

The SS, SD, and Gestapo

By Walter S. Zapotoczny

Adolf Hitler founded the *Schutzstaffel* (SS) in April of 1925, as a group of personal bodyguards. As time went on, this small band of bodyguards grew from 300 members in 1925 to 50,000 in 1933 when Hitler took office. The man responsible for this growth was Heinrich Himmler, who commanded the SS from 1929 until its disintegration in 1945. Between 1934 and 1936, the SS gained control of Germany's police forces and expanded their responsibilities. Because of these new responsibilities, the SS divided into two sub-units: the Allgemeine-SS (General SS), and the Waffen-SS (Armed SS).

The Armed SS consisted of three main groups. The first was the Leibstandarte, Hitler's personal bodyguard. The second was the Death's-Head Battalions, which was in charge of the death and concentration camps. The third group was the Disposition Troops, an elite combat unit known for its extreme fighting tactics, which was mixed in with Germany's regular army. The General SS dealt with local police matters and with "racial matters." The main component of the General SS was the RSHA (Reich Security Central Office in German). Formed in 1939 by Himmler to coordinate and manage the activities of the Gestapo, Kripo, and SD, a subdivision of the SS. Reinhard Heydrich headed this agency until his assassination in 1942 near the village of Lidice, in Czechoslovakia. The RSHA also dealt with foreign espionage and counterintelligence.

Herman Goering first established the *Geheime Staatspolizei*, or Gestapo, in Prussia on 26 April 1933, with the mission of carrying out the duties of political police with or in place of the ordinary police authorities. On 30 November 1933, Goering issued a decree for the Prussian State Ministry and for the Reichs Chancellor which placed the Gestapo under his direct supervision as Chief. The Gestapo was thereby established as an independent branch of the Administration of the Interior, responsible directly to Goering as Prussian Prime Minister. This decree gave the Gestapo jurisdiction over the political police matters of the general and interior administration and provided that the district, county, and local police authorities were subject to the directives of the Gestapo. By a decree of 8 March 1934, the regional State Police offices were separated from their organizational connection with the district government and established as independent authorities of the Gestapo. The Gestapo was established as a uniform political police system operating throughout the Reich and serving Party, State, and the Nazi leadership. Parallel to the development of the Gestapo in Prussia, the Reichsfuehrer SS, Heinrich Himmler, created in Bavaria the Bavarian Political Police and directed the formation of political police forces in the other federal states outside of Prussia. The unification of the political police of the various states took place in the spring of 1934 when Hermann Goering appointed Himmler the Deputy Chief of the Prussian Gestapo in place of the former Deputy Chief, Diels. Himmler thereby obtained unified control over the political police forces throughout the Reich.

In 1932, the Reichsfuehrer of the SS, Heinrich Himmler, created the *Sicherheitsdienst*, or SD, as an intelligence service of the SS under the then SS-Standartenfuehrer Reinhard Heydrich. On 9 June 1934, the Nazi Party issued an ordinance, which merged all information facilities then existing within the Party organization into the SD, and the SD was established as the sole Party information service. In the course of its development, the SD came into increasingly closer cooperation with the Gestapo and with the *Reich Kriminalpolizei*, the Criminal Police, or Kripo. The Gestapo and the Kripo considered together were called the *Sicherheits-polizei*, the Security Police, or Sipo. The SD was also called upon to furnish information to various State authorities. On 11 November 1938 a decree of the Reich Minister of the Interior declared that the SD was to be the intelligence organization for the State as well as for the Party, that it had the particular duty of supporting the Secret State Police, and that it thereby became active on a national mission. These duties necessitated a close cooperation between the SD and the authorities for the General and Interior Administration. Through laws and decrees, the SD was established as a uniform political information service operating throughout the Reich and serving Party, State, and the Nazi leadership.

On 27 September 1939 by order of Himmler, in his capacity as Reichsfuehrer SS and Chief of the German Police, the central offices of the Gestapo and the SD, together with the Criminal Police, were

centralized in the office of the Chief of the Security Police and SD under the name of the Reich Security Main Office.

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