

## 20.2 NAZI SS Officers

Himmler was head of the SS (Schutzstaffel or "Protection Echelon"), the elite militia of the NAZI party used to intimidate and coerce. In the following document, he lays out the SS role and the code of behavior expected of them. *Source: Heinrich Himmler, "Speech to SS Officers, 1943," in A Holocaust Reader, ed. Lucy Dawidowicz, (New York: Berman House, 1976), pp. 130–35; reprinted in Reading the Global Past: Selected Historical Documents, vol. II, ed. Russell J. Barber, Lanny B. Fields, Cheryl A. Riggs, (Boston: Bedford Books, 1998), pp. 145–47.*

... In 1941 the Führer attacked Russia. That was, as we probably can assert now, shortly—perhaps three to six months—before Stalin was winding up for his great push into Central and Western Europe. I can sketch this first year in a very few lines. The attack cut through. The Russian army was herded together in great pockets, ground down, captured. At that time we did not value this human mass the way we value it today, as raw material, as labor. In the long run, viewed in terms of generations, it is no loss, but today, because of the loss of manpower, it is regrettable that the prisoners died by the tens and hundreds of thousands of exhaustion, of hunger....

### GOOD NATURE IN THE WRONG PLACE

It is a basic mistake for us to infuse our inoffensive soul and feeling, our good nature, our idealism, into alien peoples. This has been true since the time of Herder, who must have written *Stimmen der Völker* in a boozy hour,<sup>1</sup> and who thereby brought such immeasurable sorrow and misery on us later generations. This has been true since the case of the Czechs and Slovenes, to whom, after all, we gave their sense of nationality. They themselves were not capable of achieving it; we invented it for them.

One basic principle must be absolute for the SS man: we must be honest, decent, loyal, and comradely to members of our own blood and to nobody else. What happens to the Russians, what happens to the Czechs, is a matter of total indifference to me. What there is among the nations is the way of good blood of our kind, we will take for ourselves—if necessary, by kidnapping their children and raising them among us. Whether the other nations live in prosperity or croak from hunger interests me only insofar as we need them as slaves for our culture; otherwise, it does not interest me. Whether 10,000 Russian females drop from exhaustion while building an anti-tank ditch interests me only insofar as the anti-tank ditch gets finished for Germany's sake. We shall never be brutal and heartless where it is not necessary—obviously not. We Germans, the only people in the world who have a decent attitude toward animals, will also take a decent attitude toward these human animals. But it is a crime against our own blood to worry about them and to give them ideals that will make it still harder for our sons and grandsons to cope with them. If someone were to come to me and say, "I cannot build the anti-tank ditch with women or children; it is inhuman, they will die in the process," then I would have to say, "You are a murderer of your own blood, for if the anti-tank ditch is not built, German soldiers will die, and they are sons of German mothers. They are our own blood." This is what I want to instill into the SS and what I believe I have instilled into them as one of the most sacred laws of the future: Our concern, our duty is to our people and our blood; it is for them that we have to provide and to plan, to work and to fight, and for nothing else. Toward anything else we can be indifferent. I wish the SS to take this attitude in confronting the problem of all alien, non-Germanic peoples, especially the Russians. All else is just soap bubbles, is a fraud against our own nation and an obstacle to the earlier winning of the war....

## FOREIGNERS IN THE REICH

We must also realize that we have between six and seven million foreigners in Germany, perhaps even eight million by now. We have prisoners in Germany. They are none of them dangerous so long as we hit them hard at the smallest trifle. Shooting ten Poles today is a mere nothing when compared with the fact that we might later have to shoot tens of thousands in their place, and that the shooting of these tens of thousands would also cost German blood. Every little fire will immediately be stamped out and quenched and extinguished; others—as with a real conflagration—a political and psychological fire may break out among the people.

I do not believe the Communists could risk any action, for their leading elements, like most criminals, are in our concentration camps. Here something needs saying: After the war it will be possible to see what a blessing it was for Germany that, regardless of all humanitarian sentimentality, we imprisoned this whole criminal substratum of the German people in the concentration camps; and for this I claim the credit. If these people were going about free, we would be having a harder time of it. For then the subhumans would have their NCO's and commanding officers, they would have their workers' and soldiers' councils. As it is, they are locked up, and are making shells or projectile cases or other important things, and are very useful members of human society....

## THE EVACUATION OF THE JEWS

I also want to make reference before you here, in complete frankness, to a really grave matter. Among ourselves, this once, it shall be uttered quite frankly; but in public we will never speak of it. Just as we did not hesitate on June 30, 1934, to do our duty as ordered, to stand up against the wall comrades who had transgressed, and shoot them,<sup>2</sup> so we have never talked about this and never will. It was the tact which I am glad to say is a matter of course to us that made us never discuss it among ourselves, never talk about it. Each of us shuddered, and yet each one knew that he would do it again if it were ordered and if it were necessary.

I am referring to the evacuation of the Jews, the annihilation of the Jewish people. This is one of those things that are easily said. "The Jewish people is going to be annihilated," says every party member. "Sure, it's in our program, elimination of the Jews, annihilation—we'll take care of it." And then they all come trudging, 80 million worthy Germans, and each one has his own decent Jew. Sure, the others are swine, but this one is an A-1 Jew. Of all those who talk this way, not one has seen it happen, not one has been through it. Most of you must know what it means to see a hundred corpses lie side by side, or five hundred, or a thousand. To have stuck this out and—excepting cases of human weakness—to have kept our integrity, that is what has made us hard. In our history, this is an unwritten and never-to-be-written page of glory, for we know how difficult we would have made it for ourselves if today—amid the bombing raids, the hardships and the deprivations of war—we still had the Jews in every city as secret saboteurs, agitators, and demagogues. If the Jews were still ensconced in the body of the German nation, we probably would have reached the 1916-17 stage by now.<sup>3</sup>

The wealth they had we have taken from them. I have issued a strict order, Carried out by SS-Obergruppenführer Pohl, that this wealth in its entirety is to be turned over to the Reich as a matter of course. We have taken none of it for ourselves. Individuals who transgress will be punished in accordance with an order I issued at the beginning, threatening that whoever takes so much as a mark of it for himself is a dead man. A number of SS

men—not very many—have transgressed, and they will die, without mercy. We had the moral right, we had the duty toward our people, to kill this people which wanted to kill us. But we do not have the right to enrich ourselves with so much as a fur, a watch, a mark, or a cigarette or anything else. Having exterminated a germ, we do not want, in the end, to be infected by the germ, and die of it. I will not stand by and let even a small rotten spot develop or take hold. Wherever it may form, we together will cauterize it. All in all, however, we can say that we have carried out this heaviest of our tasks in a spirit of love for our people. And our inward being, our soul, or character has not suffered injury from it.

<sup>1</sup> Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744-1803), German philosopher and poet, has been called the father of German nationalism. As a champion of the idea of nationalism, he published an anthology of folk songs of various peoples called *Stimmen der Völker* (Voices of the Peoples).

<sup>2</sup> A reference to the purge of the SA [Sturmabteilung, “storm troopers,” the Nazi Party militia] and the murder of its top leaders by SS officers and men.

<sup>3</sup> The reference is to the time when the tide of World War I began to turn against Germany. German nationalists and rightists then attributed Germany’s losses and ultimate defeat to the *Dolchstoß*, the “stab in the back” by the Jews.

**1. For what audience was the document written?**

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**2. Why do you think this document was written?**

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