

Reinhard Heydrich, Head of the Security Police and the SD, on the Classification of Concentration Camps (January 2, 1941)

Abstract

As early as March 1933, Himmler, then police president of Munich, had ordered the creation of the first Nazi concentration camp, which was located in nearby Dachau. Political opponents of the Nazi regime (such as Communists, Social Democrats, labor unionists, and so forth) were sent there for so-called protective custody [*Schutzhaft*]. Dachau served as the model for the organization of all subsequent camps. After 1933, several other concentration camps were built in Germany, including large camps such as Sachsenhausen (1936), Buchenwald (1937), Flossenbürg (1938), Mauthausen (1938), and Ravensbrück (1939). After the outbreak of war in 1939, the network of concentration camps extended quickly into newly conquered territories, particularly in the East. Camp inmates included political opponents, “enemies of the race,” criminals, homosexuals, “asocials,” and later, prisoners of war as well. At the beginning of 1941, Himmler ordered the classification of all existing concentration camps, with each being graded on the basis of prisoner type and working conditions. For all intents and purposes, imprisonment in Mauthausen, a category III camp, was a sentence to “extermination through work” in its quarry. The regulations put forth in this decree, however, were not always followed. This was due above all to the fact that the number of both prisoners and camps rose sharply after the start of the war.

Source

Secret

Berlin 2. January 1941

The Chief of the Security Police and the Security Service (SD)

To:

- a. Reich security headquarters
- b. All state police headquarters
- c. All commandants of the security police and security service

For the information of:

- d. All inspectors of the security police and security service
- e. The inspectors of the concentration camps (with 15 copies for the camp commandants)
- f. The commanders of the security police and security service in Krakow and Prague

Subject: Classification of the concentration camps

The Reichsführer SS and Chief of the German police has approved the division of the concentration camps into various categories which take into account the prisoner’s personal characteristics as well as the degree of danger he poses to the state. Accordingly, the concentration camps will be divided into the following categories:

Category I: For all prisoners against whom only slight accusations have been made and who are definitely capable of being reformed, also for special cases and solitary confinement, the camps:

Dachau
Sachsenhausen
Auschwitz I
(The latter also applies in part to category II)

Category Ia: For all old prisoners and those only partially capable of work, who can still be used in the medicinal herb gardens, the camp: Dachau

Category II: For prisoners against whom strong accusations have been made, but who are still qualified for re-education and correction, the camps:

Buchenwald
Flossenburg
Auschwitz II

Category III: For prisoners against whom strong accusations have been made, particularly those who have criminal convictions at the same time and are asocial—i.e, virtually incapable of correction, the camp: Mauthausen.

Not to be included in category Ia are old prisoners who are not qualified for work and who are in need of medical treatment. They are to remain in the sections of their respective concentration camps that have been specially provided for this purpose. More serious cases are to be transferred to the hospital section of the concentration camp Sachsenhausen.

A regrouping of the prisoners within the camps according to the new classifications cannot be carried out right now in view of the current measures being taken with respect to prisoner employment. New dispositions will be made, however, in accordance with classification.

In the case of future requests for arrests and transfers to a concentration camp, I therefore ask that suggestions be made as to the category of the prisoner, taking into consideration his personality as well as the degree of danger he poses to the state.

I therefore order that a complete record of the political life, previous convictions for criminal offences, and conduct of the prisoner since the takeover of power be established, and that each and every request for assignment into category III be justified in detail.

This decree does not apply to the district and local police authorities.

[signed] Heydrich

Source of English translation: Letter from the Head of the Security Police and the SD, Reinhard Heydrich, on the Classification of Concentration Camps (January 2, 1941). In United States Chief Counsel for the Prosecution of Axis Criminality, *Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression*, Volume III. Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1946, Document 1063-A-PS, pp. 775–76. English translation credited to Nuremberg staff; edited by GHI staff. Available online at: https://www.loc.gov/item/2011525363_NT_Nazi_Vol-III/

Source of original German text: Schreiben des Chefs der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD, Reinhard Heydrich, über die Einstufung der Konzentrationslager (2. Januar 1941). In International Militärgerichtshof Nürnberg, *Der Nürnberger Prozess gegen die Hauptkriegsverbrecher vom 14.*

November 1945 bis 1. Oktober 1946: Urkunden und anderes Beweismaterial. Nuremberg, 1947.
Munich: Delphin Verlag, 1989. Volume XXVI: Amtlicher Text – Deutsche Ausgabe, Nummer 405-PS bis Nummer 1063(d)-PS. Dokument 1063 (a-b)-PS [Geheimes Schreiben Heydrichs vom 2. Januar 1941 an das Reichssicherheitshauptamt und andere Polizeistellen über die Einstufung der Konzentrationslager (Beweisstück US-492)], pp. 695–97.

Recommended Citation: Reinhard Heydrich, Head of the Security Police and the SD, on the Classification of Concentration Camps (January 2, 1941), published in: German History in Documents and Images, <https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/nazi-germany-1933-1945/ghdi:document-1510> [May 05, 2024].