collective radicalization during their formative years at University or as rank and file Nazis, and shared beliefs and ambitions, they were to be the aspiring generation of the Third Reich.

⁵² Breitman, *Files from CIA Records*.

⁵³ Ingrao, *Believe and Destroy*, 349.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 38-9

⁵⁵ Wildt, *An Uncompromising Generation*, 136.

⁵⁶ Höhne, *Der Orden*, 278-9.

Service to the State: Illusion and Reality

The Illusion

Starting with their entrance to the SS, this intellectual elite was to give academic credence to the Nazi state and to become the brain trust of National Socialist ideology. Despite their positions within the SD, which were considered top secret, they still maintained connections, or even held, positions at universities, and published a number of treatises in academic or party-affiliated journals on various topics, such as economics, law, racial theory, and history.⁵⁷ Some of it was legitimate academic work, such as Dr. Helmut Knochen's biography on the eighteenth-century British playwright George Colman titled *Der Dramatiker George Colman* published in 1935, but was still appropriated by the Nazis for academic legitimacy. Other works, such as Franz Six' *Freimauerei und Judenemanzipation* (Freemasonry and Jewish emancipation) published in 1938, were little more than racial propaganda with the trimmings of proper historical work.⁵⁸ As Six's work gave the Nazi regime and ideology the appearance of academic support, Six, along with others, received prestigious positions at universities. For instance, in 1938, at the age of twenty-seven, Six was granted a position not only as a full professor, but also as dean of History and Philosophy at Berlin University.⁵⁹

Werner Best's academic prestige also suited Nazi intentions. Although after the start of the war, he published in 1940 a two-hundred fifty page book titled *The Administration in Poland before and after the collapse of the Polish Republic*, which, adding insult to injury, was a deliberate attempt to rewrite Polish history from a perspective of racial determinism after Poland's swift defeat. The first two lines of this less-than-objective historiography states, "The national history of a people is always crucial in determining the state-building and state-

⁵⁷ Reitlinger, *The SS*, 42.

⁵⁸ Ingrao, *Believe and Destroy*, 351-2.

⁵⁹ Reitlinger, *The SS*, 42.

maintaining abilities of its people, as well as determining in this history how many of these abilities are formed from outside influences. An overview of the state history of Poland compels one to form a negative verdict of the state-building and state-maintaining abilities of this nation.”⁶⁰ Best clearly wanted to create a narrative supporting the new, European order, where the dominant German ruled over the weaker Slavs not just in the present moment, but throughout history.

Although lacking the academic credentials of most of the men who worked for him, Heydrich also published work throughout the pre-war era. In 1936, he distributed a brochure through the party-affiliated publisher *Franz Eher Nachfolger GmbH* titled *Wandlungen unseres Kampfes*, which argued “that the struggle against [Jewish Bolshevism] has grown deeper than ever; a struggle that must no longer be fought with normal means... but by having its roots ripped from the ground.”⁶¹ In the same year, Heydrich also published an article titled *Die Bekämpfung der Staatsfeinde* in the prominent journal *Deutsche Rechtswissenschaft* (German Jurisprudence), which essentially argued the same point as the aforementioned article.⁶² Material published in a journal generally reserved for scholarly articles on law gave Nazi race theory the appearance of academic support, further symbolizing not only the subversion of law, but of academia as well. However, for the men of the RSHA, this was only a cover for their real work in the SS.

⁶⁰ Werner Best, *Die Verwaltung in Polen vor und nach dem Zusammenbruch der polnischen Republik* (Berlin: Preußische Druckerei und Verlag. 1940), 1.

⁶¹ “Transitions of our Struggle.” Reinhard Heydrich, *Wandlungen unseres Kampfes* (Munich: Franz Eher Nachfolger GmbH. 1936), 2-3.

⁶² “Combatting Enemies of the State,” Reinhard Heydrich, „Die Bekämpfung der Staatsfeinde.“ In *Deutsche Rechtswissenschaft*, ed. Karl Eckhardt, Hans Frank, and Bernhard Rust (Hamburg: Hanseatische Verlagsanwält. 1936), 97-100.

The Reality

Prior to the start of the Second World War and the creation of the RSHA, the primary objectives of the men of the SD were to observe and report sources of opposition to the Nazi Reich. For example, during the winter of 1939, the SD-Inland issued a number of reports on the content and distribution of a book titled *Die Grundlagen des jüdischen Volkes: eine notwendige Abrechnung mit dem Judentum*.⁶³ Published in Breslau (Wrocław, Poland today) by Pötsch Verlag in December 1938, *Die Grundlagen* was a last ditch effort by German author Walter Pötsch to express his outrage at the treatment of Jewish Germans and to rally support against the regime in response to the pogroms of *Kristallnacht*.⁶⁴ He wrote,

thousands have been bloodily beaten, brutally tortured, thrown in to concentrations camps, and mistreated; doctors, business-men, workers of all backgrounds, people like us! ...German People! The voices of conscience, of humanity, of heart, of reason, and the voice of your fate are calling out to you!⁶⁵

His impassioned call to action unfortunately only attracted the attention of those who wished to silence him. A report by the SD-Inland in January, 1939 issued to the SiPo described the book as merely “dealing with the Jewish question in Germany and the reprisals against the Jews in a Jew-favoring fashion” and recommended “protective custody” for Walter Pötsch as a necessary action.⁶⁶ The fate of Walter Pötsch is unclear, but his attempt to appeal to the righteous indignation of the German people was quashed in swift and calculating fashion by the SD. All

⁶³ The Foundations of the Jewish People: a Necessary Reckoning with Jewry; SD-Inland. “Die Grundlage des jüdischen Volkes,” *Internal Report of the SD* (Microfilm), Reel 3, File 52, , (United States Holocaust Museum, 1939), Frames 741-52.

⁶⁴ Walter Pötsch. *Die Grundlagen des jüdischen Volkes: Eine notwendige Abrechnung mit dem Judentum*. Breslau, (Wrocław) Poland: Breslau Verlag. 1938.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁶⁶ SD-Inland. “Die Grundlage des jüdischen Volkes,” File 752.

copies of the book that could be located were confiscated and Pötsch Verlag was closed immediately.⁶⁷

While the ‘Pötsch Case’ is an example of the SD’s role as an intelligence-gathering and decision-making entity, its members could also, when willing, take on roles that placed them in the front lines of fighting the enemies of the Reich. Dr. Franz Six, among others of the SD, was one with such a penchant for direct action. On January 25, 1938, Dr. Six vaguely reported back to SD headquarters in Berlin from the East Prussian city of Königsberg that the intelligence services of Danzig and Poland “have been damaged.”⁶⁸ Eight days later, Erich Ehrlinger, a leader within SD-Inland Berlin at the time, forwards a report to the SD director of East Prussia, providing an overview of the event a week prior in Königsberg:

During his stay in Königsberg, Dr. Six, working on behalf of the SD, took command of local security forces and led an ‘action’ against the ‘National Zionist Union,’ during which the intelligence services of Poland and Danzig were damaged...the ‘action’ occurred in response to the materials being sent across borders into Poland by the Zionists...the materials are being treated as evidence of the connection between the national Zionists and the [Polish] NZO (New Zionists’ Organization) and have been delivered to the necessary divisions...The operation is considered a success as the leader of the Zionists in Königsberg has been arrested, although it cannot be ascertained, how much damage this has caused the [Polish] intelligence service in Danzig.⁶⁹

The language of the order is intentionally vague, as is often the case with Nazi documents and details about the nature of the ‘action’ are lost, but what can be gleaned from this series of communications reveals more about those who wrote them than their actual topics. For one, despite Six’ comfy, tenured position at the University of Berlin and high rank in the SS and SD,

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Erich Ehrlinger and Franz Six, “Aktion in Königsburg,” Internal Report of the SD (Microfilm), Reel 3, File 48, (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archive, 1939), Frame 96.

⁶⁹ ‘Aktion’ in the original German; the term was often used as Nazi euphemism before the war for mass arrests or raids, but during the war, it became associated with executions. Ibid., frames 94-5.

he was more than willing to engage in direct action against the enemies of the Reich; not just organize from an office in Berlin, but also lead cleansing operations in the streets.

However, both this ‘action’ and the suppression of the Pötsch book were examples of early activities for the men of the SD that involved subverting possible sources of resistance and opposition within the German Reich. These operations largely targeted individuals and resulted in arrests and deportations to concentration camps, but during the invasion of the Soviet Union, the RSHA targeted broad swaths of populations for extermination based on Nazi conceptions of racial inferiority. A radical shift in policy was made possible through a world war and an adaptive administration. Only a few months after the suppression of the Pötsch Verlag, the Second World War commenced with the invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939, and the SD would be combined with the SiPo to form the more efficient, flexible, and murderous Reich Main Security Office.

The Creation of the RSHA

In 1937, Heinrich Himmler described the purpose of the SD and SiPo as destined “to protect the German people as a total organic being, its life force, and its institutions, from destruction and decay.”⁷⁰ Additionally, when Reinhard Heydrich expressed the wish to forge a new SS and police organization out of the SD and the SiPo and gave the task of designing it to Walter Schellenberg and Werner Best, his key phrase to guide them was “a fighting administration.”⁷¹ Heydrich imagined that,

the RSHA was supposed to unite political initiative, analysis of issues, organizational responsibilities, and practical implementation into a single institution that would be regulated by no administrative or legal norms but instead would be capable of

⁷⁰ Wildt, *The Spirit of the Reich Main Security Office*, 341.

⁷¹ Wildt, *An Uncompromising Generation*, 214.

acting as a political organization everywhere and with any means deemed politically necessary.⁷²

This radical transformation of the SD and SiPo from compartmentalized organizations into an all-encompassing bureaucracy large enough to administer all Nazi-occupied lands at the height of the Second World War, yet nimble enough to adapt to specific and changing tasks, radicalized the men of the RSHA from racial theorists and Nazi intellectuals to calculating executioners. A transformation their experiences made possible.

However, a detailed history of the RSHA, even for its brief, five-year existence, is an exhaustive study in bureaucratic jargon, groups and subgroups appearing then disappearing, and individuals shifting between offices, from the office to the field, and vice-versa. What can be gleaned from this minutia-riddled assemblage, however, is that the RSHA was not overblown and inefficient, but nimble, dynamic, and able to adapt. “It was capable of expanding or shrinking, building new departments and dissolving old ones, shifting priorities or establishing new ones, and initiating intra-agency task forces.”⁷³ For example, when the RSHA was first organized on September 27, 1939, it contained six offices, but Franz Six organized a seventh office titled “Ideological Research and Evaluation,” which would become a crucial office for two, specific war aims: the physical and racial assault on Europe.⁷⁴

Six, however, was often detached to “Office II Organization, Administration, Law” or attached to a command of a *Einsatzkommando* throughout the war. Office VII, with and without Six, however, played a major role in the intellectual theft of Europe by the Nazis. Office VII was often known as the “Library of the RSHA” and during the war it amassed a voluminous collection of books, treatises, and other academic works by Jewish intellectuals in order “to build

⁷² Ibid., 213.

⁷³ Wildt, *The Spirit of the Reich Main Security Office*, 166.

⁷⁴ Ingraio, *Believe and Destroy*, 97.

a case for a Jewish conspiracy against the state and legitimize the expulsion and extermination of the Jews.”⁷⁵ A pre-requisite to be a member of this office was to at least have an undergraduate degree and six of the twelve of the section heads had earned their PhDs.⁷⁶ The sources for their ‘research’ were all looted from private and public libraries, synagogues, and Yeshivas across Europe.⁷⁷ Following the invasion of Poland, after being transported in six train cars, 500,000 volumes arrived at the new Library, but this number increased, by some estimates, to three-million by the end of 1941, with the addition of Marxist and Freemason literature.⁷⁸

Another critical office of the RSHA was “Office III German-life-areas,” or the former *SD-Inland* office. Otto Ohlendorf and Emil Augsburg were both assigned to it, with the former as Office head and the latter as a group leader, who also worked extensively with “Office VI Foreign Affairs.” Both were later sent east in 1941 as *Einsatzgruppen* and *Einsatzkommando* leaders.⁷⁹ Interestingly, the German word for the title of Office III was *Lebensgebiet*, which one could directly define as ‘life domain,’ but the definition this carried in the RSHA was much more encompassing, even revolutionary. Testifying at Nuremberg after the war, Ohlendorf tried to define the term for the tribunal:

It’s very difficult to define, as it includes a whole world of ideas. Let’s take the ‘domain of law, for example. We need to imagine that the life of the law includes all its institutions and their effects on the normal course of life. In our groups, we have always expressed the opinion that culture was wider than what is usually understood by this term, in other words that it includes all the manifestations of the life of a people. This means culture in the narrow sense, just like areas that are distant from it, such as economics, which are then included. This must not just include the superficial, but the whole human environment that springs from it.

⁷⁵ Dov Schidorsky, “The Library of the Reich Security Main Office and Its Looted Jewish Book Collections.” *Libraries and the Cultural Record* Vol. 42 no. 1: (Winter, 2007): 21.

⁷⁶ Wildt, *An Uncompromising Generation*, 200.

⁷⁷ Schidorsky, “The Library,” 22.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁷⁹ Wildt, *An Uncompromising Generation*, 160.

Thus for us, public health, law administration, economics, the sciences, education, and religious life all composed the 'life domain.'⁸⁰

From this definition, one can get a sense that Office III was the very organization Himmler explained in the quote from 1937. It was this turgidly named office that, during the war years and afterwards, given a Nazi victory, would control and monitor every aspect of the *Volk*: *Gleichschaltung* brought to its full potential. During the war, the Office was especially useful for gauging actual public opinion of the war effort, but this function ceased after 1943 for fear of the demoralizing effect of the collected data.⁸¹ The formation of this Office was the pet-project of Ohlendorf, who only put off further development in order to command Einsatzgruppe D and 'cleanse' the continent of the biological enemies of the *Volk*: a pre-requisite, in his estimation, for the flourishing of the *Volk* as masters of Europe.⁸²

The largest office of the RSHA and the one that employed three of the individuals focused on in this study was "Office VI Foreign Affairs," which contained forty-three subsections at its height due to, as one may imagine, the vast amount of land under Nazi occupation and the fact Germany was eventually at war with three, major allied powers.⁸³ The three who worked in Office VI, for the most part, were Walter Schellenberg, Emil Augsburg, and Dr. Helmut Knochen. When Office VI was established, it was intended to form the groundwork for administering the occupied territories and conducting counter-espionage, which often put it into close cooperation with "Office IV Investigating and Combating Opponents" (The Gestapo

⁸⁰ Ingrao, *Believe and Destroy*, 96.

⁸¹ Wildt, *An Uncompromising Generation*, 204.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 362.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 12-3.

Office).⁸⁴ It was in Office IV, specifically Group IV E specializing in counter-espionage, where Walter Schellenberg started his work with the RSHA.⁸⁵

According to Schellenberg's recollection, it was on June 22, 1941, the day of the invasion of the Soviet Union, that he was appointed head of Office VI for the sole purpose of turning the office into "a more unified intelligence service" and using his connections with the Gestapo to foster closer cooperation between these two offices.⁸⁶ Evidence of close cooperation between these offices, although dated to 1939, before Schellenberg became chief of Office VI, comes in the form of a series of internal, RSHA memoranda between Dr. Helmut Knochen, the second individual of Office VI, and Adolf Eichmann of "Office IV Group B₄: Emigration and Evacuation" a sub-group that specialized in orchestrating the mass deportations of Jews and other 'enemies of the state.' In one communication, Dr. Knochen provides a recommendation for an individual named Paul Schmitz to work in Eichmann's office in a "position specializing in transport capacity."⁸⁷ Eichmann, considered to be one of architects of the Holocaust, apparently required specialized assistance and Office VI offered support where needed.

The third individual of this study in Office VI was Emil Augsburg, who was assigned early in the history of the RSHA to "Group C Eastern European Affairs." Augsburg, because of his specialties, would see little time behind a desk in Berlin and much more in the killing fields of eastern Europe. He and many other officials of the RSHA were making this transition from intellectual to *Schreibtischtäter* or *Täter*. The RSHA was radical in that it created an apparatus where intelligent, although clearly anti-Semitic, individuals, who would have otherwise pursued

⁸⁴ Ibid., 205.

⁸⁵ Schellenberg, *Schellenberg Memoirs*, 70.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 227.

⁸⁷ Translated from the German compound word "Vermögensverkehrsstelle." Helmut Knochen, "Korrespondenz an Eichmann." *Internal Correspondence of the RSHA*, (Microfilm), Reel 4, File 26 (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 1939).

solely careers in academia or civil service, became perpetrators both indirectly of mass murder and directly. The Einsatzgruppen, the creations of the RSHA, provided the opportunity for legalized, and in their view, justified violence and genocide. The operations of the Einsatzgruppen, most of whose leaders were members of the RSHA, “were far more horrible than the acts of terror that had been committed by the same men in their earlier positions as Gestapo and SD leaders.”⁸⁸

The Einsatzgruppen

The first experiences at genocide for the men of the RSHA came during the invasion of Poland, as this proved to be the testing ground for policies later in the war.⁸⁹ In the weeks leading up to the invasion, Heydrich and a number of his top SD officials, which included Werner Best, Franz Six, Erich Ehrlinger, and Helmut Knochen, organized, outfitted, and assembled five Einsatzgruppen in the cities of Allenstein, Breslau, Dramburg-Pommern, Oppeln, and Vienna, which served as their launching points into Poland.⁹⁰ “The members of the Einsatzgruppen were drawn primarily from the SS and police stations of the areas surrounding the respective assembly points,” but the leaders of the larger Einsatzgruppen and the smaller, more nimble *Einsatzkommandos* and *Sonderkommandos* were chosen from among the leadership in the SiPo, SD, and among Heydrich’s group as well. Ehrlinger, for example, joined the staff of Einsatzgruppe IV.⁹¹

The objective of the Einsatzgruppen in Poland was rearguard work: clearing potential ‘combatants’ in Polish cities and towns behind the advance of the Wehrmacht. However, who the Einsatzgruppen and Kommandos determined to be combatants was left to their discretion. In a

⁸⁸ Wildt, *The Spirit of the Reich Main Security Office*, 343.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Wildt, *An Uncompromising Generation*, 218-9.

⁹¹ Ibid., 219.

consolidated field report from Einsatzgruppen III and IV on September 6, 1939, the two units were sweeping the towns of Kempen and Konitz, respectively, and encountered sporadic resistance from “armed militia.”⁹² This was used as a pretense to broaden their definitions of combatants and act accordingly. In Kempen, one-hundred “criminals” and fifty Jews were taken into “protective custody.”⁹³ The report does not suggest that they were executed, at least not immediately, but during the six-week operation of the Einsatzgruppen in Poland, 10,000 people were executed. This, however, pales in comparison to the slaughter that occurred during the invasion of the Soviet Union in June, 1941, when the men of the RSHA were not just organizers, but active participants of mass-murder.⁹⁴

From June 22 to the end of December, 1941, the four Einsatzgruppen collectively killed approximately 550,000 people at a rate of execution fifty-five times higher than that in Poland and the men of the RSHA were some of the most fanatical in the bloodshed.⁹⁵ However, unlike in Poland where there was daily correspondence between Berlin and the Einsatzgruppen, orders from the RSHA were less frequent and were often broad and discretionary, leaving the organization of Einsatzkommandos and Sonderkommandos and how the executions were to be performed in the field up to individual commanders.⁹⁶ Otto Ohlendorf, commander of Einsatzgruppe D, which was assigned to the Ukraine, stacked his command with not just RSHA men, but personnel from his own office, which made his command much more personally attuned.⁹⁷ In a six-day period, from August 23 to August 29, 1941, Ohlendorf’s command, which

⁹² “Tagesbericht der Einsatzgruppen,” *Internal Report of the SiPo* (Microfilm), frame 3.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ Ingrao, *Believe and Destroy*, 161.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ Wildt, *The Spirit of the Reich Main Security Office*, 345.

⁹⁷ Yitzhak Arad, Shmuel Krakowski, and Shmuel Spector, eds. *The Einsatzgruppen Reports: Selections from the dispatches of the Nazi death squads' campaign against the Jews in occupied territories of the Soviet Union July 1941 - January 1943*, Trans. Stella Schosburg (New York: Holocaust Library, 1986), 14.

included Romanian auxiliary troops, executed approximately 4,300 Jews in the region surrounding Ananyev in the Ukraine.⁹⁸

Operating in the Ukraine later in the war was Erich Ehrlinger, who, while stationed in Kiev as commander of SD forces, demonstrated his efficient method of murder in numerous cases. Ehrlinger, unlike Ohlendorf, was often present at execution pits and was known to encourage his command with motivational speeches before executions. He even personally shot men, women, and children to set an example of killing without remorse or zeal.⁹⁹ Before his appointment in Kiev, Ehrlinger's efficiency caught the attention of his superiors when he was commander of Einsatzkommando 1b in Latvia during the summer of 1941. From July 7 to July 16, Ehrlinger and his seventy-man command "executed 1,150 Jews" near the town of Daugavpils and encouraged all in his command to "equally participate."¹⁰⁰

However, in one infamous instance in the summer of 1943 near the small town of Michalowa just outside of Kiev, Ehrlinger broke from his usual detached and efficient methods. After a successful escape of five Jewish prisoners from his custody, Ehrlinger ordered the entire, local Jewish population of the ghetto to assemble in the square where he asked them all to start to count off. The approximate five-hundred Jews did not immediately follow his orders and began to murmur amongst themselves in a perceived show of defiance. In response, Ehrlinger, reportedly angry and screaming incoherently, drew his pistol and discharged two, full magazines of ammunition into the crowd at random and without discretion, killing and wounding many.¹⁰¹ The former Tübingen University graduate of law was now killing not because of ideology or orders, but for the sake of killing. His zeal for slaughter made his superiors reluctant to relocate

⁹⁸ Ibid., 119.

⁹⁹ Wildt, *An Uncompromising Generation*, 297-8.

¹⁰⁰ Arad, *The Einsatzgruppen Reports*, 27-8; Wildt, *An Uncompromising Generation*, 298.

¹⁰¹ Wildt, *An Uncompromising Generation*, 300.

him. Ehrlinger did not leave his position until he was promoted to the head of Office III of the RSHA in 1944, making him the longest serving ‘field specialist’ of the RSHA.¹⁰²

For Ehrlinger, the transformation had reached its radical conclusion, but others, perhaps more horrifyingly, maintained their calculating composure during the long months of massacre. During what many hoped to be the final push towards Moscow in the fall of 1941, Dr. Franz Six left his positions at the RSHA and at Berlin University to take part in intelligence work in Smolensk. Six, in cooperation with other SD officers, “captured and identified key, political commissars for interrogation, torture, and execution.”¹⁰³ Six was slated to lead the first *Einsatzkommando* into Moscow as soon as the city fell in order to seize the prized documents of the Kremlin.¹⁰⁴ Also a part of this taskforce was Emil Augsburg, but, unlike Six, he had more extensive experience on the Eastern Front with Soviet prisoners. Since June, 1941, Augsburg had been in command of *Einsatzkommando Moskau*, which specialized in swiftly interrogating and executing dozens of Soviet officers throughout the summer and was slated to be the first task force to enter the Soviet capital.¹⁰⁵ During a Soviet air attack in Smolensk, Augsburg was wounded and sent back to Berlin, where he, due to his ideologically sensitive work in the east, continued his work with the RSHA until the end of the war.¹⁰⁶

To the Bitter End

Despite the academic and ideological ardor of Augsburg, Ehrlinger, Ohlendorf, Six, and the rest of the RSHA leadership, Moscow did not fall. Rather, Nazi-occupied Europe fell after a string of military defeats, and the new, European order that they devoted their lives and careers

¹⁰² Ibid., 301.

¹⁰³ Reitlinger, *The SS*, 42.

¹⁰⁴ Arad, *The Einsatzgruppen Reports*, 14.

¹⁰⁵ Richard Breitman, *Historical Analysis of 20 Name Files from CIA Records*.

¹⁰⁶ Jefferson Adams, *Historical Dictionary of German Intelligence*, (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2009),

to creating crumbled before their eyes. But even for these academics, denial of the situation was a powerful anesthesia. They continued their work researching, publishing, and killing for the Nazi Reich to the bitter end. The evidence for such fanatical denial lies in the publications and speeches of these individuals during the war years, with Dr. Franz Six being the most vocal of the SS intelligentsia. In January 1944, despite the already deteriorated military situation, Six published an article titled “The Transformation of the European State System to the World State System” in the journal *Zeitschrift für Politik* that focused on the Nazis’ view for Europe’s future as a united continent leading the world. He argued that “Germany, in this current conflict, is fighting *for* the western-European cultural community, *for* the ascension, through a common, European *Lebensraum*, of the new European order to the position of a world-power...and *against* the Anglo-Saxon powers, who would willingly place ideological world-hegemony in the hands of their bolshevist partner.”¹⁰⁷ Six, like the rest of the SS intelligentsia, believed in the bright future of *their* new world order and wanted to promote its ascendancy, no matter the reality. A year later in March of 1945, when Nazi Germany’s destruction was imminent, Six published one last article titled *Europe in Question: The Crisis of the European Spirit*, but with more of an urgent and apocalyptic tone. He still brazenly urged *all* of Europe to resist occupation and to “not let what took centuries to create be destroyed in mere months, weeks, days, or even hours; to consider the results of the First World War as just a small example of the substantial loses, both physical spiritual, and intellectual, in store for Europe.”¹⁰⁸

Even before the destructive year of 1945, The RSHA had already abandoned its central office, due to the constant, allied bombing campaigns, and distributed its various sub-sections

¹⁰⁷ Franz Alfred Six, “Der Wandel des europäischen Staatensystems zum Weltstaatensystems.” *Zeitschrift für Politik* 34, no. 1 (Januar/ Februar 1944): 19.

¹⁰⁸ Franz Alfred Six, “Europa in der Entscheidung: Krise des europäischen Geistes.” *Zeitschrift für Politik* 35, no. 1 (Januar/März 1945): 1.

throughout Germany, which decreased effective communication and cooperation, and created, in certain areas, bureaucratic fiefdoms.¹⁰⁹ With the perceived, mortal enemy of National-Socialism, Jewish-Bolshevism, on Germany's doorstep, an atmosphere of simultaneous anxiety and contempt for the enemy, one that had been fostered since the start of the war, reached a fever pitch, which pushed them further to the conviction of fighting to the bitter end.¹¹⁰ For example, in the last months of the war, the Swiss and Swedish red-cross attempted to negotiate with the SS for the release of prisoners from concentration camps to receive proper aid.¹¹¹ Only in the last weeks of April, 1945, did Sweden secure the release of Scandinavian prisoners, but Switzerland still received a cold rejection, further proof of the stubbornness and callousness exhibited by many of these men, even at war's end.¹¹² The RSHA, with its original central office in Berlin being reduced to rubble by February 1945, finally ceased to exist on April, 23 1945, when its leaders finally realized the end had come and went into hiding.¹¹³

Conclusion

On December 17, 1941, while giving a speech in Prague on the need for closer cooperation between Germany and southeastern Europe in the “struggle against international, Jewish bolshevism,” Reinhard Heydrich ended his speech with the pledge, “to the prosperity of a greater Germany and to the prosperity of a new Europe.”¹¹⁴ Four years later, with Europe in shambles, tens of millions killed, wounded, or displaced, the irony of such a statement could have not been stronger. The former leaders and intelligentsia of the SS were no longer the

¹⁰⁹ Wildt, *An Uncompromising Generation*, 349-50.

¹¹⁰ Ingrao, *Believe and Destroy*, 216.

¹¹¹ Wildt, *An Uncompromising Generation*, 355.

¹¹² Heinrich Müller, the leader of the Gestapo arranged the agreement with Sweden, while Ernst Kaltenbrunner, Heydrich's successor as chief of the RSHA, rejected the Swiss offer. *Ibid.*

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 357.

¹¹⁴ Reinhard Heydrich, *Rede zur Tagung der Südosteuropa*, 17. Dezember, 1941. Uploaded November 6, 2014. (MP3 File) accessed February 14, 2016.

founders of a new world order, but war criminals in a defeated and occupied Germany. The SS and its nexus of organized and intellectual terror, the RSHA, were to have brought the Nazi racial state and its vision of Europe into existence, but failed. It is sometimes assumed that Nazi war criminals were nothing more than the dregs of society, typical ‘Brown-Shirt’ thugs, who manipulated their way to the top and came from criminal backgrounds. Yet, for the large part, this was not the case.

As Michael Wildt noted, “this project [the RSHA] led droves of intellectuals, academics and scientists to become ready supporters of the Nazi regime. At last, philosophers could believe that they were in power; physicians could see themselves in the role of uncontrolled designers of human life; historians could think themselves in a position to shape world history.”¹¹⁵ They were not just racial, anti-Semitic theorists, sitting in the proverbial ivory tower, dreaming and ranting among their fellow cohorts about the necessity of a homogenous and strong *Volk*. They joined, organized, and commanded the organizations that made theory and ideology a reality. Along with their educated and middle class upbringing, their experiences as a generation prepared them for radicalization. Their experiences as children of the First World War, as *völkisch* activists in their youth, and as young, Nazi intellectuals, making connections at universities and other academic settings, helped solidify their theories and made them into true believers. Yet, it was the nature of the RSHA as a radicalizing and all-encompassing entity that created opportunities to not only focus their energies, but to commit acts they otherwise would never have thought themselves capable of perpetrating.

Epilogue: Did They Escape Justice?

Of the eight individuals used in this study to give a glimpse into this ‘RSHA Generation,’ seven survived the war. All seven went into hiding, but could not remain out of sight for long.

¹¹⁵ Wildt, *The Spirit of the Reich Main Security Office*, 346.

250,000 former Nazis were detained by the occupational forces, but the overwhelming majority of this group received light sentences, considering the nature of their crimes, or nothing at all, with only the top, few leaders in the regime receiving the harshest of sentences. With only a few exceptions, such as Otto Ohlendorf, most of the men of the RSHA generation re-entered German society with little to no hindrance.¹¹⁶ Some became business-men, advertising executives, or worked for the booming automobile industry. Franz Six was released in 1951 after only serving five years in prison and worked as an advertising executive for Porsche until his death in 1975. But where does this leave the question of guilt for the men of this generation? Did they largely escape justice? If so, what does this say about Germany after the Holocaust? Shortly after the end of the National Socialist regime, the memory of the RSHA was both figuratively and literally buried under cold war divisions. The Berlin Wall was built over the remains of the RSHA in the center of Berlin and divided Germany, both east and west, sought to suppress the crimes of their nation or conveniently place all the blame on a few dead men such as Hitler, Himmler, and Goebbels. The crimes of the Third Reich are bigger than any one person or any handful of perpetrators; they were crimes only an entire nation is capable of committing. Ehrlinger should have been executed or sentenced to life in prison for the 1,150 lives he and his command had executed in Latvia. Perhaps all 250,000 detained Nazis should have been removed from German society through imprisonment, expulsion, or execution, but Germany's guilt would have remained nonetheless. The Nazi regime did not come to power through a coup led by a radical minority, but was chosen by the German people.

In the 1960s, the first generation of post-war, West Germans confronted this history by asking the older generation, "What did you do during the war?" A few high ranking Nazis were put on trial, but most were simply identified and never prosecuted, much like the men of the

¹¹⁶ For the fates of these men after 1945, see Appendix 1A.

RSHA. This process of identifying and making publically known how many former Nazis were still a part of West German society was a first and difficult step in coming to terms with the nation's past. Following reunification with East Germany and the fall of the Berlin wall, the process of coming to terms with the past gained momentum in the unified state as citizens revisited questions of national identity. Open dialogues on national guilt, German identity, and the building of memorials in Berlin symbolized progress made. As Germany peeled back the layers of its historical conscience, researchers rediscovered the physical remains of the RSHA beneath the Cold-War layer of Berlin's history. The foundation blocks of the RSHA are currently on display as a part of the free exhibit *Die Topographie des Terrors*, displaying not only the structural architecture of a totalitarian state, but also the names and faces of its architects.

Appendix 1A: Glossary of Personnel¹¹⁷



Reinhard Heydrich: Born on March 7, 1904 in Halle, Germany.

- Came from a middle class family; Father ran the local, music conservatory and raised his children to be musicians. Heydrich excelled at piano and violin.
- Joined a Freikorps in March 1919 at the age of 15, and a civil defense formation the following year.
- Entered the German Navy in 1922 to pursue a career as an officer.
- Joined Himmler's fledging SS in 1931 as his deputy and head of the SD
- Made Chief of the SD and SiPo on June 26, 1936
- Chief of the RSHA on September 27, 1939
- Died on June 4, 1942 following and assassination attempt in Prague.



Emil Augsburg: Born in Łódź in 1904 to a middle class, *Volksdeutsch* family

- Raised to speak German, Polish, and Russia
- Attended the University of Leipzig to study law and worked as an editor for its publishing house.
- Earned his PhD in 1934, which focused on the Soviet Press, and entered the *SD-Ausland* the same year.
- Entered the RSHA as part of Office VII Research division (the library).
- Given command of *Sonderkommando Moskau* : specialized in the liquidation of Soviet Officers
- Worked for the American OSS and CIC (Counter-Intelligence Committee) from 1946-1948 as a specialist on Soviet intelligence; never put on trial.
- Believed to have died in 1981



Werner Best: Born July 10, 1903 in Darmstadt, Germany to a middle class family

- Arrested during the French occupation of the Ruhr in 1923 for subversive activity, but was later released.
- Attended Heidelberg University for both Undergraduate and Doctoral studies in law: He wrote his thesis in 1927 on European Tariff law.
- Joined the SS and SD in 1931 as Heydrich's Deputy
- As Chief of SD forces in Denmark in 1942, he tried to implement the final solution with little result due to the resistance of the Danish People.
- Werner Best was never tried in Germany, but did testify on behalf of Six and Ohlendorf during the Nuremberg trials. Best always asserted his role as 'legal advisor' and that he never knew of the mass killings, but thought the Jews were being expelled eastward. Investigations by West German Authorities in the sixties suggested that he had a much larger role as an organizer, who provided *völkisch* legal justification for mass murder, but Best was considered to be in too poor of health to stand trial, and lived in Germany until 1989.



Erich Ehrlinger: Born October 10, 1910 in Baden-Württemberg to a middle class family

- Entered the University of Tübingen in 1928 to study law, but briefly left to join the SA in 1930. Returned to finish his studies in 1932.
- Left his career in law to join the SS in 1935 and was selected for service in the SD.
- Gained experience as a Sonderkommando leader in the Sudetenland and Austria.
- Given command of Sonderkommando 1b and is held responsible for 1,150 executions in Latvia, and hundreds more in the Ukraine.
- Promoted to head of Office III of the RSHA in 1944.
- He went into hiding under an assumed name after the war, but was denounced by his ex-wife in 1952. Not arrested until 1958, he was sentenced in 1961 to twelve years in prison for 1,045 counts of being an 'accomplice to murder,' but only served four. He died in 2004 in Karlsruhe, Germany.

Source: Public Domain

¹¹⁷ The information in this glossary was compiled from multiple sources on the RSHA



Helmut Knochen: Born on March 14, 1910 in Magdeburg, Germany to a middle class family

- Studied German, English, and Physical Education at Leipzig from 1930-34.
- Joined the Nazi party in 1932 and completed his dissertation in 1935 at Göttingen University on the English dramatist, George Coleman. Brought into the SS and SD by Franz Six in 1936.
- Appointed chief of SD and SiPo forces in Paris in June, 1940. He was responsible for the implementation of the final solution in Paris and then all of occupied France in 1942 (was a part of Office VI SD-*Ausland* of the RSHA)
- In 1946, Knochen was sentenced to death for ordering the execution of a British paratrooper, but was then extradited to France where he was also sentenced to death in 1954. His sentence was commuted to life-imprisonment in 1958, but given amnesty in 1962, where he returned to Germany and worked as an insurance salesman.
- He died in 2003.



Otto Ohlendorf: Born February 7, 1907 in Söhlde, Germany to a middle class family

- Joined the Nazi Party in 1925 and the SS in 1926, before even Himmler.
- Studied economics at the University of Leipzig from 1928 to 1932.
- Earned his Doctorate in law in 1936; the same year he joined the SD.
- Head of Office III SD-*Inland* at the RSHA's inception
- Appointed head of Einsatzgruppen D in the Ukraine for much of the war.
- Ohlendorf was tried at Nuremberg and he, like most of the defendants, tried to argue for his innocence, based on that the fact that he was only following orders. The tribunal did not find it convincing and found him responsible for the deaths of 90,000.
- Ohlendorf was executed by Hanging on June 8, 1951: the only one to be executed of this group.



Source: Public Domain

Walter Schellenberg: Born January 16, 1910 in Saarbrücken, Germany to a middle class family

- Studied Law at the University of Bonn; joined the SS in 1933 and was recruited for the SD in 1934.
- Became a specialist in counter-espionage in the SD-*Ausland* and was made chief of Office VI SD-*Ausland* of the RSHA on June 22, 1941.
- Fancying himself a 'James Bond,' type of spy, Schellenberg travelled across Europe and Africa, taking part in numerous espionage-related projects.
- Although recognized by a military tribunal as being fully aware and even contributing to the mistreatment and mass murder of Soviet POWs, he was only sentenced to six years in prison and served only two, after being released early for poor health.
- He died of Liver cancer in 1952 after completing his memoirs in Italy.



Source: Public Domain

Franz Six: Born August 12, 1909 in Mannheim, Germany to a middle class family.

- Studied philosophy and history at the University of Heidelberg from 1929 to 1934, completing both his undergraduate and doctoral studies.
- Joined the Nazi Party in 1930 and the SA in 1932.
- He was a member of the NSStB during his studies in Heidelberg, where he met Werner Best, who was influential in his recruitment to the SS and SD in 1935.
- He was Professor of History at Berlin University, chief of Office VII Ideological Research, and later of Office II Administration and Law at the RSHA during the War years.
- Involved in various SD operations before and during the War, Six only received a twenty-year sentence due to a lack of evidence directly linking him to the killings; evidence that would resurface later in the form of testimonies from other perpetrators in his unit. His sentence was twenty-years in prison, but was released in 1951 after only serving five years, and worked the rest of his life as an advertising executive for Porche until his death in 1975.

Appendix 1B: Glossary of Terms

SS: *Schutzstaffel* (Protection Squad) - An elite corps of the Nazi Regime led by Heinrich Himmler after 1929.

SA: *Sturmabteilung* (Assault division) - An essential private army of the Nazis used heavily in street battles during their rise to power and led by Ernst Röhm; subsumed into the SS after *the Night of the Long Knives* and the assassination of Ernst Röhm.

SD: *Sicherheitsdienst* (Security Service) - Formed in 1931 by Reinhard Heydrich at the behest of Himmler to form an elite, intelligence gathering service.

SiPo: *Sicherheitspolizei* (Security Police) - Formed in 1936 by Himmler and placed under the leadership of Heydrich, it contained the infamous *Gestapo* (Secret Police) and the *KriPo* (Criminal Police).

RSHA: *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* (Reich Main Security Office) - Created on September 27, 1939, it was an amalgamation of the offices of the SD and SiPo, as well as creating few new offices as well. It was vital for the close coordination, cooperation, and necessary planning for units, such as the *Einsatzgruppen*, and the implementation of the Final Solution later in the war.

Ausland: Abroad or foreign

Einsatzgruppe (Task force): An invention of the RSHA and whose members were recruited from the SiPo and SD, these units were integral to carrying out operations of high ideological importance, especially on the eastern front, such as the execution of ideological enemies (Jews, Soviet Officers, Partisans, etc.) and securing vital documents from foreign archives. There were four during the Invasion of the Soviet Union: *Einsatzgruppe A, B, C, and D*.

Einsatzkommando and *Sonderkommando* (Operations unit and special unit): Both were subdivisions within a larger *Einsatzgruppe* and are essentially interchangeable. They refer to the same size task forces, which perform the same tasks. It was up to commander's discretion as to which term was used.

Freikorps: Paramilitary groups formed in Germany during the chaotic months after the End of the First World War to suppress communist forces. Although supporting the creation of the Weimar Republic, they were often politically aligned to the far-right.

Gauleiter: Regional leaders of the Nazi party in Germany

Gleichschaltung (Coordination): Nazi policy of 'coordinating' all aspects of German Society with Nazi ideology; it was successful to varying degrees.

Inland: Interior or domestic.

Kristallnacht (Night of Broken Glass): A nation-wide Pogrom against its Jewish citizens, organized by the Nazi Regime that occurred November 7-9, 1938.

Machtergreifung (Seizure of Power): Term used to refer to the Nazi seizure of Power on January 30, 1933.

Mitläufer (fellow travelers): Term used to refer to those in Nazi Germany who went along with Nazi policies and made no effort to resist.

NSDStB: *Nationalsozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund* (National Socialist German Students League) - A nation-wide, Nazi Student organization founded in 1926.

NSSStB: *Nationalsozialistischer Studentenbund* (National Socialist Students League) – A Nazi Student organization specific to Heidelberg University; also founded in 1926.

Schreibtischtäter: Literally, ‘desk criminal.’

Staat: State

Stabswache: Headquarters‘ guard

Stosstrupp: Strike force.

Täter: Perpetrator, culprit, or criminal

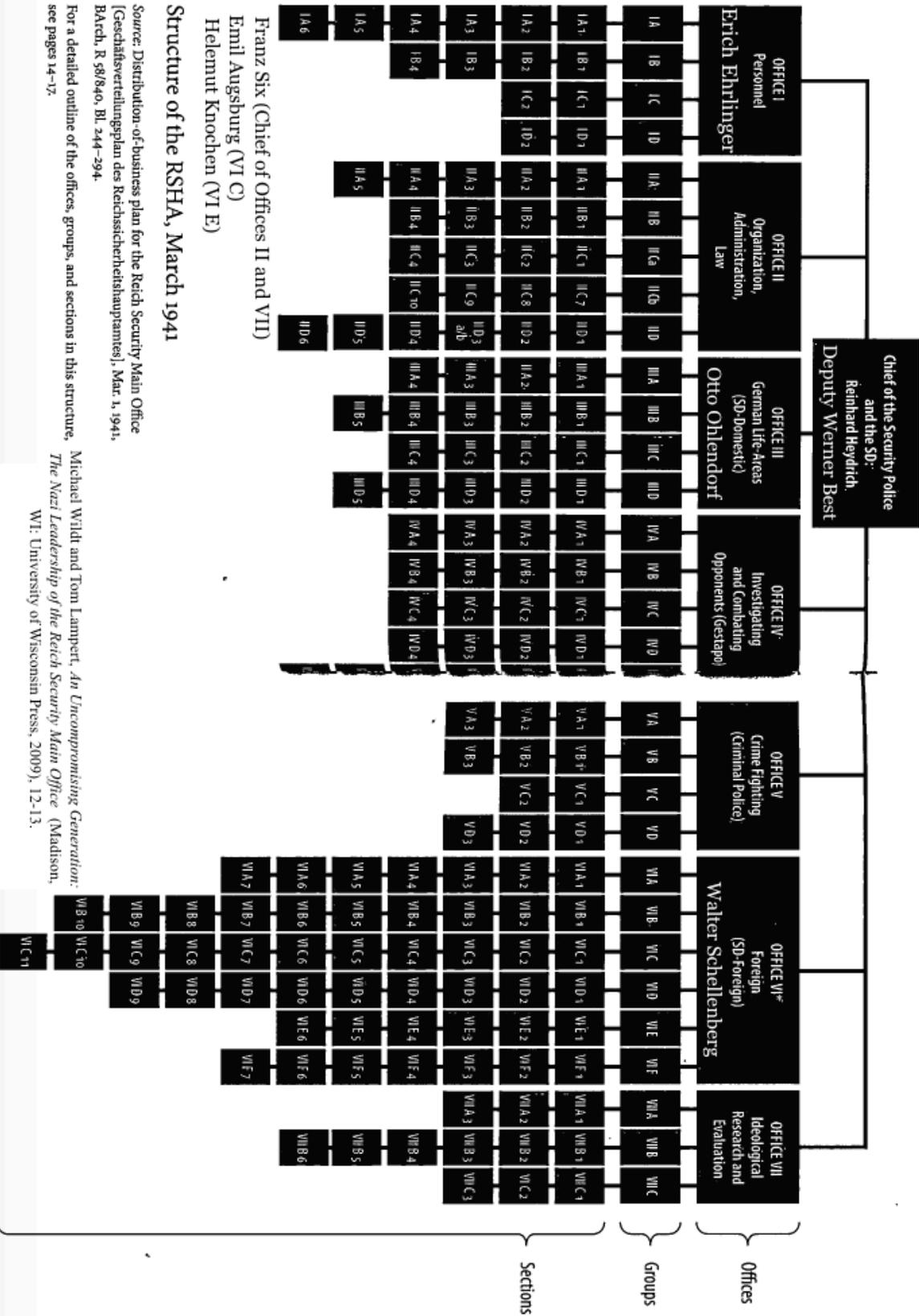
Volk (A people or nation): Within the context of this study, the term refers to the Nazi ideal of a racially, ideological ‘healthy,’ German nation.

völkisch (ethnic/ national): An adjective describing ideas or actions that fit within Nazi conceptions of the German ethnicity or nation.

Volksdeutsch (Ethnic German): Refers to ethnic Germans living outside of German speaking lands.

Wannsee Institute: An organization founded in 1937 in Wannsee, a suburb of Berlin that specialized in surveillance, research, and analysis of the Soviet Union.

Appendix 2B: Chart of the RSHA



Source: Distribution-of-business plan for the Reich Security Main Office [Geschäftsverteilungsplan des Reichssicherheitshauptamtes], Mar. 1, 1941, BArch, R 98/840, Bl. 244-294.

For a detailed outline of the offices, groups, and sections in this structure, see pages 14-17.

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