

THE SCOURGE OF THE SWASTIKA

A SHORT HISTORY OF NAZI
WAR CRIMES

by
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THE SCOURGE OF THE SWASTIKA

To my wife,
to whose advice and co-operation at all its stages
this book owes so much

PREFACE

In his opening speech at the trial in Nuremberg of the major German war criminals Sir Hartley Shawcross, Chief Prosecutor for Great Britain and Northern Ireland, said this :

Apologists for defeated nations are sometimes able to play upon the sympathy and magnanimity of their victors, so that the true facts, never authoritatively recorded, become obscured and forgotten. One has only to recall the circumstances following upon the last World War to see the dangers to which, in the absence of any authoritative judicial pronouncement, a tolerant or a credulous people is exposed. With the passage of time the former tend to discount, perhaps because of their very horror, the stories of aggression and atrocity that may be handed down; and the latter, the credulous, misled by perhaps fanatical and perhaps dishonest propagandists, come to believe that it was not they but their opponents who were guilty of that which they would themselves condemn. And so we believe that this Tribunal acting, as we know it will act notwithstanding its appointment by the victorious Powers, with complete and judicial objectivity, will provide a contemporary touchstone and an authoritative and impartial record to which future historians may turn for truth and future politicians for warning.

As everyone knows, the 'authoritative judicial pronouncement' of which Sir Hartley spoke has been given. There have been numerous other war crime trials¹ the proceedings of which have been published and are there for all to read. But many have no time to do so, and many would not wish to if they had.

¹ In the British Zone of Occupation in Germany alone, 356 war crime trials were held involving more than 1,000 war criminals. The Judge Advocate General of the Forces, Sir Henry MacGeagh, GCVO, KCB, KBE, QC, who was head of the United Kingdom National Office of the United Nations War Crimes Commission was responsible for the trial of all enemy war criminals brought before British Military Courts.

PREFACE

This book is intended to provide the ordinary reader with a truthful and accurate account of many of these German war crimes. It has been compiled from the evidence given and the documents produced at various war-crime trials, and from statements made by eye-witnesses of war crimes to competent war-crime investigation commissions in the countries where they were committed.

For their kind offices in obtaining access for me to sources of official information in their respective countries, my grateful thanks are due to His Excellency Monsieur René Massigli, GCVO, KBE, the French Ambassador; His Excellency Monsieur le Marquis du Parc Locmaria, CVO, the Belgian Ambassador; and Doctor D. V. Stikker, Ambassador for the Netherlands.

I am also greatly indebted to Violette Lecoq, now Madame Rougier-Lecoq, for permission to reproduce some of her remarkable sketches of life and death in Ravensbrück Concentration Camp; to Major Peter Forest, formerly Chief Interpreter in the War Crimes Group, British Army of the Rhine for editing the footnotes regarding German terms, ranks, and titles; and last but not least to Mr. Anthony Somerhough, OBE, QC, formerly Head of the British War Crimes Group in Germany for the loan of certain photographs and many helpful suggestions.

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PROLOGUE

BEFORE 1939 there had been regrettable incidents in modern wars between civilized nations amounting to war crimes. In Belgium and France in the early stages of the First World War many excesses were committed by German troops during their rapid advance towards Paris.¹ Towns and villages were looted and set on fire, women were raped, and innocent people murdered. Although these crimes were more than mere sporadic outbursts of 'frightfulness' on the part of isolated units or single divisions, they were not part of an organized campaign of terrorism planned before the outbreak of hostilities and faithfully carried out in obedience to orders.

During the Second World War, however, war crimes were committed by the Germans on an unprecedented scale. They were part and parcel of the Nazi conception of total war and were carried out in pursuance of a preconceived and preconcerted plan to terrorize and exploit the inhabitants of invaded and occupied territories and to exterminate those elements among them who might be found most inimical to German conquest and Nazi domination.

Before the war, the Nazis had created in their own country under the 'Führerprinzip' a tyranny almost without equal in history. They encouraged and fostered racial hatred by the principle of the 'master-race' with its ultimate and inevitable objective of world hegemony. They set brother against brother, children against parents, Gentile against Jew. They endeavoured to debauch a whole nation and those who refused to be debauched they terrorized and finally threw into concentration camps.

It is only when one recalls what was done in Germany between 1933 and 1939 that one can see in their true per-

¹ See Appendix II, p. 255.

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spective the crimes committed during the war in occupied territories.

The suppression of free speech including freedom of the Press, the control of the judiciary, the confiscation of property, the restrictions on the right of peaceful assembly, the censorship of letters and telegrams, the monitoring of telephone conversations, the regimentation of labour, the denial of religious freedom: these are the bonds with which a tyrant binds his subjects. If Hitler thought so little of the 'master race', is it surprising that he should have regarded as less than vermin the peoples of the countries which his Armies invaded?

That the German people did not all yield easily, or willingly accept the Nazi doctrine and programme, is not disputed. Had they done so there would have been no SS,¹ no SD,² and no Gestapo. It was only by fear, torture, starvation and death that the Nazis eliminated at home the opponents of their régime, and it was in this way that these organizations of oppression gained the experience and the training, later put into practice abroad with such thoroughness and brutality, that made them the nightmare and the scourge of Occupied Europe.

The crimes which are described in this book were not haphazard; that must be self-evident from their very magnitude. The enslavement of millions and their deportation to Germany, the murder and ill-treatment of prisoners of war, the mass executions of civilians, the shooting of hostages and reprisal prisoners, and the 'final solution' of the Jewish question were all the result of long term planning. This has been proved beyond doubt and the Germans themselves have provided unchallengeable evidence in the records, returns, inventories, orders, and other documents, all carefully preserved, which fell into Allied hands after the surrender of the German forces in Europe.

For when they employed prisoners of war on prohibited

¹ Schutzstaffeln—Nazi Party troops.

² Sicherheitsdienst—security service.

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work the Germans rendered returns to the appropriate army formation; when they looted they made immaculate inventories of their booty; when they gassed Jews and others they sent detailed reports to RSHA¹; when they shot hostages they posted up lists on public buildings 'pour encourager les autres'; when they conducted painful and disgusting experiments on unwilling inmates in their concentration camps they made careful case-notes. As fast as they committed these crimes so, with characteristic thoroughness, they collected and tabulated documentary evidence of them.

In *Mein Kampf* Hitler had written years before, 'A stronger race will drive out the weaker ones, for the vital urge in its ultimate form will break down the absurd barriers of the so-called humanity of individuals to make way for the humanity of Nature which destroys the weak to give their place to the strong.' That is the law of the jungle: little wonder that it brought in its train so much misery, agony, destruction and death.

And how were these criminal plans put into execution? The German High Command and the General Staff cannot escape all responsibility.

When old Marshal von Hindenburg so suddenly and unexpectedly called Hitler to power in 1933 many of these men doubtless looked down their noses at him. But it was not long before most of them became his accomplices; and those who did not, like von Fritsch, were got rid of in characteristically shameless fashion. Thenceforth the full weight of the pyramid of the German Officer Corps, with that military Yes-man Keitel at its summit, was right behind Hitler. These men aided and abetted him in planning and waging aggressive war, and in committing war crimes and crimes against humanity without number. Only when the tide of Nazi success was clearly ebbing did critical whisperings first begin to echo through the corridors of the German War Ministry.

The International Military Tribunal for the trial at

¹ Reichssicherheitshauptamt—Reich Security Head Office.

PROLOGUE

Nuremburg of the major German war criminals declined to declare the General Staff and High Command a criminal organization. Nevertheless, in their judgment they said of these men :

They have been responsible in large measure for the miseries and suffering that have fallen on millions of men, women, and children. They have been a disgrace to the honourable profession of arms. Without their military guidance the aggressive ambitions of Hitler and his fellow Nazis would have been academic and sterile . . . they were a ruthless and military caste. . . . Many of these men have made a mockery of the soldier's oath of obedience to military orders. When it suits their defence, they say they had to obey; when confronted with Hitler's brutal crimes which are shown to have been within their general knowledge, they say they disobeyed. The truth is that they actively participated in all these crimes, or sat silent and acquiescent, witnessing the commission of crimes on a scale larger and more shocking than the world has ever had the misfortune to know.

But it was the Leadership Corps, the Gestapo, the SD, and the SS, who were the principal instruments of tyranny which Hitler used.

They were the organizations that carried out these dreadful crimes: the mass murders of the concentration camps; the murder and ill-treatment of prisoners of war; the impressment of foreign workers for slave labour; the inquisitorial interrogations; the tortures; the experiments on human guinea pigs.

These dreaded 'black coats', with Heinrich Himmler at their head, hung over Occupied Europe for five long years like a black thundercloud pregnant with sudden death.

The opening chapter of this book describes the origin, establishment, and organization of these bodies and the sadistic cruelty which was their stock-in-trade.

CHAPTER I

HITLER'S INSTRUMENTS OF TYRANNY

FROM the very moment Hitler came to power he and the Nazi party began to put into execution the common plan or conspiracy whose aims had already been set out in *Mein Kampf* and which included the commission of crimes against peace, war crimes, and other crimes against humanity.

The framework of this conspiracy was the Nazi Party; the Leadership Corps was the chain of civil command by which the master plan was activated. Every member was sworn in annually. 'I pledge eternal allegiance to Adolf Hitler. I pledge unconditional obedience to him and to the Führer appointed by him.'

From the Führer at the fountain source, through Gauleiter, Kreisleiter, Ortsgruppenleiter, Zellenleiter, and Blockwart the stream of Nazi doctrine flowed into every home. The Gauleiter for the district, the Kreisleiter for the county, down to the Blockleiter who was responsible for some fifty households.

Each of these functionaries, at his own level, had a staff which dealt with every aspect of a citizen's life; education, propaganda, journalism, finance, justice.

Immediately below Hitler were the Reichsleiters; Rosenberg, von Schirach, Frick, Bormann, Frank, Ley, Goebbels and Himmler. Each was responsible directly to the Führer for a definite facet of Nazi policy. They carried out their Leader's directives. Their supreme task was stated to be the preservation of the Party 'as a well-sharpened sword for the Führer'. They were concerned with general policies and not detailed administration.

Next in importance were the administrators, once described as 'a hierarchy of descending Caesars'.

Germany had been divided into a number of large administrative regions, each of which was called a Gau. Each had a political leader, a Gauleiter, who was directly responsible to the Führer for his own area.

The Gau was further sub-divided into counties, urban and rural districts, cells and blocks. The Nazi official thus touched life at every turn, but it was the smallest Caesar—the Blockwart—who was the biggest tyrant of them all.

It was he who spied on every household; it was he who had a stool pigeon in every family; it was at his level that the impact of Nazi propaganda was brought to bear full-square upon the individual.

According to the Party manual, it was the duty of the Blockwart to find people disseminating damaging rumours and to report them to his superiors. 'He must not only be a preacher and defender of the National Socialist ideology towards the members of the Nation and the Party entrusted to his political care, but he must strive to achieve the practical collaboration of the Party members within his block zone. . . . He must keep a dossier about each household.'

It was in the presence of the Blockwart that every little German came face to face with his Führer, and there were half a million of them. Thus did Hitler hold the whole Reich in the hollow of his hand.

As it was in peace; so it was in war. There was a Gauleiter in Holland and a Gauleiter in Alsace; Poland, the Baltic States, the Eastern Territories, each had its Gauleiter, and the lessons learnt in the early days of Nazism at home were put into practice abroad. The same system which had bent all Germans to the Führer's will was to be used to enthrall the peoples of the territories which his armies had invaded and which were now under German occupation.

There were doubtless many Germans who were never ardent Nazis and who regarded Hitler as a vulgar upstart and his cronies as unpleasant toughs. None of these, however, were in the SS which was the hard core of Nazism. Its members were all blind disciples of the Führer and had no other loyalty to God or man.

During the early stages of the trial of major German war criminals at Nuremburg there appeared in the columns of a local newspaper an account of a visit made by some journalist to a camp in which SS prisoners were interned. All had asked him but one question: 'what have we done except our normal duty?' If aiding and abetting the commission of several million murders can be described as normal duty then they had done little else.

In this book are chapters dealing with the extermination of the Jews, the enslavement and deportation of workers from the occupied territories, the shooting of hostages and mass executions of civilians and the murder and ill-treatment of Allied prisoners of war. In all these crimes the SS, SD and Gestapo played a leading part.

In peace these organizations had been entrusted by the Nazi leaders with the responsibility of 'rendering harmless'¹ all opposition. In war they were to break down all resistance to the German occupation.

The similarity of the methods used to accomplish these objectives ensured that the normal duties of these bodies in peace constituted their training for war. By persecution, by terror, by torture and the ever-present threat of the concentration camp they had made Germany safe for Hitler. When war should come, by these same means, now well tested and perfected, they would keep in subjection the inhabitants of those countries which German troops might invade and occupy.

It was in 1929, four years before Hitler came to power, that Heinrich Himmler was appointed Reichsführer SS and assumed control of the Schutzstaffeln which then had only

¹ A Nazi euphemism for murder.

280 members. He proceeded to build this force into a private army and police force enlisting only those who were reliable and fanatical followers of the Führer. By the time Hitler became Reichschancellor the SS had reached a strength of 52,000. Their mission was stated to be the protection of the Führer and the internal security of the Reich, and Reichsführer Himmler left no one in doubt of the methods by which it was to be accomplished.

'We shall unremittingly fulfil our task to guarantee the security of Germany from within, just as the Wehrmacht guarantees the safety of the honour, the greatness and the peace of the Reich from without. We shall take care that never again in Germany, the heart of Europe, will the Jewish-Bolshevistic revolution of subhumans be kindled from the interior or through emissaries from outside. Without pity we shall be a merciless sword of justice to all those forces of whose existence and activities we know, on the day the slightest attempt is made be it to-day, after a decade, or a century hence.

A merciless sword they undoubtedly were; but without honour and without justice.

For such a task a highly organized force was necessary and the Supreme Command of the SS was set up—consisting of twelve departments. The main body of SS, the Allgemeine, was the trunk from which all the branches grew. It was organized on military lines and divided into districts, sub-districts, regiments and other lower formations down to platoons. At the outbreak of war it numbered 240,000 scoundrels of the deepest dye.

It was composed, for the most part, of those SS men who were not specialists. They were, to borrow a phrase from the Services, the general duty men of the Schutzstaffeln. One of their grim duties was staffing the concentration camps, and nearly all the guards at such camps were provided by the Allgemeine.

Next in importance was the Security Service, or Sicherheitsdienst, known later through Occupied Europe, as well as in the Reich itself, by the dreaded initials SD. Originally merely the intelligence service of the SS it became more important after Hitler was made Reichschancellor and by 1939 it was one of the main departments of RSHA.

By then, Reinhard Heydrich, its chief, had expanded it into a vast system of espionage which watched with beady eyes, like some great vulture, the private life of every German citizen and became the sole intelligence and counter-intelligence agency for the Nazi Party.

Three years after Hitler's accession to power Himmler was appointed, in addition to being Reichsführer SS, Chief of the German police in the Ministry of the Interior, and the reorganization of the German police forces with two distinct branches began. These were the uniformed police or ORPO,¹ and the security police or SIPO,² which in 1939 became amalgamated with the SD under RSHA.

The Geheime Staatspolizei, or Gestapo as it was universally known, was a State organization and was first set up in Prussia by Göring in 1933.

This was a political police force. Unlike the ordinary police it was not concerned with the prevention and detection of crime, but with the suppression of all independent political thought and of individual political convictions, and the elimination of all opposition to the Hitler régime.

The network of oppression was at last complete, and within this spider's web sat Himmler, his SS all around him, and behind, the shadow of the concentration camp.

Thus was Germany 'entirely and completely possessed by National Socialism', as Hitler put it when speaking in the Reichstag in 1938. Thus was the nation mobilized. And for what purpose? For aggression, for conquest, for world domination, for total war. And war came; invasion, success, until two thirds of Europe lay under the German heel with

¹ Ordnungspolizei—uniformed police.

² Sicherheitspolizei—security police.

the SS, SD and Gestapo ready to keep it so. This machinery of Nazi tyranny was in good running order. Designed and manufactured years before with skill and care it had been tuned up and tested in peace time. This was to be its finest hour!

As the German armies advanced into enemy territory, specially formed operational units of the SIPO and SD accompanied them. These *Einsatzgruppen* as they were termed, were officered by staff of the Gestapo and KRIPO,¹ who were given SS commissions.

The rank and file were *Waffen-SS* and *ORPO*. These groups were attached to Army Groups or Armies and operated usually in the Army Rear Area. Whilst they were under tactical command of the Army Commander, their own special tasks were given them by RHSA to whom they were directly responsible.

After these special tasks had been performed and as the fighting moved on, the occupation administration was organized on a more permanent footing. These *Einsatz* Groups then became the stationary headquarters of the SIPO and SD and were allotted areas of jurisdiction. They had their own chain of command under the Military Commander of the occupied territory, but independent of it, with direct approach to the Chief of the Security Police and SD.

In the countries under German military occupation, executive action was usually taken by the Gestapo which was a much larger organization than the SD or KRIPO. From 1943 to 1945 the Gestapo had a membership of about fifty thousand whereas the KRIPO and the SD numbered only fifteen thousand and three thousand respectively.² The initials SD were commonly used in the German Intelligence

¹ *Kriminalpolizei*—C.I.D.

² The SIPO and SD consisted of the Gestapo, KRIPO and SD. Although the total strength of the SD proper was, between 1943 and 1945, only about 3000 the initials SD were generally used as an abbreviation for the term SIPO and SD, and in the occupied territories members of the Gestapo frequently wore uniforms with the SD insignia.