

Himmler's Secret Speech to High Officials of the Reich Security Main Office (January 30, 1943)

Abstract

In the end, the enormous SS apparatus that evolved under Himmler's leadership had little in common with the relatively unimportant guard units he had taken over in 1929. Over the course of time, the SS established roots in all entities of party and state. It was given tremendous autonomy in combating both internal and external enemies of the regime and in developing and implementing Nazi racial and population policies—so much so that it became something of a “state within the state.” Nonetheless, the organization remained loyal in its service to Hitler and regarded itself proudly as the most important “instrument in carrying out his will.”

Himmler's close collaboration with his most important deputy, the former naval lieutenant Reinhard Heydrich (1904–1942), played a decisive role in the development of the SS. Heydrich first joined the organization in June 1931, having been discharged from the navy a few months earlier on account of “dishonorable conduct” in the context of a romantic affair. He rose quickly through the ranks, eventually becoming head of the Reich Security Main Office [*Reichssicherheitshauptamt* or RSHA], under whose umbrella he coordinated all divisions of the Security Police [*Sicherheitspolizei* or Sipo] and the Security Service [*Sicherheitsdienst* or SD]. In July 1941, Hermann Göring gave him the task of devising “an overall solution to the Jewish question,” and Heydrich thus became the bureaucratic and logistical organizer of the Holocaust. Two months later, he was also named “Deputy Reich Protector of Bohemia and Moravia” in occupied Czechoslovakia, where he died in June 1942 as a result of injuries sustained during an attack by Czech resistance fighters. In an act of “retaliation,” the National Socialists destroyed the Czech village of Lidice and massacred its population.

Ernst Kaltenbrunner (1903–1946) succeeded Heydrich as head of the Reich Security Main Office. On January 30, 1943, Himmler delivered the following secret speech to a group of RSHA officials who had come together to mark Kaltenbrunner's official appointment to the post.

Source

Berlin, January 30, 1943

The Reichsführer SS at the installation of SS Group Leader Dr. Kaltenbrunner, Berlin

My SS Leaders! Comrade Kaltenbrunner! I have ordered and summoned you, the closest personnel of the Reich Security Main Office, you who hold the higher positions of responsibility, to this room, just as in June of last year, 1942, when your commander had been killed. I gathered the department heads in this room and held the first meeting here, with the full and clear awareness that the creator of the Reich Security Main Office, the Security Service, and the Security Police, Obergruppenführer Heydrich, created this tasteful and beautiful room as one of his last accomplishments in life, which spoke for him and his nature, and which should always speak for the nature of this Aryan security service of the Germanic nation. In the same way, the entire security service and the entire security police bore his stamp, were of his nature, of his character.

For ten years now we have been a National Socialist state. In an hour or two it will be ten years since we marched through the Brandenburg Gate. I believe Heydrich was also part of that march back then. Let

me look back one more time, so that we may then look toward the future.

In 1930, it was necessary for the party to set up an intelligence service in order to get a picture of the Communist, Jewish, Masonic, and reactionary opponents. At the recommendation of then Group Leader von Eberstein, I acquired the retired navy lieutenant Reinhardt Heydrich. Getting him was actually based on a misunderstanding, which is something very few people know about. It was said that Heydrich was an information officer. Back then, in 1930, I didn't pay much attention; I thought an information officer was a man who procures information. Heydrich was an information officer in the sense of an information devices officer: he was a radio officer who used communication devices as his trade. At the time, he came to see me in the small house in Waldtrudering and explained to me: "Well, Reichsführer, I am not at all the person you are looking for; I was a radio officer." I looked him over: tall and blond with decent, keen, and kind eyes. I said to him: "Look here, that doesn't matter, it doesn't bother me at all. Sit down in the room, I'll be back in fifteen minutes, and write down how you picture an intelligence service of the NSDAP." In those fifteen minutes he wrote down what he had in mind. I said: "Yes, I agree. Alright, I'll take you." Then the salary was set for this head of the security service, as we called him. The Fourth Regiment in Schleswig-Holstein undertook to pay 80 reichsmarks a month; that was the first part. From the rest of the budget I took, I believe, another 40 reichsmarks. In the initial period he also got something from the navy. I told myself, you'll be able to help him out in the immediate future; at any rate, we'll give it a try. Untersturmführer Heydrich began with the 120 borrowed marks after he had joined the SS in Hamburg, had hung around the port with the Hamburg boys who were jobless, had done his service honestly, and had settled down splendidly as a former lieutenant.

Then we began the work. It was very strange. At the time, I had on my staff a Sturmbannführer, a retired major, "H." Heydrich had barely shown up when, six or eight days later, the Münchener Post, the Social Democratic paper, reported that an intelligence officer was present. Heydrich was very suspicious and told me back then, with the nose he always had: "H. did that." I would not allow it. I said: "You can't get started by attacking one of my staff." Heydrich wrote his first name with "dt" at the end; he (H.) wrote "Reinhard" with only a "d."^[1] Later, in 1933, it became known that H. did indeed work for the Munich police, I think for 100 reichsmarks a month. He then hanged himself in his cell.

We then worked together for a year. The security service grew out of the smallest, smallest of means. Today, hardly anyone suspects just how much it grew from privation, how many sacrifices there were along that road. Hardly any of the chaps who later joined had an inkling. That is why you must tell those who are Regierungsrat and Kriminaldirektor today. We lived through the difficult years of 1931 and 1932. Who today still knows—as Dr. Goebbels said very rightly today—how desperate we were in 1932! The party lost many of its followers after the August elections. The priests [*Pfaffen*], the Center Party, and the reaction were trying to break us through elections. We did not become part of the government in which Papen was chancellor. The flotsam and jetsam we had collected was washed away again. At that time, only the Schutzstaffel grew. The subsidies, the donations, and a lot of dues from the party were no longer coming in. There was less and less. We supported the Schutzstaffel—today it is all right for me to say this—at the central office as well as outside in the various regiments (today's Oberabschnitte) of Weichsel, Sepp Dietrich, and Daluege, by contributing 350 reichsmarks from our Reichstag allowance of 550 reichsmarks, from which we lived. Christmas 1932 was so bad that the men, those who worked for the security service at the time, could only be given installments of one mark, two marks, three marks. Mrs. Heydrich, who courageously and boldly suffered and fought by our side, cooked a thick soup for all so that the men got some food once a day. Christmas 1932 we had enough money to let the men travel home. We didn't have the money to allow them to travel back, let alone pay them their salaries for December or January.

With this small team, we came to January 1933. By that time things were already getting a little better. There was the election campaign in Lippe and we got a boost. We then proceeded to the *Machtergreifung*. Now, at the time, we were tied to Munich; for us, Munich was crucial. In Munich we

didn't get around to it until March 12—I never dwelt on it and I never gave it a thought of my own—I became police president of Munich and took over police headquarters; Heydrich was given the political section in Munich, division 6a. And that is how we started. During these beginnings we acquired a few infinitely brave and hard-working collaborators, above all, you, my dear (SS Group Leader and General Lieutenant of the Police) Müller, and your deceased comrade Flesch, who recently died after long suffering. We turned the political division of police headquarters into a Bavarian Political Police. The political police grew in the states [*Länder*] like mushrooms after a rain. I became a unique legal specimen—someone can earn a doctorate by examining this question in the future—by combining in one person all the German citizenships that existed at the time. I was a Bavarian, Badener, Württemberger, and so on; I was at home everywhere. I acquired these citizenships by becoming the commander of the political police in Hesse, Bremen, Lübeck, Lippe (both Lippes), Anhalt, and so on, and became a civil servant there. In Munich we created a central office: the Commander of the Political Police of the States. With this there arose a kind of security police.

A year later, on April 20, 1934, Göring, who was then Prussian Minister President, made me the deputy chief of the National Secret Police [*Geheimen Staatspolizei*] after a long meeting of us old party comrades. Heydrich became inspector. With this, the political police of the states in all of Germany were in one hand, and we could slowly begin to create a Reich apparatus. It grew in various organizational forms. It was in part the SD, in part the Security Police; at the time it was called the Stapo.

I will not neglect to mention June 30, 1934, with its bitterness, the bitter necessity, the bitter duty. The event had repercussions and brought the attempt by Jewish and other opponents to stir up enmity between us and the Wehrmacht and the party. The Wehrmacht was going to break us. At the time, strong nerves, restraint, and intelligence were required, in ample measure, to manage the situation. We managed it.

Then came the year 1936, when, on June 17, I became chief of the German Police, with the title Reichsführer SS and Chief of German Police. Back then, Daluge, now Oberst-Gruppenführer, was truly generous in giving the criminal police under his authority, as inherently similar to and an indispensable part of a security police, to Gruppenführer Heydrich. That year, the entire criminal police headed by Nebe came to us. Now the total apparatus was growing. The state apparatus and the SS apparatus grew together more and more. The number of faithful members rose. Together we really managed things very well in the first few years. I spoke for many, many hours with Obergruppenführer Heydrich about all the problems. As the years went by, he knew my views, knew the path I wanted to take, knew the goal I had for the organization, how I envisaged the SS as a whole.

Heydrich then grew into greatness especially during the war years, which I was able to confirm to you in his obituary, before the entire German nation and before the public. His greatness—and this I would like to highlight here once more—lay in the fact that he was always first a German and Germanic [*ein Deutscher und ein Germane*], that he approached all things as a National Socialist, that for all the ambition and responsibility he had for his Reich Security Main Office, he had all the faithful qualities of a comrade, in that he stood up for you and the men. Let me say that I was not happy about some things. I knew exactly that this person or that person messed something up. Perhaps you are not yet aware today what a loyal boss you had, what he took upon himself. There were cases where I said: “Heydrich, I don't believe that.” It's not that he lied to me. But at all times, he first, with greatest chivalry, shielded you men. For all the ambition he had for his security police and his Reich Security Main Office, he saw things first of all from the perspective of the total SS. Over the years, he weighed everything very wisely so that this entire apparatus above all never became misanthropic—something that such an apparatus should tend toward by its nature. We always see people only from the negative side. When someone comes to us, he does not come to tell us something nice that has happened; he wants to tell us something ugly that has happened. Second, it must be that this entire service—to use this expression for once—of the

German nation is never pessimistic, that we will never allow ourselves to be overwhelmed even by the bad news—we get practically no good news—and by negative things, that everything will remain solidly locked within our chests. We must be absolutely clear that there can be 1,000 negative things. Everything negative, everything harmful you must report to your commanders, who in turn will report it to me. But when you report something, please, never report it with a tear-choked voice and a downcast head: something terrible has happened; the world has more or less broken apart; National Socialism is destroyed and is already lying in fragments on the ground; we are the only shining bearers of the grail; we still have the grail of the National Socialist Weltanschauung in our pure hands, but all others are really swine. Instead, carry on in the style that Heydrich introduced and with which he corrected a good deal in you—you know that yourself. The bad, the defeats, the setbacks that exist will be soberly recorded and soberly reported, without a downcast head and without acting like a priest. In reports you say: this I consider probable, that exaggerated; in conclusion, this or that situation outside is probably such-and-such; my suggestion for change is this and that. Or: I have no suggestion to make, I merely feel obligated to make this report. But you should not report: the entire movement is in danger, or something else is in danger. We will survive the war. We shall, and of this you may be assured, overcome all our enemies, be they priests or Jews. In this Europe we shall survive the difficulties: that is my firm conviction. Things will still get insanely difficult for us. But we will get through it, and in the end there will be a Germanic Reich.

Another thing that was so incomparable in Heydrich—and he trained you in this spirit—was that he always stood, that he never yielded, and that he had an indomitable will and indomitable aggressiveness. We stepped up, and we shall—I know that is no different with you new leaders—step up again and again, spiritually and in actual fighting, just like our divisions on the front line. We shall attack. And if we have attacked ten times, we'll attack for the eleventh time. If we have attacked seventy times, we will also attack for the seventy-first time. I am not just picking a random number, but I am taking a case that happened with one of our divisions, which, over the course of one year, launched seventy-two attacks led by its commander. And if it is necessary to attack a seventy-third time, it will be done. As long as one man can bend his finger on the trigger, the trigger will be pulled and there will be fighting. If one fights and attacks in this way, one is unconquerable. The same is true for all of us SS men, spiritually. An immense number of problems will appear. Problems are appearing today. I know the problems of the economy, the problems of plutocracy. I know the problem that our people, raised the wrong way in some things, does not have the right attitude toward work, that in some areas we spoke too much of rights and too little of duties, that we must address the whole question of religion, that the negative is not enough, that we must beware of introducing any kind of new priestly service [*Pfaffendienst*] after the war. I know that the question of whether we are a dying or a growing people has in no way been resolved, that child subsidies, tax relief, houses, and so on, have never helped in this area, that only a religious attitude toward these things, an inner transformation, can help. Rest assured, should we live to be seventy or eighty years old, if fate lets us live that long, we must step up again and again in every year of our lives.

Here, the security service, the chief political office of the SS, must march at the front, but without ever doing anything rashly, without ever engaging in politics itself. Instead, it must always only work politically as it is commanded. Within itself, it must educate the men that Heydrich began to educate, that Kaltenbrunner will continue to educate, men who are ready on the ideological level, who never deviate from the line, but who are never stubborn and inflexible in implementation, who are stubborn in will, stubborn in their goals, but who never give up a single component of our Weltanschauung. Therefore, we will never become Jesuits, because we condemn that. We will never become sectarians. We will be generous, as generous as an old pagan can be. We believe in a God and will be as generous as only the person who believes in a God can be. This is how you were raised by Heydrich and me over the course of twelve years.

It has now been almost three-quarters of a year since Heydrich was torn from his work at a young age. He was a man of the future. You cannot do anything about fate, it is what it is. In the months up to now, I

myself assumed leadership of the Reich Security Main Office, because I wanted to let some time pass. The year ahead will ask a lot of us. The bridge must be manned on every ship. Therefore, I thought for a long time about whom I should make commander of the ship. After long, careful considerations, my choice fell on one of my oldest men, on Gruppenleiter Kaltenbrunner. We have known each other for much longer than he has been officially wearing the SS uniform. I know him, and we know each other from the time when he set himself apart from the many unknown National Socialists in Austria as the leader of the illegal SS. It is always a good learning experience for a Reichsführer SS and for a main department head of the SS—but especially for a head of the Reich Security Main Office – to be illegal for a good long while. I believe, Kaltenbrunner, that the time when you were really tested in Austria, tested in your endurance, in your character and your strength, was one of the best learning experiences of our lives and—unbeknownst to us at the time—the best preparation for the new task that you are now taking on.

Kaltenbrunner, you are taking over a tried-and-true leadership corps, immaculately trained, spotless and pure in its spirit and character. You are taking over excellent department heads and group leaders. I know that these men of yours are getting an equally good Main Office Chief [*Hauptamtschef*]. And I know that you will lead this Reich Security Main Office, which was created over the course of twelve years by someone who is now dead, in the spirit of the SS and by continuing the legacy of our comrade Heydrich, so that the SS and the Führer will have in the Security Service an instrument as good as—though better in character than—what England trained over centuries and has in its service.

With this, Kaltenbrunner, I present to you the document in which the Führer appoints you Main Office Chief of the Reich Security Main Office, and I hand the Reich Security Main Office over to you. Lead it well!

NOTES

[1] Heydrich was baptized Reinhardt Eugen Tristan. At some point after becoming an SS officer, he dropped the “t” from the end of his first name and went by Reinhard.—Ed.

Source: U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD, Record Group 319, IRR Files 1903, Ernst Kaltenbrunner XE 00040; reprinted in Richard Breitman and Shlomo Aronson, “Eine unbekannte Himmler-Rede vom Januar 1943,” *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*; 38 (1990) 2, pp. 343–48.

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