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Michael Wildt (Hg.)

Nachrichtendienst, politische Elite
und Mordeinheit. Der Sicherheitsdienst
des Reichsführers SS



Reviewed by Kevin Crichton (Fleetwood, Lancashire)

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This volume is a collection of thirteen papers presented at the Hamburg Institute for Social Research (October 2001) on the role and politics of the Sicherheitsdienst (SD) in Nazi Germany. It is the perfect companion to Wildt's other recently published work, *Generation des Unbedingten*.^[1]

The SD began as one of many NSDAP intelligence organizations in the early 1930s. It was formed as the intelligence arm of Himmler's SS, to collect intelligence upon opponents, both external and internal to the NSDAP. Himmler wanted the SD to model itself upon the British and French security services, and collect, collate, and interpret intelligence in a truthful manner. Following the seizure of power, the SD's role of reporting upon opponents declined, and it became more an institutional arm of the Nazi state, contributing to its security and stability. Carsten Schreiber's article on the Saxon SD greatly advances our understanding of the SD not only at the regional level, which is important enough in itself, but also enhances our knowledge of the Gestapo's surveillance of German society by showing how the SD complemented and enhanced the activities of the latter. On the basis of his research into the 2,700 personnel cards of the Saxon SD, Schreiber argues that the SD, in comparison to the Gestapo, was in many ways a fluid and dynamic association of individuals, bound together by

a common ideological perspective. The positions of SD members were never static, and they could, and did, cross from the fringes of the organization towards the center of power, something that was unlikely to happen in the Gestapo. The differing roles of the *Zubringer*, *Agenten*, *Vertrauensleute*, *Mitarbeiter*, and *Beobachter* show how sophisticated the SD's intelligence-gathering network became, and the extent to which the SD was fully integrated into the organizational framework of the regime.

Despite the increasing importance of the SD during the early years of the Nazi regime, the SD remained a numerically small organization. Its size, however, should not be taken as a sign of its marginal status. The small nucleus of ideologically minded individuals constituted a reliable pool of leaders for Germany's political police, and with Heydrich's leadership of the *Sicherheitspolizei* (Sipo) and later the *Reichshauptssicherheitsamt* (RHSA), opportunities for the SD to extend its reach increased. Alongside this expansion of the SD, came not only an increasing professionalism in its outlook and *modus operandi*, but also in terms of its recruits, an increasing number of politically motivated young academics looking to make their mark in the world. Both contributions by Wolfgang Dierker and Jrgen Matthus reveal the extent to which the SD, under the influence of these academics, moved away from merely collecting evidence about the regime's op-

ponents, in this case the Churches and the Jews, towards using intelligence in a systematic manner to influence the direction of the persecution. Given the attraction that the SD held for academics, it should not be surprising that the SD reciprocated by displaying a serious interest in academia. That the SD was committed to using academics and their fields of research for its own ideological mission is something brought to the fore in Gerd Simon's work on *Germanistik*, and Joachim Lerchenmeller's paper on the SD and its view of history as a subject. The SD's later comprehensive removal of archives, libraries, and papers from across Occupied Europe, as detailed by Jrg Rudolph, throws further light on the SD's appetite for knowledge and information upon its opponents. The Second World War provided the SD with the opportunity to gain executive power to put their murderous ideology into practice. Membership in the *Einsatzgruppen* finally allowed the SD to step beyond the confines of merely gathering intelligence on the regime's opponents, into the realm of mass murder, murder which was itself justified by the intelligence the SD had collected, collated and disseminated. This leap from collecting intelligence to wielding executive power was something that the SD had striven for throughout the 1930s. This fusion of theory and practice was not a contradiction, but the radical, if not revolutionary, conclusion, as Christian Ingrao demonstrates, to the cultural fallout following Germany's defeat in 1918. It is curious to see, from Andrej Angrick's work on Otto Ohlendorf and his *Einsatzgruppe*, the extent to which *Einsatzgruppen* behavior was determined by the intelligence they collected upon the areas in which they operated. Nonetheless, it is quite clear, as Bettina Birn makes out, that without the active participation of indigenous police forces, the SD's ability to carry out genocide in the Baltic states would have been seriously hampered by insufficient numbers of SD personnel. The wartime espionage activities of the SD are admirably covered by Katrin Paehler's work on the SD in Italy, and Klaus-Michael Mallmann's rather intriguing research into the SD's attempts to foster subversion in the Soviet Union through anti-Communist Soviet Prisoners of War. Paehler's doctoral research into attempts to create a Nazi foreign secret service looks like a promising addition to the historiography.

Nevertheless, how did the SD, which began as an intelligence agency, become a key organization in the Holocaust? For George Browder, who has done much to bring the SD out of the SS's shadow, the key to understanding the SD's transformation lies within its personnel. The SD's social composition encompassed a very

broad spectrum. The majority of members came from the lower- and middle-class milieux, and had either graduated from Volks- or Mittelschule; a large percentage later proceeded to higher education, with a further 14 percent holding doctorates. Whilst many had enjoyed an upward social mobility, almost half had been either unemployed or suffered setbacks in their career path during the Great Depression. The influx of *Kriminalpolizei* (Kripo) officials in the mid-1930s, when the SD penetrated the Kripo by opening up its membership to Kripo officials, led to an influx of professional police officials, of whom the vast majority were not NSDAP members. Consequently, this diluted the idealistic view of the SD held by its early members, which occurred again when SA and SS men were drafted in to swell the ranks and maintain ideological conformity. This led to a significant blurring of the lines between the Gestapo and the SD. Browder argues that SD members were not anti-Semitic en masse as hitherto believed, and consequently not easily won over to the cause of genocide. The professional police officials who became part of the SD often had other priorities, such as combating Marxism, and only became involved with anti-Jewish policies when the Third Reich made its anti-Semitic ideology a police issue. Many joined the SD since it was often seen as an elite within an elite, the disciplined, intellectual core of the new Reich. Nonetheless, there had to be some degree of identification with core Nazi values to join the SD, and it was certainly possible that one could join the SD to fight the left, as much as to pursue anti-Semitic goals. It was not unknown for SD officials to be non-anti-Semitic, and for others to resign their membership of the SD when anti-Jewish policy took center stage several times in German politics. The topic of the post-war careers of ex-SD members is covered by Lutz Hachmeister, detailing the ease in which they managed to rejoin society and the role they played within the Federal Republic.

The historiography of the SD reveals a multi-dimensional view of the organization with no clear picture of its role and influence in the Third Reich until now. Interpretations ranged from the SD acting as the intellectual kernel of Party and State, to a mere intelligence-gathering agency, a view frequently portrayed in the memoirs of ex-SD agents and officials. As is clear from this work, the SD was a specific ideological institution of the Third Reich, which did more than collect intelligence on opponents, but was an organization that strove to create a new racial order. The SD was intended to act as the General Staff of Germany's political police, an ideological elite pursuing political goals, and genocide was an inte-

gral part of this. It is impossible to do justice to the sheer breadth and depth of all the papers in this volume, but this collection is a valuable one indeed. Together with Wildt's other work, this volume forms an important nucleus for future research into the SD.

[1]. Michael Wildt, *Generation des Unbedingten: Das Fhrungskorps des Reichssicherheitshauptamtes* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2003). See H-German review at <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.cgi?path=82461096634736>.

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