

Centers of Terror:

The offices of the Commanders of the Security Police and the Security Service in the Reich Commissariat Ukraine 1941–1944.

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Exactly nineteen years to the day after the German armed forces surrendered, on May 8th, 1964, the PhD candidate in sociology, Elias S., was called to the state office of criminal investigation of Lower Saxony in Hannover. S. was born in Göttingen, a city not far from Hannover, in 1920. At the age of five, he moved with his parents to Gdansk and later to Poland; he finished school there in 1938. That same year, he began studying philosophy in the city of Vilnius, which was then part of Poland. After the Red Army's invasion he switched to the technical University in Lviv.

The policemen interrogating him in 1964, however, were not particularly interested in his upbringing and his studies. What they wanted to find out about was the time that followed. S. had survived the first waves of anti-Jewish violence in Lviv that had started after the German attack on the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941. In early 1942, he was recruited as a forced laborer by a German army unit to work as a mechanic. It was with this unit a short while later that S. reached the city of Dnepropetrovsk in central Ukraine.

A few weeks after his arrival in Dnepropetrovsk, S. was called to the office of the company commander. The latter explained to S. that he was now under arrest and would have to go to – as he put it – “where all other Jews are too.” S. spent the next two months in a prison cell. He was repeatedly interrogated. The Germans were especially interested in how he had ended up in Dnepropetrovsk and if he had any contact to partisans. Maybe because he was fluent in German, or perhaps just because the Germans wanted to use his manpower, S. did not fall victim to any of the regular killings of prisoners that took place during this time. Then, after two months, he was taken, together with other prisoners to a former military compound. The prisoners had to clean the area of rubble and build a fence around it. Later, the prisoners had to work in different workshops. They were often mistreated and beaten by the guards.

In the autumn of 1942 typhus began to spread among the prisoners. S. became infected. He was brought to a hospital close to the camp. After making friends among the doctors and nurses he managed to escape. By that time, the camp had grown to holding several hundreds of prisoners. S. made his way to Vilnius, before moving on to Denmark, Norway and finally entering the safe haven of Sweden, where he survived the end of the war.

S.'s story is unique. That alone, I believe, makes it worth retelling in detail. But you might be wondering about the connection to my topic – the offices of the Commanders of the Security Police and the SD (or KdS offices as I will call them in the remainder of this paper). The answer is that those who had imprisoned S. in Dnepropetrovsk were members of the KdS office and that, from that point on, S. was at their mercy. The camp he helped build later became a so-called Work Education Camp (*Arbeits-erziehungslager*) under the command of the KdS. It was run by members of the KdS office and guarded by Ukrainian auxiliary policemen. The KdS Branch in Dnepropetrovsk was established in early 1942 and derived from a subunit of the mobile killing squads. Before the summer, several members of the Gestapo and the Criminal Police were sent to Dnepropetrovsk. Many of them came from the police branches in Düsseldorf. They were deployed there to reinforce the existing office and to establish sub branches in Zaporizhia, Kriwoi Rog and Nikopol.

In October 1941, the Germans had murdered most of the Jews of Dnepropetrovsk who had not managed to flee. Therefore, here, in contrast to other areas of Ukraine (especially the General Districts Volhynia and Podolia and Shitomir) the KdS members were not involved in any largescale mass shootings. There was no strong partisan movement either. Instead they kept busy investigating criminal cases, fighting Soviet spies and resistance fighters, surveilling the churches, and murdering individual Jews they arrested as well as psychiatric patients. Karl Günther Husmann, who had temporarily been appointed KdS after KdS members had been found binge drinking alcohol, remembered after the war that, in spring 1942, a group of Soviet spies had parachuted and landed in the local river. They were arrested by the Germans. An Order Police member testified to having seen, hanging in the streets, the bodies of six people who had been killed by members of the KdS for not giving up their arms after an appeal to do so. The prisoners of the KdS were regularly shot dead and the prison emptied in that way. With this in mind, it almost seems like a miracle that S. survived.

Nonetheless, S.'s story can serve to illustrate some of my main claims regarding the KdS in the Reich Commissariat Ukraine as a whole: 1. From 1942 onwards, the KdS were responsible for terrorizing and murdering the Jewish population of the Reich Commissariat Ukraine. 2. The camps that were established by the KdS were not only aimed at repressing the population, but also helped strengthen the position of power of Security Police and SD within the Nazi regime. 3. The KdS were the result of Heinrich Himmler's attempt to merge Police and SS. 4. The German regime of terror was supported and only made possible by the integration of a substantial number of local collaborators into the Security Police and SD apparatus.

1. After the attack on the Soviet Union, the German troops and their allies soon conquered large swathes of land. The Germans immediately installed a military administration. Within a few

months, the conquered areas were then gradually handed over to a civil administration. Erich Koch was appointed Reich Commissar Ukraine; in late 1941, Hans Adolf Prützmann swapped position with Friedrich Jeckeln and became the Higher SS and Police leader Russia South and Ukraine.

The stationary police forces were organized in two separate branches: The Order Police on the one hand, and the Offices of the Security Police and the SD on the other. The latter consisted of the Criminal Police, the Secret State Police (better known as Gestapo), and the Security Service (SD). The police and the SS were subject to two separate chains of command. This was how Heinrich Himmler, the head of the SS and police forces, ensured he could bypass other institutions and push through his own interests.

The Germans established KdS offices in all five General Districts within the Reich Commissariat Ukraine (as well as Teilbezirk Taurien). In turn, these KdS offices built up a network of sub branches. These institutions reported to the Commanding Officer of the Security Police and the SD (Befehlshaber der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD) – for a long time Dr. Max Thomas, in Kiev. The realms of authority of the civil administration and the SS-Police remained intentionally vague. This, again, served Himmler's personal interest, by extending the reach of his power in the occupied territories, and it followed Himmler's logic of being able to react spontaneously to events. But it also frequently led to tensions between Himmler and Alfred Rosenberg, the Reich Minister for the Occupied Eastern territories. Nonetheless, on the ground in Ukraine these conflicts only played a minor role. The Higher SS and Police leader Prützmann and Reich Commissar Koch had known each other for years. They got on so well that Koch allowed Prützmann to take on responsibility for policies towards Jews. This happened against the will of Alfred Rosenberg who wanted police and SS to be a tool of the civil administration without its own agenda.

In summer 1942, the General Districts Wolhynia and Podolia as well as Zhytomyr were the only places within the Reich Commissariat Ukraine where Jewish communities still existed. By the end of the year, these people had been murdered by members of the KdS branches and their outposts. Many other units kept killing Jews or supported the KdS members in their murderous actions. But, in this context, the KdS played an important and leading role.

2. Throughout the occupation, the Germans did not establish a system of concentration camps in Ukraine. There were plans to open a concentration camp in Kiev, but this never materialized. Instead, the KdS built up their own camps, so-called Work Education Camps (*Arbeits-erziehungslager*). The establishment of these camps is well documented in the case of Estonia, where the local KdS chose to establish Work Education Camps in Contrast to Concentration Camps to keep them out of the reach of the SS Main Economic and Administrative Office. For Ukraine such documents are missing. But either the same thing happened there, or a general order was issued.

The prisoners of these Work Education Camps had to do hard labor under inhumane conditions. They were mistreated and beaten. Camps of this type had already been established in Germany and some occupied countries before the German attack on the Soviet Union. The Gestapo was thereby not only able to investigate against alleged criminals and convict them, but also to take the prison system into its own hands and exploit the prisoners' labor. This was true for the camps in the Reich Commissariat Ukraine too. In contrast to the procedures in the Reich, the camps in Ukraine were immediately used to lock up Jews as well as alleged communists and criminals. The camps in the Reich later followed that example and extended the range of potential prisoners. It is unknown if this radicalization process was influenced by the experiences of Security Police and SD in the occupied territories. But later on, the KdS model — the merging of security police and SD into one branch, as was the case in Ukraine and other occupied territories — was adopted inside the Reich, too. Apparently, the Nazis considered it a successful idea. Moreover, though the camp system in Ukraine existed in parallel to the concentration camp system in other parts of Europe, it was not completely separate. In autumn 1943, as the Red Army approached, the remaining inmates of the camp S. had been a prisoner of, were deported to the concentration camp Mauthausen in Austria. Some prisoners had tried to flee on the way and were shot dead by the Germans. Very few of the prisoners lived to see the camp's liberation by US American troops in early 1945.

3. The KdS offices united Gestapo, Criminal Police, and SD were under the command of just one person: The Kommandeur der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD. In Himmler's eyes this helped to minimize internal conflicts, sped up internal processes, and made it possible for the branches to react quicker, exchange information, and intensify their measures of terror. In terms of their set-up and basic concept, the KdS offices resembled the Reich Security Main Office (RSHA) in Berlin. Himmler's plan to fuse SS and Police started to materialize in 1936 when, in addition to being the Reich Leader SS, he was appointed the head of the German police. Another step in this process was the establishment of the RSHA in September 1939. The fact that the former KdS Nikolaev — later BdS Black Sea — Friedrich Hegenscheidt was later investigated by the RSHA for not having been proactive enough and imprisoned by the Gestapo in Berlin alongside members of the July 20th plot, can be seen as further proof that the KdS were expected to find ever more radical solutions.

4. The Germans relied heavily on local collaborators to secure their power in the occupied territories. Security Police and SD were no exception. Initially, especially Hitler did not like that idea. But, as early as January 1942, the Reich Security Main Office gave the order to Security Police and SD to integrate locals into their apparatus. In Ukraine, the KdS organized their own auxiliary units, so-called *Schutzmannschaften der Sicherheitspolizei*. Little is known about these units. The guards

of the camp Elias S. was interned in belonged to this group. The Germans also established a Ukrainian Criminal Police. The latter's main task was to investigate against alleged local criminals. Not only did the Germans lack manpower – outposts often consisted of just two or three Germans and a larger number of Ukrainians – but also local knowledge and language skills. Himmler did in fact order his subordinates to learn Ukrainian or Russian. But in practice, they relied on translators and local informers. Ultimately, only *they* had knowledge about the local conditions and for example knew where Jews lived.

Finally, I would like to say a few words about my sources. Elias S.'s testimony is not just unique for its content. Its sheer existence makes it special. Very few Jews survived the mass murder and the camps in Ukraine. It is therefore one of the only insights we have into the victims' perspective of these events and circumstances. Contemporary sources from the side of the perpetrators are rather scarce too. In autumn 1943, for example, as the Red Army was approaching, the KdS branch in Dnepropetrovsk withdrew westwards and the KdS members started a fire in the yard and burned most of their files. Most of the material the Red Army managed to capture in spite of this was taken to Moscow. Today these files are kept in the archives of the Russian Ministry of Defense in Podolsk and are therefore not accessible. In addition to surviving documents from Ukrainian State Archives, therefore, I also draw in my work on West and East German post-war trial material.

My project tries to shed light on the wider structures of the National Socialist regime and its modes of operation. It not only gives new insights into the practice of German occupation and the Holocaust, but also enhances our understanding of the SS and police apparatus.