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Theodor Eicke and His Contributions to the Nazi Party: An Essay on the Development of the Nazi Concentration Camp System and SS-Totenkopfdivision

Erin Jackson
Lawrence University

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Theodor Eicke and His Contributions to the Nazi Party: An Essay on the Development of the
Nazi Concentration Camp System and SS-Totenkopfddivision

Erin Jackson, 2022

History Honors Thesis

Honor Thesis Advisor: Gregory D. Milano

I Hereby Reaffirm the Lawrence University Honor Code

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ABSTRACT

Fall Term 2021 I completed a research project describing a brief history of Dachau concentration camp, 1933-1945. This research project then morphed into my capstone, which described the development of the Nazi concentration camp system under Theodor Eicke. My capstone was based on how Eicke reorganized the concentration camp system from the early camp system to the camp system of World War II. This project will focus on Eicke himself, and how he shaped the Nazi Party. Eicke is responsible for many key identifiers of the Nazi Party: the concentration camp system, the punishment system within concentration camps, the usage of prisoner labor, Schutzstaffel [SS] formations and indoctrinations, and other organizational schemes of the Nazi Party. This essay will examine Eicke's background and his contributions to the Nazi Party as Dachau Camp Comandante, Camp Inspectorate, and Commander of the Waffen-SS Death Head Division, and how each of these components contributed to greater Nazi violence and the Final Solution.

I. INTRODUCTION

Is there any more of a potent symbol for the destructive power of modern state terror than the Nazi concentration camp? New methods of mass destruction, abuse, and extermination were driven by extreme nationalism, politics, and racism. During the reign of the Nazi Regime, millions of prisoners were taken to concentration camps and subjected to dehumanization, dirt, disease, hunger, and ruthless discipline. And while the concentration camps are known for their roles within the war, the general historiographies of World War II, the Holocaust, and the Nazi Regime often exclude the development of both the concentration camp system and the tactics of punishment used within the camps.

Understandably, research has focused overwhelmingly on the roles concentration camps played during the Holocaust. But that does not erase the fact that the first camp opened in 1933, years before Germany had begun to plan for World War II. Nazism's goal was to create a new Germany, with its longstanding intention of government takeover. However, the Nazi Regime could not gain complete control if opponents of National Socialism still made their voices heard. Thus, Dachau opened its gates March 22, 1933, to 100 political prisoners in protective custody.¹ Dachau would be the camp to set the course for the development, growth, and reconstruction of the early camp and punishment systems.

¹ Marcuse, Harold. *Legacies of Dachau: The Uses and Abuses of a Concentration Camp, 1933-2001*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2001.

Dachau was unique- it served many functions in the Nazi Regime. Dachau main camp and subcamps served as incarceration camps, as well as Schutzstaffel [SS] schooling and training centers. While not a death camp, at least 28,000 prisoners died between 1940 and 1945 of disease, starvation, medical experiments, and euthanasia. No death count was taken between 1933 and 1940, so the exact death toll of Dachau prisoners will unlikely ever be known. The camp's location was also strategic. Munich at the time of Dachau's construction housed the Nazi Party Headquarters; the camp was a mere twenty-eight minutes away by car.

Dachau's historiographical content is mostly composed of its functions during WWII. However, the story of Dachau's origins and its contributions to the Holocaust during the pre-war era (1933-1939) is often excluded from the main narrative. In fact, the punishment system that was used to regulate the inhumane treatment of camp inmates was devised at Dachau during the pre-war period, by one of its early Commandants, Theodor Eicke. Eicke's work to make Dachau a showcase of National Socialist ideology would include the creation of the 'Dachau Model' regulatory system of camp life and punishments within camps.

Known for his brutality, Eicke would rise through the ranks of the Nazi Party until his death in 1943. Eicke is responsible for some of the most horrific identifiers of the Nazi Party, including the concentration camp system, the punishment system used within concentration camps, and for one of the most terrifying divisions of the the Waffen-SS (combat unit of the SS), the Totenkopf-SS. Eicke would begin his ascent at Dachau, where many of the key elements of the Holocaust were devised under Eicke's supervision.

Dachau, under Eicke, would see many phases of development before the beginning of World War II. What important elements of the Holocaust were devised at Dachau? How was the

early camp system and the punishment system reformed and later applied to all concentration camps? What was Eicke's personal role in the preparation and execution of the Holocaust? This paper will highlight important figures, legislations, and concepts of the Holocaust created at Dachau by analyzing primary sources such as documents and official Nazi orders, and secondary sources, such as historiographical monographs based on Dachau's history as well as examining the complex relationship between Dachau Concentration Camp, Theodor Eicke, and the Holocaust.

II. THEODOR EICKE: 1892-1933

Not much is known about Theodor Eicke's early life. He was born into a lower-middle class German family, the youngest of eleven children. He would drop out of school before completing high school to enlist in the German Army during World War I, serving both administrative and front line duties. Eicke would be awarded the German Iron Cross Second Class for his actions during the war. Afterwards, Eicke found sporadic work as a policeman, and would often be fired for his anti-republican political activities. Before the onset of the Great Depression in Germany in 1929–1930, the National Socialist German Workers' Party (Nazi Party) was a small party on the radical right of the German political spectrum. Eicke resented the Weimar Republic, which governed Germany from 1918-1933. He perceived the Republic to be weak, and resented the economic misery and national humiliation of Germany after the loss of World War I. Eicke grew increasingly impatient with the Weimar Republic's failure to manage the growing crisis, and would join the Nazi Party in 1928.²

² Holocaust Education and Archive Research Team. "Theodor Eicke: "Papa Eicke" of the Concentration Camps". *Key Nazi Personalities in the Camp System*. Accessed 11 November 2021.

Along with joining the Nazi Party, Eicke originally joined the Sturmabteilung, or the SA, lead by Ernst Röhm. He would leave the SA to join the Schutzstaffel [SS]in 1930. Here is when his career would begin its ascent. By 1931 Eicke would become the equivalent of a colonel; he was promoted to the rank of SS-Standartenführer by Heinrich Himmler, who was the leader of the SS from 1929-1945. However, in 1932, Eicke would be caught preparing pipe bombs to be used against political opponents in Bavarian Germany. He was given a two year prison sentence. Due to protection received from the Bavarian Minister of Justice Franz Gürtner, a Nazi sympathizer who would later serve as minister of justice under Adolf Hitler, Eicke was able to avoid his sentence and flee to Italy on orders from Heinrich Himmler.³

In March 1933, less than three months after Hitler's rise to power, Eicke returned to Germany. Upon his return, Eicke had political quarrels with Gauleiter (regional leader) Joseph Bürckel, who had him arrested and detained for several months in a mental asylum in Würzburg. During his stay at the mental hospital, Eicke was stripped of his rank and SS membership by Himmler for having broken his word of honor. Also during the same month, Himmler set up the first official concentration camp at Dachau. In June of 1933, after the mental asylum's director informed Himmler that Eicke was not "mentally unbalanced," Himmler arranged his release, paid his family 200 Reich marks as a gift, reinstated him into the SS, and promoted him to SS-Oberführer (equivalent to senior colonel). In the same month, Eicke would be promoted to Dachau Concentration Camp Comandante.⁴

³ Mann, Chris. *SS-Totenkopf: The History of the Third SS Division 1933-45*. Amber Books Limited. 2015.

⁴ Mann, *SS-Totenkopf: The History of the Third SS Division 1933-45*, 147.

Before Eicke, Hilmar Wäckerle served as the first comandante of Dachau. Wäckerle was incredibly violent towards prisoners. May 15, 1933, a Jewish legal intern arrived in Dachau and was beaten to death within three days of his arrival. In another example of his cruelty, Wäckerle ordered his men to lead four Jewish men outside of Dachau and shoot them in the surrounding woods, under the pretense that the men were escaping. One of the men survived his 5 gunshot wounds, and told the story to his doctors in Munich before passing away days later. With Dachau still under the Bavarian State Police control, Wäckerle was indicted on a murder charge.⁵ Upon this incident, Hitler decreed Dachau and all other concentration camps were not to be subjected to German law as it applied to German citizens⁶. Dachau, and all other concentration camps, would instead be under the authority of SS administrators alone. This set the precedent for Nazi behavior within the camps, as SS authorities had the total freedom to hand out punishments as they saw fit.

Eicke's work at Dachau would include the creation of the 'Dachau Model' punishment system, based on National Socialist ideology. He revised rules and regulations for camp life and announced them in October 1933, and the official order was issued in the summer of 1934. These rules would later act as the blueprint for the treatment of prisoners in all of the concentration camps during the entire duration of the Nazi Regime. In his order, Eicke states:

"It is left to every protective custody detainee to reflect on why he got to the concentration camp. Here he will be given an opportunity to change his inner attitude to nation and fatherland in favor

⁵ Marcuse, *Legacies of Dachau: The Uses and Abuses of a Concentration Camp, 1933-2001*, 23.

⁶ Megargee, Geoffrey P. "Dachau Maincamp System". *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos, 1933-1945, Volume 1*. Indiana University Press. 2009.

of a people's community on a National Socialist basis or else, if the individual prefers, to die for the dirty Second or Third Jewish International of a Marx or Lenin.

Order and Discipline:

Regardless of origin, status or occupation the prisoners are, without exception, in a subordinate position. Whether old or young, everyone has to get used to military discipline and order from the very first day on. All SS men, right up to the commandant of the concentration camp, are the superiors of the prisoners; their orders are to be followed at once and without argument.

Behavior in the Camp:

Huts and quarters may only be entered and exited by the prescribed entrances. Anyone who climbs through a hut window by day or night, gets on hut roofs without instruction, throws stones over the camp wall, leaves his hut during the night – between last post and reveille – will be fired on without warning.

Disciplinary and Penal Order:

Within the framework of the existing camp regulations the following penal regulations have been issued for the maintenance of discipline and order in the Esterwegen concentration camp.

Tolerance means weakness. Because of this realization merciless action will be taken whenever the interest of the fatherland requires. The decent misguided fellow German will not be affected by these penal regulations. The political agitators and subversive intellectuals, however, should know this: Watch out that you are not caught – else we will reach for your throats and silence you according to your own methods.

Anyone making political or inciting speeches for the purpose of agitation, rallies together with others for this purpose, forms cliques or drifts about, collecting, receiving, burying true or false reports for the purpose of enemy atrocity propaganda about the concentration camp or its installations, passing them on to outside visitors or others, smuggling them out of the camp in secret notes or in any other way or encouraging others to escape or to commit a crime will, according to revolutionary law be hanged as an agitator!"⁷

One stipulation in Eicke's October 1933 regulations for concentration camp prisoners was the obligation to work. By 1934, Dachau had its own bakery and meat processing plants, as

⁷ Eicke, Theodor. "Eicke Order to Camp SS, Summer 1934". *The Nazi Concentration Camps: Documents*. Accessed 13 January 2022. <http://www.camps.bbk.ac.uk/documents.html>

well as various workshops for specialized labor such as wood and metal working⁸. Eicke, in a separate order, states:

“Compulsory work:

Prisoners are, without exception, obliged to perform manual labor. Social position, profession and background are irrelevant. Anyone who refuses work, tries to evade it or claims to have physical infirmities or illnesses in order to do nothing will be regarded as incorrigible and will be called to account. The working hours throughout the camp will be determined exclusively by the camp commandant. The beginning and end of work will be indicated by hooters or by the workshop bell. With the commandant’s approval work may be required at any time over and above the prescribed working hours and on Sundays and public holidays, if the needs of the camp make it necessary. Prisoners who claim illness without cause or for trivial reasons and thereby attempt to evade work will be placed in the section for “punitive work”. Anyone wishing to be seen by the doctor must attend an examination the same day. Anyone the doctor judges to be capable of work will be given punitive work.”⁹

As for the treatment of prisoners, Eicke showed no mercy, and instructed his men to do the same. Dachau was heavily guarded by members of the Schutzstaffel stationed at the camp. Each offense committed by a prisoner had an exact consequence. Corporal punishment, beatings, solitary confinement, and the shooting of offenders were some of the consequences of those who were considered ‘agitators’, or anyone who refused to obey the newly issued regulations. Eicke coined the infamous motto “Arbeit macht frei” - work makes [one] free - which was inscribed on the gates of both Dachau and Auschwitz. However, most ‘work’ prisoners of Dachau faced were senseless tasks. One such task prisoners were forced to perform was pulling a huge cement “Jew and Bigshot Roller” around the camp. The purpose behind the grueling and humiliating tasks

⁸ Marcuse, 26.

⁹ Eicke, Theodor. “Camp Inspectorate Eicke on Compulsory Labor, Summer 1934”. *The Nazi Concentration Camps: Documents*. Accessed 28 February 2022. <http://www.camps.bbk.ac.uk/documents.html>

was to break down the spirits of the prisoners, and discourage them from breaking Dachau regulations.

Eicke was continuously improving Dachau by cracking down on the lack of organization left from his predecessor. During a visit to the camp on August 4th, 1933, both SS chief Himmler and Himmler's superior, Sturmabteilung [SA] chief Ernst Röhm, praised Eicke's work highly. This, of course, was before Eicke's declaration of reorganization in October, as Eicke was still assessing the state of affairs within the camp. Eicke also mentions the extensiveness of his own efforts during a 1936 self-assessment. Summarizing, Eicke states:

“The SS death head's formations were created from a corrupt guard detachment of about 120 men in Dachau in the fall of 1934...My men lived in drafty factory halls. Everywhere there was poverty and misery...I found disloyalty, embezzlement, and corruption. For those reasons I had to dismiss 60 men in only four weeks.”¹⁰

While a far cry from the common narrative of self-assured Schutzstaffel guards portrayed in the concentration camp historiography, Eicke's self-reflection is an accurate rendition of both the early phase of the camp system, and of how ambitious and opportunistic men used their energy to create the barbarous system that was firmly established by the time World War II began. But how was the Dachau Model spread? For that, we must return to Eicke.

III. CAMP INSPECTORATE EICKE, 1934-1939

Within a year of his appointment to Dachau, Eicke was promoted to the new position of “Inspector of the Concentration Camps and SS Guard Units' ” for the entire German Reich. Following this appointment, the guidelines Eicke had implemented at Dachau were applied to

¹⁰ Eicke, Theodor. *Konzentrationslager* (1936), quoted in Marcuse, Harold. *Legacies of Dachau: The Uses and Abuses of a Concentration Camp, 1933-2001*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2001. PP. 23.

other camps as well. Eicke's, Dachau's, and the entire concentration camp system's futures took an important turn with the events of June 30th, 1934, known as the "Night of Long Knives". On this night Hitler was able to neutralize the Sturmabteilung [SA], a paramilitary organization associated with the Nazi Party not apart of the German Army. It the only remaining Nazi Party formation not completely under Hitler's control. He ordered Himmler's SS to eliminate its leader Ernst Röhm, as well as other dissident and potential rival Nazi Leaders.

Röhm had increased the SA's size from 500,000 in 1933 to nearly 4 million and aspired to take over the German Army. In order to gain the support of the army for Hitler's impending purge of the SA, Himmler's men spread rumors that Röhm was preparing for an army coup. Officers also began to draw up lists on men who were too also be eliminated at the same time as Röhm. The actual purge would be carried out by Hitler's personal SS bodyguard regiment, but Eicke was instructed to have units of his guard troops from Dachau on standby at a junction nearby Munich, as a precautionary measure. Although Eicke and his men never received official orders that night, they executed seventeen SA leaders in Dachau. In his monograph, Marcuse writes that Eicke himself was likely the person who shot Röhm in his Munich jail cell the next day.¹¹

An important consequence of the Night of Long Knives was that Himmler no longer had a superior between himself and Hitler. Eicke was promoted to the position of Camp Inspectorate for his show of loyalty during the purge.¹² The official order came from Himmler, and was issued December 10th, 1934. The order states:

¹¹ Marcuse, 27.

¹² Marcuse, 27.

“With effect from 10.12.1934 the office of “Inspector of Concentration Camps” is established with residence in the office building of the Secret State Police [Gestapo] in Berlin, Prinz-Albrechtstr, (Ground floor, Rooms 30–34) and directly subordinated to me. Matters of organization, administration and economic management of the concentration camps hitherto dealt with by Office II 1 D of the Secret State Police are removed from it as from the date mentioned and transferred to the new office, whereas processing of material (political) matters of protective custody continue to come under Office II 1 D... The Camp Inspectorate is headed by SS Gruppenführer Eicke ...”¹³

Many of the ‘typical’ characteristics of the concentration camp system- camps of enormous size with hundreds of thousands of prisoners expanding across Europe; ruthless exploitation of prisoners in every means possible; lethal nature, with deadly diseases, executions, gruesome experiments and systematic killings- only emerged during the second world war (mainly from 1941-2 and onwards). The camps that are as old as the Nazi Regime itself, such as Dachau, played a prominent role in the development of the Third Reich. The camps established in 1933, streamlined in 1934, and expanded and remodeled in 1937 mirror the development and growth of the Nazi Regime itself. However, the crucial period of the formation of the camp system is often excluded from the historical narrative of concentration camps. Even in Marcuses’s monograph about Dachau, he spends little time on the early stages of Dachau. The majority of his work focuses on wartime uses of Dachau, and how the camp functioned after World War II.

¹³Himmler, Heinrich. “Himmler Orders the Establishment of the Camp Inspectorate, 10 December 1934”. *The Nazi Concentration Camps: Documents*. Accessed 13 January 2022. <http://www.camps.bbk.ac.uk/documents.html>

While the early camps have been largely overshadowed by the more evident horrors of larger camps developed in the war period, such as Auschwitz, it is important to remind ourselves that the wartime camps were only made possible by the development of the early camps of the Regime. By the time that Auschwitz was established in 1940, Dachau had already been in operation for more than seven years. The pre-war camps, however, were unlike the wartime camps: there were fewer camps with fewer prisoners, and death in the camps was an exception, not the norm. In Dachau, for example, it is estimated that over 40,000 prisoners died while incarcerated at the camp. By the beginning of World War II, about 500 prisoners had died at Dachau.¹⁴ Of those who lost their lives between 1933 and 1945, over one third died during the final six months of the war.¹⁵

Like the Regime they served, the camps were characterized by their adaptable nature. The early camps of the Nazi Regime were always in a state of change: in terms of function, organization, appearance, camp conditions and prisoner population. These rapid shifts within the early camps can be broken into three distinct stages, all occurring during the pre-war period. The first stage was the period of Nazi assumption of power; the period of the early camps (1933-4). The second was the unification of the concentration camp system (1934-7), and finally came the phase of expansion (1937-9) during the run-up to war.

Dachau concentration camp was built for the purpose of detaining political prisoners and enemies of the state. The early camps, including Dachau, were characterized by their lack of coordination with the unorganized violence taking place within their walls. Soon enough, a

¹⁴ KZ-Gedenkstätte Dachau. "Dachau Concentration Camp 1933-1945". *KZ-Gedenkstätte Dachau, Stiftung Bayerische Gedenkstätten*. Accessed 28 October 2021.

¹⁵ Megargee, "Dachau Subcamp System," 445.

bewildering array of concentration camps would be spread across Germany. These camps were established by various agencies of the state at local, federated, and regional levels. While the establishment of the early camps was often in collaboration with one another, there were some camps established in the spirit of competition. Local squads of Nazi storm troopers and protection squads would play leading roles in the establishment of these camps, and the lack of organization within the early formations of Nazi SA and SS squads was reflected within the early camps. Each camp differed in its appearance; structures, conditions, and spaces were unique to the regions where and the buildings of which the camps were constructed. Factories, pubs, and even structures from World War I were converted into concentration camps. Dachau itself was constructed from the remnants of a munitions factory destroyed during World War I.¹⁶

Now holding the title of Camp Inspectorate, Eicke had the power to completely reorganize the early camp system. The Gestapo (German Secret Police) was in charge of arrests, transfers, and releases regarding prisoners. The SS would come to rule the camps through Eicke's Inspectorate office in Berlin. During 1933-34, local, state, and provincial authorities were in charge of the individual camps in their jurisdictions. After the creation of Camp Inspectorate, these individual camps were closed down or coordinated through the SS.

SS coordination meant greater uniformity, with common rules, uniforms, and guards. Camps began to resemble each other in appearance as the SS developed its own ideal type of camp: barrack style camps that could be expanded to accommodate more prisoners. New camps being built after Eicke's appointment to Camp Inspectorate were moved away from public view, as opposed to the early camps, which were a collection of buildings often set up within close

¹⁶ Megargee, 442.

proximity to towns and cities.¹⁷ Once under SS control, the ‘Dachau Model’ of punishment was applied to all camps as well.

Once again, the coordination and reorganization of the early camps can be broken into three phases. The first phase (1933-1934) is characterized by the establishment of the early camp system. This period is also marked by the general disorganization of the concentration camps. The second phase (1934-1937) is the phase of consolidation. As soon as Eicke was promoted to Camp Inspectorate, the immediate closure and consolidation of early camps began. New camps were also constructed during this period, some of which would come to be cornerstones of the concentration camp system as war broke out. The third phase (1937-1939) is marked by the expansion of the camp system as war grows near. During this phase, the Nazi Regime begins to target their per-determined groups of undesirables.¹⁸

The most important event of phase one is the promotion of Eicke to Dachau Camp Comandante. Without this promotion, it is hard to say if the camp system would go on to be the feared system of unspeakable violence it is known for. Eicke, a brilliant organizer and leader, is solely responsible for the creation of the punishment system, born out of the general disorganization left behind by previous Comandante Wackerle. Eicke had clear intentions of running the camp the same way he ran his battalions during his time in the SS. The success of Dachau was widely recognized by his superiors. Eicke was able to further gain their trust and dependability, and his ascent into higher Nazi ranks is credited to his work at Dachau. Previously

¹⁷ Marcuse, 29.

¹⁸ Goeschel, Christian and Wachsmann, Nikolaus. “Before Auschwitz: The Formation of The Nazi Concentration Camps, 1933-9”. *Journal of Contemporary History*, July 2010, Vol. 45, No. 3, pp. 515-534. Sage Publications. 2010.

mentioned, the disorganization of the early camps mirrored the disorganization and the intent of the Nazi Regime. While the camps did serve their purpose (the detainment of political prisoners), the potential of the camps was still widely debated. In order for the camp system to gain stability, the Nazi Regime had to first gain civilian understanding and approval. Throughout 1933-34, the Nazi state took great care to control the information pertaining to the camps being made available to the public. In order for the camp system to grow and gain credibility, the public must have a positive reaction to the construction of new camps. Installing Eicke as Comandante led to positive changes of public opinion surrounding Dachau.¹⁹ After Eicke implemented his October 1933 decree or reorganization, and after prisoners were forced to supply labor, Dachau began to contribute to the economy of the township of Dachau (the town where the camp was located).

After Eicke's appointment to Camp Inspectorate, phase two began. Using the model of punishment he created at Dachau, Eicke began to reorganize the other existing early camps. Eicke also promoted these camps as economic ventures, to gain the same compliancy of the public he did after promoting Dachau the same way. The following years would be characterized by hectic activity, with Eicke overseeing takeovers and closures of old camps and the construction of new camps. This phase would end in 1937. By the end of the year, there were four central SS concentration camps, Dachau being one of them. Another camp, Lichtenburg, had also been constructed in 1933. The other two camps were new sites of terror. Sachsenhausen and Buchenwald were constructed in 1936 and 1937 respectively and were modeled on Eicke's

¹⁹ Marcuse, 26.

version of the SS concentration camp. At the end of 1937, the four camps combined held around 7,750 prisoners.²⁰

While the camp system had been clearly established and solidified by 1937, let us return to 1935. In this year, it was still unclear if the camp system would be a permanent institution. 'Protective custody' may have been necessary while the Nazi's were consolidating their power in phase one (1933-34), but after the 'Night of Long Knives' in 1934, that goal had been attained. During 1934, multiple high ranking government officials pushed Himmler to reduce the number of protective custody prisoners, which was disproportionately high in the Bavarian region. In Dachau, the numbers of prisoners had increased from 2,000 in June 1933 to 2,600 in December of the same year. Numbers had gradually fallen from 2,600 to 1,300 by November 1934. In a crucial meeting in February 1935, Himmler and Hitler approved plans to increase the size of guard detachment to the camps. Finances were also discussed, and Hilter decided that beginning April 1936, camps and their guard detachments would be financed out of the national budget.

The reasoning behind these two decisions are clear. At this point, the Nazi Party had begun longer-range preparations for war, and these decisions exemplify the particular purpose of developing their strategies. Himmler had argued two things- he showed how the camps could fulfill the Nazi Party's goal of improving the German people. On the other hand, the camps could prove useful against civil unrest, which Himmler expounded in the spring of 1935.²¹ The argument of camps aiding in preventing civilian unrest was hinged on the plans being drawn up

²⁰ Marcuse, 34.

²¹ Marcuse, 31.

for war, code-named Situation A. In order for the camps to be a reliable tool in the event of Situation A, the camp system had to be expanded and regularized. In February 1936, Gestapo chief Reinhard Heydrich began to compile names for the 'A List'. Names on this list were to be arrested and placed in 'protective custody' in the event of Situation A. By 1937, the list had 46,000 names.²²

This, of course, exceeded the actual and planned capacities of the concentration camps at that time. Himmler, Eicke, and the head of the SS administration Oswald Pohl began on their expansion plans. However, finances were an issue. While the national budget had paid the basic upkeep of camps and the guard salaries, individual German states were responsible for the new construction and administrative costs.

The three SS leaders compiled various solutions. The first project would be the construction of Sachsenhausen, near Berlin. Sachsenhausen would replace Oranienburg and Columbia House camps. To fund this, the three men sold the existing camp Esterwegen to the National Labor Service, a branch of the Ministry of Finance. After negotiations, Eicke was given about 500,000 Reichsmarks for the construction of the new camp. Another means of reducing costs was the use of camp inmates to draw construction plans and perform much of the construction labor. Organizing the use of prisoner labor would be Pohl's specialty.²³

The next project would be headed under Eicke. A new camp was to be built in the state of Thuringia, southwest of Berlin. However, instead of procuring means from the Reich ministries, Eicke went straight to Hitler for authorization. He received a loan from the national government

²² Marcuse, 32.

²³ Marcuse, 32.

and Hitler's approval. In his justification, Eicke argued that Thuringia would play a key role in 'Situation A' since it was located both in 'the Heart of Germany' and close to Czechoslovakia and Poland. Construction of Buchenwald began in June 1937, near Weimar.

The next major project, the reconstruction of Dachau, would mark the beginning of phase three. The costs were simply paid out of the national budget. Construction began in 1937 and would end in 1938. It was during this phase that Dachau would be remodeled into its characteristic appearance of a 250x600 meter rectangular enclosure. About a dozen one and two story stone barracks were torn down and replaced with thirty-four long wooden barracks in two columns. The barracks would lead to the roll-call square at the south end. The Nazis were quite proud of these new camps and the role they played in the construction of their ideology. In 1938 it was suggested that whole groups of government officials take tours of the concentration camps, just as school groups would tour museums on a field trip. Dachau would double in capacity, from 2,700 to 6,000 inmates.²⁴

These three camps, Dachau, Buchenwald, and Sachsenhausen, as well as Lichtenburg, would become the mainstays of the concentration camp system as the early camps were transformed into a more expansive, regulated system. Three more camps would be added before Hitler triggered World War II in September 1939. Flossenburg was constructed between Nuremberg and the Czech border in April 1938. Mauthausen was added in Austria in July 1938, and Ravensbrück constructed north of Berlin in May 1939. Ravensbrück is particularly

²⁴ Megargee, 433.

interesting, as it was exclusively for female prisoners. Mauthausen and Flossenburg were located at large granite quarries so that prisoner labor could be used for the economic benefit of SS.²⁵

Prisoner numbers also began to increase sharply, as the concentration camps came to play a more prominent role in the escalating Nazi war on social and racial outsiders. By the end of June 1938, the SS camps held around 24,000 prisoners, following the nation-wide police raids. Targeted individuals included beggars, the homeless, petty criminals, professional criminals, and ‘a-socials’. Social outsiders had been taken to camps since 1933, but only in this phase were they detained in large numbers, now outnumbering political prisoners. With the massive influx of prisoners, and the expansion of the camp system, prisoners faced the most brutal conditions yet. Death rates in the camps began to soar due to mass overcrowding, deprivation, and extreme abuse. Once established, the camp system rapidly expanded until the outbreak of war.

The largest influx of Jewish prisoners to the concentration camp system would come after Kristallnacht, or the Night of Broken Glass. The violence was instigated primarily by Nazi Party officials and members of the Sturmabteilung [SA] and Hitler Youth. In its aftermath, German officials announced that Kristallnacht had erupted as a spontaneous outburst of public sentiment in response to the assassination of Ernst vom Rath. Vom Rath was a German embassy official stationed in Paris. Herschel Grynszpan, a 17-year-old Polish Jew, had shot the diplomat on November 7, 1938.²⁶

²⁵ Marcuse, 34.

²⁶ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington DC. “Kristallnacht” *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Encyclopedia*. Accessed 02 March 2022. <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/kristallnacht>

At 1:20 a.m. on November 10, Reinhard Heydrich sent an urgent telegram to headquarters and stations of the Reich. SA and Hitler Youth units throughout Germany and its annexed territories engaged in the destruction of Jewish-owned homes and businesses. Members of many units wore civilian clothes to support the fiction that the disturbances were expressions of ‘outraged public reaction’.

Despite the outward appearance of spontaneous violence, and the local cast which the destruction took on in various regions throughout the Reich, the central orders Heydrich relayed gave specific instructions: the "spontaneous" rioters were to take no measures endangering non-Jewish German life or property; they were not to subject foreigners (as well as Jewish foreigners) to violence; and they were to remove all synagogue archives prior to vandalizing synagogues and other properties of the Jewish communities, and to transfer that archival material to the Sicherheitsdienst [SD, the Security Service]. The orders also indicated that police officials should arrest as many Jews as local jails could hold, preferably young, healthy men.²⁷

As the carnage spread, units of the SS and Gestapo, following Heydrich's instructions, arrested up to 30,000 Jewish males and transferred most of them from local prisons to Dachau, Buchenwald, Sachsenhausen, and other concentration camps. Dachau received more than 11,000 of the 30,000 incarcerated.²⁸ Significantly, Kristallnacht marks the first instance in which the Nazi regime incarcerated Jews on a massive scale simply on the basis of their ethnicity. Hundreds died in the camps as a result of the brutal treatment they endured. Most did obtain release over the next three months on the condition that they begin the process of emigration

²⁷ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington DC. “Kristallnacht.”

²⁸ Megargee, 444.

from Germany.²⁹ The effects of Kristallnacht would serve as a spur to the emigration of Jews from Germany in the months to come.

Also notable, the SS began to venture from police and military activities to economic ones. Dachau township would be transformed into a large SS complex. The reconstruction project of Dachau concentration camp had moved the mayor of Dachau township into action. He asked Oswald Pohl, head of the SS administrative office, to support the selection of Dachau township as the site for the new SS complex as this would greatly improve the economic capabilities of the township. On March 22, 1939, exactly six years after the opening of Dachau concentration camp, a document granting official approval was signed.³⁰

Dachau township thus gained four major SS installations within the large camp complex: the 'protective custody' prison (the concentration camp proper), the barracks of the SS guard regiment, an SS training camp, and the barracks of the SS motorcycle battalion "N". Dachau township would transform once more during the war, as new SS hospitals, factories, and offices were added. After the declaration of war, Hitler's conquest of Europe forged its own economic course.

IV. DEVELOPMENT OF THE SS-TOTENKOPF

The SS Totenkopfdivision was one of the original three Waffen-SS field divisions created with Hiler's approval in the autumn of 1939. Appropriately, the Totenkopfdivision was born

²⁹ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington DC. "Kristallnacht."

³⁰ Marcuse, 34-5.

officially on the grounds of Dachau concentration camp, where Eicke's true reign of terror had begun. In its original form, the Totenkopf was largely the product of the prewar concentration camp system, which by 1939 had been refined into the wartime version of the camp system most are familiar with. The founder, organizer, and commander of the Death Head Division until his death in combat in Russia in February 1943 was Theodor Eicke.

While serving as Dachau Camp Comandante and Camp Inspectorate, Eicke would indoctrinate many of the of the key SS officers involved in the genocide of European Jews and other minority groups targeted by the Nazis. While in office of Camp Inspectorate, Eicke also had the formidable task of recruiting, equipping, and training the subsequently designed SS Death Head Division units that would guard the concentration camps. With responsibility over the entire camp system, Eicke would implement his 'Dachau Model' over the entire camp system. He was primarily based in office in Berlin, but often frequented the camps that were his personal projects- Dacahu, Buchenwald, Sachsenhausen, and Mauthausen.

With war recently declared, Eicke was now given the opportunity to broaden his SS career. In October of 1939, Himmler picked Eicke to command one of the three SS divisions authorized by Hitler for the anticipated campaign against western powers. Himmler transferred seven thousand men from duty roles in concentration camps to service in the new Totenkopfdivision. In addition, Eicke was also allowed to bring his own men, including the majority of his commanders and SS battalion leaders, and most of his transport, supply, guard, and supply units employed under his Camp Inspectorate office. The rest of the Totenkopfdivision would be made of transfers from other SS and police agencies as well as volunteers.

The Death Head Division would earn its reputation as one of the most powerful units in the German armed forces based on the unit's efficiency in front line action. In the French assault of 1940 and the assault of the Soviet Union in the following spring, the Totenkopfdivision performed with distinction in several crucial battles. From June 1941 until May 1945, with the sole three month rest and rebuilding reprieve, the Death Head Division would fight exclusively against the Red Army. The Totenkopfdivision maintained a consistent and brutal combat record as one of the most determined and effective units to fight in the war.

The Death Head Division was extremely brutal, as expected for a unit of combat soldiers trained and led by Eicke. The Division's own records indicate Eicke's men zealously carried out Hilter's Commissar Order, or the order for the summary execution of all captured Political Commissars of the Red Army. The Totenkopfdivision also assisted in the selection and deportation of captured Russian soldiers to Germany for forced labor. Extremely unsettling is the fact that Totenkopf men also served with the infamous Einsatzgruppen. The Einsatzgruppen was the mobile killing units that operated behind the Russian front, and is responsible for the murder of nearly half a million Jews. In August of 1941, Einsatzgruppen A, whose territorial jurisdiction encompassed the Baltic States, began extensive killing operations in the rear area of Army Group North. 340 of the Einsatzgruppen's 990 men belonged to the Waffen-SS.

Far more extensive was the relationship between the concentration camp system and the Totenkopfdivision. Eicke, having organized both, had an intimate knowledge of the essential functions of both of his creations. In the spring of 1941, a permanent administrative home was established in Dachau camp for handling personnel, pay, and benefits of soldiers in the Death

Head Division. A wide variety of supplies would also be handled in Dachau. Totenkopfdivision records make numerous references to clothes supplied from the workshops at both Dachau and Oranienburg camps. In addition, the reserve units for the Death Head Division, who usually acted as guards within the concentration camp system, would be used as a source of replacements for the Totenkopfdivision and other SS field divisions. Among the several thousand SS officers who passed through the ranks of the Death Head Division during World War II, there were undoubtedly many who came from or were sent to some type of duty in the concentration camp system.

When it came to the formation of the Death Head Division, strict guidelines were implemented as to who could and who could not be enlisted. In March of 1936, Himmler approved Eicke's request to grow his unit from 1,800 men to 3,500. The following agreements were made between Eicke and Himmler: men should be between seventeen and twenty-two years old, at least five feet ten inches (178 cm), in good health and of a racially pure background. Such requirements were not uncommon in the early armed Schutzstaffel units.³¹ Eicke had considerable autonomy when it came to the training of his men, which he used to shape the unit into the elite formation he desired. According to Eicke, the concentration camps contained the most dangerous enemies of the Reich and that the early Death Head Division was tasked with guarding these enemies. This specially selected racially, politically, and physically group of men therefore were the elite within the elite. He created an atmosphere conducive to indoctrination in

³¹ Mann, 37.

political fanaticism. Dachau concentration camp would be instrumental in the training and indoctrination of young Totenkopfdivision men.

Dachau was officially cleared of prisoners at the end of September 1939. Dachau inmates were transferred to surrounding concentration camps as Dachau itself switched to a different function of operation. The camp was used until 1940 for the training of the SS Death Head Front Division. Prisoners were transferred to Buchenwald, Flossenburg, and Mauthausen camps, where their conditions of imprisonment dramatically worsened. Eicke would return to Dachau to ensure SS men were trained in the current 'political situation' as well as the key tenets of SS ideology. Topics included the history of the NSDAP and the 'spiritual revival' of the Aryan race.³² Training also included the discussion of the many enemies of National Socialism. Eicke constructed an order of reactionaries: Jewry, freemasonry, Marxism and Bolshevism, the Church, and others not racially pure. Anticlericalism was a particular teaching Eicke instilled in the Death Head's troops. SS men were vehemently encouraged to renounce the catholic church. It is interesting to note that Dachau would come to hold what was known as the Priest Barracks, which consisted of three barracks exclusively for clergymen. Most SS men did renounce catholicism, which enhanced their dependence on Eicke's teachings and the SS.³³

Ironically, Eicke's teachings are comparable to that of a preacher. Great importance was attached to the character and pastoral aptitude of these men. A Führer in the right-wing German paramilitary milieu had a status rather different from that of an Offizier (officer), with its class

³² Dillon, Christopher. *Dachau and the SS: A Schooling in Violence*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2015.

³³ Dillon, Christopher. *Dachau and the SS: A Schooling in Violence*, 82.

connotations, in the army. His authority was said to be conferred less by rank than by the character and charisma which pushed him to command through ‘self-selection’ (Führer-Selbstausslese). In an environment of voluntary discipline and allegiance, leadership was dependent upon assertion and affirmation: this goes some way to accounting for the restless dynamism of Nazi political culture. Men like Eicke, a successful SS recruiter in an era when competition for volunteer manpower was intense and opportunists nowhere to be seen, were revered after 1933. The ideal paramilitary Führer was gregarious and paternalistic, like Eicke, and inspired and developed his men. Like Hitler, whose virtues he transmitted, he had a sense of theater and the ability to connect and communicate. Eicke’s ‘Papa’ sobriquet was held very much to be a product of these twin processes of assertion and affirmation.³⁴

Eicke would later write to Himmler, stating:

“If my men call me Papa in their barracks, then this is the finest expression of a heart-felt community found only when a superior is constantly in touch with his men, when they know that he does not simply command but also cares about them.”³⁵

Eicke expected his own officers to follow suit and frequently reminded them that their relationship with their men should also be personal and emotional, and should extend beyond formal working hours:

“The good officer is also the good spirit of his unit . . . officers and their deputies must ensure always that they retain the loyalty and affection of their men . . . For an SS officer there is no such thing as hours on

³⁴ Dillon, 71.

³⁵ Eicke, Theodor. Quoted in Dillon, Christopher. *Dachau and the SS: A Schooling in Violence*. 71.

duty; he is always on duty and never stands alone, for he is to be there for his men from dawn till night.”³⁶

This cult of leadership ensured that officers in the Dachau Death’s Head units wielded great influence over the culture of the guards, and in turn the experiences of inmates. The process started at the top with the post of ‘Commander of the Guard Troops’. An example of this is the ascent of Max Simon, a man with similar viewpoints of order and leadership as Eicke. Simon was a very influential figure in the history of the Dachau guard units and the Waffen SS. Eicke’s annual appraisals of Simon identified him as just the man to drive the militarization of the Death’s Head units. His grasp of comradeship was exemplary, his rough manner balanced by an inner warm heartedness. In ideological matters, Simon was apparently fired by the ideas and objectives of the movement and prepared always to commit himself mercilessly to these goals. He was a key force in the militarization of the Dachau guard units, both inside and outside the camp.³⁷

In regards to training within the Dachau School, it was Simon’s intention that every guard platoon at Dachau would be led by an officer with the rank of Obersturmführer. A guard company, comprising three platoons, would be led by a Hauptsturmführer. This was still a work-in-progress as of September 1938, but without exception every platoon was commanded by an SS man of officer rank. With the responsibilities of guard leadership came financial reward. Even the lowest commissioned rank of Untersturmführer attracted monthly remuneration of at least 221 Reichsmark, a substantial increase on the top NCO pay set out previously. An

³⁶ Eicke, Theodor. Quoted in Dillon, Christopher. *Dachau and the SS: A Schooling in Violence*. 71.

³⁷ Dillon, 74.

Obersturmführer earned 311 Reichsmark per month and a Hauptsturmführer up to 420 Reichsmark, the level of a top civil servant. This was an appealing remuneration package for those personnel with the extensive army service that Himmler and Eicke were trying to recruit to the Death's Head units in the late 1930s. The rewards available to such volunteers, who could be commissioned directly upon enrollment, were extravagant and expeditious.

The Dachau School illustrates the emphasis in the Death's Head sentry formations on practical leadership and example, on ceaseless proactivity in personnel development. It was vital that officers were fully up-to-date on political issues and that they develop themselves intellectually. Every Friday evening between eight and ten Simon led 'ideological development' seminars for all officers. They were exhorted to lead as National Socialists rather than soldiers, with ideological guidance in no sense restricted to the nominal hours devoted to it in the training program. It was also deemed essential that all officers were present at ideological schooling sessions for enlisted men so they could tailor their leadership to the topics addressed. It was from this area of the Dachau School curriculum that the finer details of the guard 'worldview' were built. A minimum of two hours every week was devoted to intensive schooling, whether or not the guard platoon in question was on sentry duty. It was conducted by specialist Death Head 'schooling officers', tasked with training the new recruits. Eicke instructed them to divide the time between discoursing on the current 'political situation' and the key tenets of SS ideology. Topics included the history of the NSDAP and its struggle for power, its transformative impact on the people and state, and the 'spiritual revival' of the 'Aryan' race. Emphasis was laid on the

history of the SS as both ‘protective wall’ and shock troops of National Socialists and the front line soldiers in Germany’s military.³⁸

Finally, and perhaps most pertinent of all to concentration camp guards, they were to discuss the many enemies of National Socialism. These ran, in order, Jewry, freemasonry, Marxism and Bolshevism, the Church, and reaction in all its forms. Revolutionary anticlericalism was particularly fervent in the Death’s Head troops. Eicke devoted several pages of his April 1937 orders of the month to the Catholic Church and its ‘monstrous thirst for power’. Guards were vehemently encouraged to renounce Catholicism. Most did so, which can only have enhanced their cognitive dependence on the SS. By the end of 1939 80% of the Death’s Head personnel had no confessional affiliation, compared to 56% in the SS Verfügungstruppe and just 26% in the General SS.³⁹

Other training included weapons training, infantry tactics, and ‘household’ tasks. The evenings usually belonged to the recruits. Weapons training was based on the familiarity of a gun. Recruits would strip, clean, and reassemble their rifles to the point of being able to do so blindfolded. Lessons also included the clearance of jams and battlefield repairs. Practical instruction would take place on rifle ranges. After reaching proficiency in weapons training, Death Head recruits were taught infantry tactics. An emphasis was placed on aggression, as a means to quickly overcome enemy resistance and minimize friendly casualties. Unarmed combat was taught first, and was followed by bayonet fighting. Sports were also a part of training, used

³⁸ Dillon, 81.

³⁹ Dillon, 81-2.

for both recreational purposes and to increase strength, endurance, and stamina. Household chores consisted of cleaning barracks, and pressing and repairing uniforms.⁴⁰

V. ACTIONS OF SS-TOTENKOPF DURING WORLD WAR II

The first German campaign of World War II was crucial in the shaping of the Death Head Division and preparing the unit for conversion to full divisional status. Six days after the beginning of the Blitzkrieg, Himmler designated three regiments of the Totenkopfdivision as Einsatzgruppen under Eicke's command. Based on their efficacy in the invasion of Poland, Hitler considered the Totenkopfdivision the perfect tool in implementing the liquidation of Polish leadership and intelligentsia. The regiments transferred to the Einsatzgruppen did not limit themselves to just Polish leadership, and extended such treatment to other groups that did not fit into Nazi ideals.⁴¹

The transferred Totenkopfdivision regiments began to arrest and shoot large numbers of 'suspicious elements, plunderers, insurgents, Jews, and Poles'. Synagogues and Jewish businesses were burnt, and Jewish community leaders were rounded up and executed. Two Totenkopf battalions killed some 800 Poles within two days.⁴² Political leaders, clergy, teachers, and civilians would meet the same fate. Also targeted were those with physical and mental disabilities, which would eventually lead to the T4 Euthanasia Program.

⁴⁰ Mann, 39.

⁴¹ Mann, 67-8.

⁴² Mann, 68-9.

With the success in Poland, Hitler now turned to the creation of the Waffen-SS, which he would use as the combat branch of the Schutzstaffel. In the first week of October 1939, Hitler agreed to the formation of three SS divisions to make up the Waffen-SS. Eicke's paramilitary Death Head's were now divisionalized, and made up one of the three Waffen-SS divisions. Eicke based the Death Head division on traditional army lines. The Totenkopf's four infantry regiments were each split into three battalions each of four companies each. The artillery regiment was divided into three battalions: one heavy artillery battalion and two light artillery battalions. Each artillery battalion had three batteries each with four guns each. The engineer battalion and the tank destroyer battalion each had three companies. The reconnaissance battalion had two motorcycle companies and an armored car platoon. Lastly, the signals battalion into two companies: one handled telephone communications and the other radios.⁴³

Importantly, the Waffen-SS and its three original divisions were not a part of the Wehrmacht, or the German Army. The Waffen-SS acted as a paramilitary organization, with each divisional commander reporting to Heinrich Himmler. By the third week of October 1939, all Totenkopfdivision recruits had arrived in Dachau to undergo training, headed by Eicke. Division members would undergo training and indoctrination until being called for battle May 19, 1940. The Totenkopf would participate in the French campaign, and join the German Army in the south of France. The French campaign would prove that the Totenkopf, a division made up of concentration camp guards, could perform credibly enough to be considered a competent military formation.

⁴³ Mann, 71-3.

Eicke used the year in between the French campaign and the Russian campaign to strengthen the Death Head division. He trained his men as hard as ever, and also introduced an extensive program of political indoctrination. It contained the usual mixture of Nazi history and racial theory. During the French winter, the division switched to combat training specifically for the invasion of Russia. Exercises stressed fighting in forests and small villages, under harsh weather conditions. The grueling pace was kept up throughout the spring of 1941, even as other SS divisions were sent to Greece. After the surrender of the Greek Army, Hitler ordered the resumption of preparations for Operation Barbarossa. Eicke was instructed to have his men ready at a moment's notice, and was given instruction to move his men by train on May 23, 1941. The full division reached the Eastern Prussian border by the evening of June 9, and began to move towards Soviet occupied Lithuania.⁴⁴

June 22, 1941 began Operation Barbarossa. The Totenkopfdivision moved with the Wehrmacht before branching off to plug the gap left between Panzer Corp 56 and the 16th Army. The Totenkopf's reconnaissance division first made contact with Soviet forces June 27, which had begun to reform after the initial shock caused by the German Army. The division fought onwards, and eventually reached the Dvina river. There, the Totenkopf was assigned to the 56th Panzer Corps of the German Army. The group would move towards Lake Ilmen to cut off the Leningrad-Moscow rail line.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Mann, 91.

⁴⁵ Mann, 92-3.

July 5th, the Totenkopf and 56th Panzer Corps paused to regroup in preparation for the upcoming assault on the Stalin line. The assault opened July 6. During so, the Totenkopf, tasked with cutting off Soviet formations driven back by the 56th Panzer Corps, discovered the Russian fortifications were much stronger than expected. The Death Head's struggled against lines of bunkers, wire and minefields defended by Soviet troops. Losses were high, and most seriously, Eicke was was seriously injured. Close to midnight, Eicke's staff car ran over a mine. He shattered his right foot, and was removed to a rear hospital. Before removal, Eicke appointed Matthias Kleinheister-kamp, head of the 3rd Infantry regiment, commander of the Totenkopfdivision in his absence.⁴⁶

The Death Head division would advance to Lake Ilmen, Pola River, Demyansk, Lushno between 1941 and 1942. Eicke would return to command the Totenkopf in September 1941, 2 months after sustaining injuries in the July assault of Lake Ilmen. Throughout 1941-42, the German Army continued their advance to Moscow, where they would meet heavy opposition. The Russian troops, at the advantage, would push back German forces with fresh Siberian forces away from Moscow while also attacking German forces around Lake Ilmen. Eicke and the Totenkopf were largely responsible for the survival of the German pocket surrounding Demyansk, which had been constricted by Soviet forces. The Death Head Division would remain in Demyansk from February 1942 to October 1942, where the last remnants of the division were pulled from Russia. Hitler had ordered the complete rebuild of the Division in May.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Mann, 93.

⁴⁷ Mann, 107.

Eicke would begin rebuilding the division in June of 1942, as waves of his men were pulled from Russia. The last group would leave the Eastern Front by train in October. Totenkopf members would ride from Russia to Germany and then from Germany to Bordeaux, France. Eicke and his staff had already begun preparing for the new division. Hitler had already approved a new tank battalion, and expanded on the armored regiment. Training would be interrupted November 9, 1942, as the division was ordered to participate in the occupation of Vichy, France.⁴⁸ This was in response to the Allied invasion of North Africa, named Operation Torch. The division would remain on coral defense duty until December 18, when Eicke's pleas to return to training were finally accepted. A reserve infantry division of the German Army took over for the Totenkopf.

Eicke now had four weeks to train his division until dispatch to the Eastern Front. He drove his men from dawn until midnight, and made good use of the Eastern Front veteran, who instructed new recruits about Soviet military techniques and armored tactics. The division finally departed from Bordeaux to Russia, January 30, 1943. It took two weeks for the Totenkopf to travel across the Reich before arriving at Kiev. Upon arrival, Eicke was ordered eastwards to Poltava to join another of the original three Waffen-SS divisions, the SS-Verfügungs. The two Waffen-SS divisions would combine to form the 1st SS Panzer Corps.

The 1st SS Panzer Corps would join the 4th Panzer Army in the counteroffensive pincher movement of Dnieper, which Soviet forces had begun to push towards. Eicke's forces destroyed columns containing soldiers of the Soviet 6th Army, as well as Soviet T-34 tanks. The 1st

⁴⁸ Mann, 110.

Totenkopf regiment split from the rest of the group to cut off the northern route of Soviet retreat. The rest of the Totenkopf fanned out south and finished off the rest of Soviet resistance efforts. By March 1, it was all over. The 1st SS Panzer Corps and the 4th Panzer Army had destroyed the bulk of Soviet Guard Armies 6 and 1. 615 tanks, 400 artillery pieces, and 600 anti-tank guns were either captured or destroyed. 23,000 Russian soldiers were killed, while another 9,000 were captured.⁴⁹ The counterattack of Dnieper stabilized the German front in the Southern Soviet Union.

However, this massive German victory was not without cost. On the afternoon of February 26, 1943 as the Totenkopf was increasing strung along the southern steppe around Dnieper, headquarters lost contact with the Totenkopfdivision's panzer regiment. Unable to make radio contact, Eicke took off from the field headquarters in a single engine scout plane to see if the lost division could be located from the air. At about 4:30pm, Eicke's pilot spot the Panzer Regiment's tanks. What was not noticed, however, were the Soviet troops nearby. As the plane circled to land, the was met by a barrage of gunshots from the Soviet side, which tore the fragile plane apart. It crashed midway between Soviet and German sides, and immediate German attempts to recover Eicke's body failed in the face of Soviet fire.⁵⁰

At 5:15am the following day, an assault group drove the Soviet forces from their positions to recover the bodies of Eicke, his adjutant, and the pilot. Meanwhile, news had spread through the 1st SS Panzer Division and up the chain of command to Hitler. Eicke's death was

⁴⁹ Mann, 112.

⁵⁰ Mann, 113.

announced to the public March 1, 1943. A eulogy was given by Hitler, and later the same day a divisional funeral took place.⁵¹ Eicke was not a man genuinely liked by the SS and Nazi Party. However, his exceptional organizational talents and energy would be missed. Outside his immediate family, the only place he was genuinely mourned was the Totenkopfdivision. Totenkopf was his own creation, and it was shaped by his rigid personality and beliefs. His iron discipline and utter hatred of the enemy were all infused into his soldiers. He wore the same clothes, slept in the same bunkers and foxholes, and ate the same rations as his men. In his guidance, he received unquestioned loyalty. Despite his fanaticism, it is easy to see why he was referred to as 'Papa Eicke' by his men.

VI. CONCLUSION

Eicke was a driving force in the Nazi Party. He developed many key identifiers of the Regime: the concentration camp system, the system of punishment within the camps, the stipulation of prisoner labor within the camps, and the creation and development of the Totenkopfdivision. He was also known for his cruelty towards enemies of the Regime, and his strict indoctrination of his subordinates. His talent of organization led him to important roles within the Nazi Party, such as Comandante, Camp Inspectorate, and Commander of the Totenkopfdivision.

Eicke employed rigid discipline in all areas he was involved in, from the concentration camp system to the battlefield. What he lacked in formal training, he made up for in personal energy and effort. The fighting reputation of the Totenkopf was maintained throughout World

⁵¹ Mann, 113.

War II, even after his death in 1943. The horrific brutality of the concentration camp system is used as a somber symbol of state-sponsored modern terror.

Research and historiography surrounding the Nazi Regime focuses on political figures like Adolf Hitler and Heinrich Himmler. Research surrounding the concentration camp system overwhelmingly focuses on how the system function during World War II, and its functions within the Holocaust. Research surrounding the French Campaign and Operation Barbarossa focus on the German Wehrmacht. Yet, it is alarming that such a key figure to Nazi success is being excluded from the general narrative of Nazi history. Without Eicke, the camp system would not have developed into the murderous system it is known more. Without Eicke, German stability would not have been reached in the various thrusts of Operation Barbarossa, especially in the defenses of Demyansk and Dnieper.

Furthermore, the entire pre-war period can be broken down into three distinct phases of action: creation, reorganization and solidification, and expansion. In order for the Nazi Regime to reach the full potential of the concentration camps, the camp system underwent years of reform and reorganization. These camps would serve as models for what was to come. Also important was the public view and approval of the camps. As public support was gained, the camp system could move from the phase of creation onto the phase of solidification.

Today, the history concentration camps is told from a post-Holocaust perspective: mass murder in the gas chambers, pictures of heaps of dead bodies or starved, sickly survivors overshadow the pre-war years. A re-evaluation of the history of the pre-war period is much needed. This period is much more than a prelude to the Holocaust. It is a crucial phase of

transition, as the Nazi Regime under Hitler gained and consolidated power. The camp system took almost the entire pre-war period to develop, and the efforts of Theodor Eicke are glossed over in a few quick paragraphs that do not even begin to accurately portray his influence over the Nazi Regime.

The history of the Schutzstaffel too is often summarized quickly; its history missing the deeper levels of analysis needed to fully understand the relationship between the SS, concentration camps, and the Nazi regime as a whole. The SS mentioned in the historiography of the Holocaust only mention the roles of the SS guarding the concentration and extermination camps. While it is important to understand the perpetrator v.s. victim relationship between camp inmates and the SS guards, it is also necessary to view the perpetrator v.s. perpetrator relationship between the Nazi Regime and the SS; to examine this, an understanding of the Waffen-SS and its developers is necessary.

Theodor Eicke was key to the Holocaust, and German military feats in France and Russia. The exploration of his accomplishments is vital to a complete comprehension of Nazi history. However, an in-depth analysis of his accomplishments during his career as a devout Nazi are excluded from general historiographies surrounding the Holocaust and the Nazi Regime. His actions influenced the course of modern history. It is incredibly unfortunate that Theodor Eicke, and his role in contributing to the Nazi Regime, is considered not important enough to be put in our history textbooks.

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APPENDIX OF SUPPORTING FIGURES

Figure 1: Waffen-SS Ranks and Their English Equivalents [Tables].

SS-Schütze	Private
SS-Oberschütze	Senior Private, attained after six months' service
SS-Sturmmann	Lance-Corporal
SS-Rottenführer	Corporal
SS-Unterscharführer	Senior Corporal/ Lance Sergeant
SS-Scharführer	Sergeant
SS-Oberscharführer	Staff Sergeant
SS- Hauptscharführer	Warrant Officer
SS-Sturmscharführer	Senior Warrant Officer, after 15 years'
SS-Untersturmführer	Second Lieutenant
SS-Obersturmführer	First Lieutenant

SS-Hauptsturmführer	Captain
SS-Sturmbannführer	Major
SS-Obersturmbannführer	Lieutenant-Colonel
SS-Standartenführer	Colonel
SS-Oberführer	Senior Colonel
SS-Brigadeführer und Generalmajor der Waffen-SS	Major-General
SS-Gruppenführer und Generalleutnant der Waffen-SS	Lieutenant-General

SS-Obergruppenführer und General der Waffen-SS	General
SS-Oberstgruppenführer und Generaloberst der Waffen-SS	Colonel-General
Reichsführer-SS	No English Equivalent

Figure 2: Timeline of Event Discussed, 1892-1943.

1892: Theodor Eicke is Born in Hüdigen, in the then-German province of Alsace-Lorraine

1914-1918: World War I

1918-1933: Rule of Weimar Republic

1928: Eicke joins the Nazi Party by joining the Sturmabteilung (SA)

1930: Eicke transfers to the Schutzstaffel (SS)

1931: Eicke promoted to Standartenführer

1932: Eicke flees to Italy to avoid prison sentence

March 1933: Dachau Concentration Camp opens with Himmler Wäckerle as Comandante

March 1933: Eicke returns to Germany, is detained in a mental hospital

June 1933: Eicke reinstated into SS and promoted to SS-Oberführer, promoted to Dachau Camp Comandante

October 1933: Orders of revision of Dachau concentration camp rules and regulations announced

October 1933: Prisoners' obligation to work announced

June 30, 1934: Night of Long Knives

Summer 1934: Eicke's October Orders officially issued

December 10, 1934: Himmler announces Eicke's promotion to Camp Inspectorate

February 1935: Hilter and Himmler approve larger guard detachments to concentration camps

Spring 1935: Hilter begins planning for 'Situation A'

February 1936: Heydrich Reinhard begins 'A List'

March 1936: Himmler approves Eicke's request to grow Totenkopfverbände

1935-36: Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp Constructed

1937: Construction of Buchenwald Concentration Camp begins

1937-38: Dachau Concentration Camp remodeled

1938: Flossenburg and Mauthausen Camps constructed

November 10, 1938: Kristallnacht

1939: Ravensbrück Concentration Camp constructed

March 22, 1939: Dachau township approved to host SS complex

September 1, 1939: World War II begins with the invasion of Poland

September 1939: Dachau Concentration Camp cleared of prisoners, converted into SS-Totenkopfddivision training grounds

September 1939: Three regiments of the Totenkopf are transferred to the Einsatzgruppen in Poland

October 1939: Waffen-SS divisions created upon Hitler's approval

October 1939: Totenkopfverbände officially divisionalized into Waffen-SS SS-Totenkopfddivision

October 1939- May 19, 1940: Totenkopfddivision training at Dachau

May 19, 1940- May 23, 1941: Totenkopfddivision stationed in France

June 22, 1941: Operation Barbarossa begins

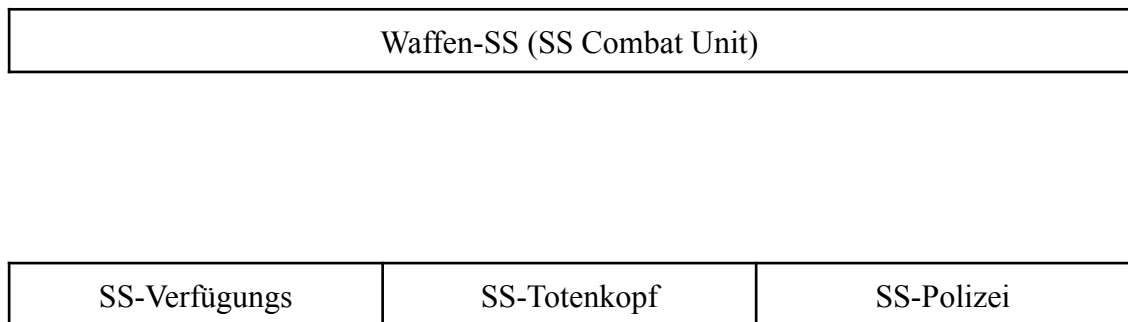
May 1942: Hitler orders the complete remodeling of the Totenkopfddivision

June 1942-January 30, 1943: Totenkopfddivision stationed in France

February 26, 1943: Theodor Eicke is killed in combat

March 1, 1943: Eicke's death announced to the public, counterattack of Dnieper ends

Figure 3: Waffen-SS Structure [Chart].



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SS-Totenkopf Infantry Regiments

4 Regiments

- 3 Battalions Each
- 4 Companies Each

SS-Totenkopf Artillery Regiment

1 Regiment

- 3 Battalions
 - 1 Heavy Artillery
 - 2 Light Artillery
- 3 Batteries W/ 4 Guns Each

SS-Totenkopf Battalions Not Apart of a Regiment

Engineer Battalion

3 Companies

Tank Destroyer Battalion

3 Companies

Reconnaissance Battalion

2 Motorcycle Companies

1 Armored Car Platoon

Signals Battalion

2 Companies

Telephone

Radio

Glossary of German Terms:

Sturmabteilung [SA] - Nazi paramilitary force, not apart of the German Army; Stormtroopers

Shutzstaffel [SS] - Nazi paramilitary force, not apart of the German Army; Concentration Camp
Guards

Waffen-SS - Combat unit of the SS

Gestapo - Nazi secret police

Kristallnacht - Night of Broken Glass

Totenkopf- Death Head(s)

Totenkopfdivision - Death Head Division

Einsatzgruppen - Special Action Groups; mobile killing units from the Security Police and the SS
intelligence unit

Blitzkrieg - Lightning War

Wehrmacht - German Army