

Aryan groups held in war camps. In the following document, Himmler lays out the role of the SS and the code of behavior expected of them.

**Source:** Heinrich Himmler, "Speech to SS Officers, 1943" in *A Holocaust Reader*, ed. Lucy Dawidowicz (New York: Berman House, 1976), 130-135; reprinted in *Reading the Global Past: Selected Historical Documents*, eds. Russell J. Barber, Cheryl A. Riggs, vol. 2 (Boston: Bedford Books, 1998), 145-147.

#### FOCUS QUESTIONS:

1. How did Himmler define "Germans" and "Germany" in this speech? What groups did he deem to be "foreigners," and how did he characterize these groups?
2. What ideas and beliefs informed Himmler's views? How did the war, and the course of the war by 1943, possibly affect his views?
3. For Himmler, what was the role of the SS in the war, in the Nazi party, and in the German nation?

... In 1941 the Führer attacked Russia. That was, as we probably can assert now, shortly—perhaps three to six months—before Stalin was winding up for his great push into Central and Western Europe. I can sketch this first year in a very few lines. The attack cut through. The Russian army was herded together in great pockets, ground down, captured. At that time we did not value this human mass the way we value it today, as raw material, as labor. In the long run, viewed in terms of generations, it is no loss, but today, because of the loss of manpower, it is regrettable that the prisoners died by the tens and hundreds of thousands of exhaustion, of hunger....

#### GOOD NATURE IN THE WRONG PLACE

It is a basic mistake for us to infuse our inoffensive soul and feeling, our good nature, our idealism, into alien peoples. This has been true since the time of Herder, who must have written *Stimmen der Völker* in a boozy hour,<sup>1</sup> and who thereby brought such immeasurable sorrow and misery on us later generations. This has been true since the case of the Czechs and Slovenes, to whom, after all, we gave their sense of nationality. They themselves were not capable of achieving it; we invented it for them.

One basic principle must be absolute for the SS man: we must be honest, decent, loyal, and comradely to members of our own blood and to nobody else.

<sup>1</sup> Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744-1803), German philosopher and poet, has been called the father of German nationalism. As a champion of the idea of nationalism, he published an anthology of folk songs of various peoples called *Stimmen der Völker* (Voices of the Peoples).

## Heinrich Himmler, "Speech to SS Officers"

Heinrich Himmler (1900-1945) headed the SS, or the Schutzstaffel (protection echelon), the elite militia of the Nazi party. The group had its origins in the 1920s when they first served as Hitler's bodyguards. With the growth and expansion of the party, the SS evolved into a policing force of more than 50,000 men. The SS routinely used intimidation tactics and coercion to eliminate political opposition, even perceived threats from within the Nazi party itself. In the 1930s the SS, under Hitler's express orders, executed Ernst Röhm (1887-1934) a high level political official along with many other officers, in a purge designed to ensure Hitler's control over the party. This address made by Himmler to the SS comes in 1943 during World War II after the tide had turned against the Germans, when their troops were not faring well, particularly on the Russian front. By 1943, the Holocaust was also well underway, with Nazi troops and the SS overseeing the mass killings of European Jews and other "non-

What happens to the Russians, what happens to the Czechs, is a matter of total indifference to me. What there is among the nations is the way of good blood of our kind, we will take for ourselves—if necessary, by kidnapping their children and raising them among us. Whether the other nations live in prosperity or croak from hunger interests me only insofar as we need them as slaves for our culture; otherwise, it does not interest me. Whether 10,000 Russian females drop from exhaustion while building an anti-tank ditch interests me only insofar as the anti-tank ditch gets finished for Germany's sake. We shall never be brutal and heartless where it is not necessary—obviously not. We Germans, the only people in the world who have a decent attitude toward animals, will also take a decent attitude toward these human animals. But it is a crime against our own blood to worry about them and to give them ideals that will make it still harder for our sons and grandsons to cope with them. If someone were to come to me and say, "I cannot build the anti-tank ditch with women or children; it is inhuman, they will die in the process," then I would have to say, "You are a murderer of your own blood, for if the anti-tank ditch is not built, German soldiers will die, and they are sons of German mothers. They are our own blood." This is what I want to instill into the SS and what I believe I have instilled into them as one of the most sacred laws of the future: Our concern, our duty is to our people and our blood; it is for them that we have to provide and to plan, to work and to fight, and for nothing else. Toward anything else we can be indifferent. I wish the SS to take this attitude in confronting the problem of all alien, non-Germanic peoples, especially the Russians. All else is just soap bubbles, is a fraud against our own nation and an obstacle to the earlier winning of the war....

### FOREIGNERS IN THE REICH

We must also realize that we have between six and seven million foreigners in Germany, perhaps even eight million by now. We have prisoners in Germany. They are none of them dangerous so long as we hit them hard at the smallest trifle. Shooting ten Poles today is a mere nothing when compared with the fact that we might later have to shoot tens of thousands in their place, and that the shooting of these tens of thousands would also cost German blood. Every little fire will immediately be stamped out and quenched and extinguished; others—as with a real conflagration—a political and psychological fire may break out among the people.

### THE COMMUNISTS IN THE REICH

I do not believe the Communists could risk any action, for their leading elements, like most criminals, are in our concentration camps. Here something needs saying: After the war it will be possible to see what a blessing it was for Germany that, regardless of all humanitarian sentimentality, we imprisoned this whole criminal substratum of the German people in the concentration camps;

and for this I claim the credit. If these people were going about free, we would be having a harder time of it. For then the subhumans would have their NCO's and commanding officers, they would have their workers' and soldiers' councils. As it is they are locked up, and are making shells or projectile cases or other important things, and are very useful members of human society....

### THE EVACUATION OF THE JEWS

I also want to make reference before you here, in complete frankness, to a really grave matter. Among ourselves, this once, it shall be uttered quite frankly; but in public we will never speak of it. Just as we did not hesitate on June 30, 1934, to do our duty as ordered, to stand up against the wall comrades who had transgressed, and shoot them,<sup>1</sup> so we have never talked about this and never will. It was the tact which I am glad to say is a matter of course to us that made us never discuss it among ourselves, never talk about it. Each of us shuddered, and yet each one knew that he would do it again if it were ordered and if it were necessary.

I am referring to the evacuation of the Jews, the annihilation of the Jewish people. This is one of those things that are easily said. "The Jewish people is going to be annihilated," says every party member. "Sure, it's in our program, elimination of the Jews, annihilation—we'll take care of it." And then they all come trudging, 80 million worthy Germans, and each one has his own decent Jew. Sure, the others are swine, but this one is an A1 Jew. Of all those who talk this way, not one has seen it happen, not one has been through it. Most of you must know what it means to see a hundred corpses lie side by side, or five hundred, or a thousand. To have stuck this out and—excepting cases of human weakness—to have kept our integrity, that is what has made us hard. In our history, this is an unwritten and never-to-be-written page of glory, for we know how difficult we would have made it for ourselves if today—amid the bombing raids, the hardships and the deprivations of war—we still had the Jews in every city as secret saboteurs, agitators, and demagogues. If the Jews were still ensconced in the body of the German nation, we probably would have reached the 1916-17 stage by now.<sup>2</sup>

The wealth they had we have taken from them. I have issued a strict order, carried out by SS-Obergruppenführer Pohl, that this wealth in its entirety is to be turned over to the Reich as a matter of course. We have taken none of it for ourselves. Individuals who transgress will be punished in accordance with an order I issued at the beginning, threatening that whoever takes so much as a mark of it for himself is a dead man. A number of SS men—not very many—have

<sup>1</sup> Reference to the purge of the SA [Sturmabteilung, storm troopers, the Nazi Party militia] and the murder of its officers by SS officers and men.

<sup>2</sup> Reference is to the time when the tide of World War I began to turn against Germany. German nationalists fought to avenge Germany's losses and ultimate defeat to the Dolchstoß, the "stab in the back" by the

transgressed, and they will die, without mercy. We had the moral right, we had the duty toward our people, to kill this people which wanted to kill us. But we do not have the right to enrich ourselves with so much as a fur, a watch, a mark, or a cigarette or anything else. Having exterminated a germ, we do not want, in the end, to be infected by the germ, and die of it. I will not stand by and let even a small rotten spot develop or take hold. Wherever it may form, we together will cauterize it. All in all, however, we can say that we have carried out this heaviest of our tasks in a spirit of love for our people. And our inward being, our soul, or character has not suffered injury from it.

### Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Call for Sacrifice"

With the Japanese surprise attack on Pearl Harbor in December of 1941, the US entered World War II fighting on the side of the British and Allies, which after Hitler's invasion of Russia in June of 1941 also included the USSR. In the wake of the Pearl Harbor attack, Hitler honored an earlier treaty he had made with the Japanese emperor, and came to the defense of Japan making it a member of the Axis powers. The entry of the US and Japan created another theater of war, one in the Pacific, in addition to the European front which by 1942 extended into the Mediterranean, North Africa and the Middle East. In this 1942 speech, entitled "Call for Sacrifice," President Roosevelt asked all Americans to contribute to the war. Roosevelt made this appeal during one of his regular informal speeches, which he called "fireside chats," that were broadcast to a wide American radio listening audience.

**Source:** Russell D. Buhite and David W. Levy, eds., *FDR's Firesides Chats* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), 219-229.

#### FOCUS QUESTIONS:

1. What "sacrifices" did Roosevelt request from Americans and from what segments of the public?
2. What did he see as the greatest threats to the war effort and the Allies' success? How did Roosevelt present these threats?
3. What does this tell us about the nature of warfare in World War II and its affect on civilian populations, even in the US which was far removed from the theaters of war?

My Fellow Americans, it is nearly five months since we were attacked at Pearl Harbor. For the two years prior to that attack this country had been gearing itself up to a high level of production of munitions. And yet our war efforts had done little to dislocate the normal lives of most of us.