



○ *SS-Reichsführer* Heinrich Himmler

A veteran of the Great War and early member of the Nazi party, Heinrich Himmler began in the party as the commander of political police in Bavaria and slowly rose in status through careful maneuvering and the cultivation of contacts within the NSDAP. In 1929, he was appointed *Reichsführer SS* ("Leader of the SS"), by Hitler. At the time, the SS was little more than two hundred or so men spread about the Reich, but Himmler had a clear vision of what the SS could become. Its first mission above all others was the protection of the *Führer*, Adolf Hitler, but later, its reach would grow.

Hitler's political enemies were, surprisingly, not outside, but inside the Nazi party itself. The *Sturmabteilung* or SA ("Storm Detachment") of the Nazis, composed of hundreds of private armies left over from the Great War, was led by Ernst Röhm, a pedophile with a predisposition for young boys, who vacillated between loyalty for Hitler and outright treason. Röhm would promise one thing and do another, often threatening Hitler in vague ways in the national press. After Hitler realized reconciliation was not possible, he and Himmler plotted the downfall of the SA. Careful growth and the cultivation of a strong and loyal force rapidly

brought the SS up in the ranks of the NSDAP. The SA could outstrip it in manpower, but the SA was no match for the loyalty, organization and support the SS enjoyed.

In July of 1934, after weeks of unrest, the entire SA was put down. After several disturbing reports of small groups of SA men on alert in Berlin and Munich and the movement of rifles to SA headquarters in Berlin, Hitler ordered the SS into action. In an incident known as "The Night of Long Knives" the SA leadership was arrested and executed by the SS. For his part in elevating Hitler to the position of unquestioned supreme power, Himmler was elevated as well, to a position within the Reich second only to Hitler himself.

Himmler worked feverishly to expand and develop the SS in the months following the purge. In late 1934, the SS formed the *SS-Verfügungstruppe* ("Special Disposal Troop,") that would become in later years the *Waffen-SS* ("Armed SS")—an entire SS army separate from the German *Heer* ("Army"). Through careful plotting, Himmler managed to recruit the first three German *Übermensch* discovered by *RuSHA SA*. After 1941, Himmler consolidated power even further, by gaining complete control of the German *Übermensch* population and formed the first super-army in world history, the *Überkommandogruppe SS-Heinrich Himmler* ("Super-commando group SS-Heinrich Himmler"). By the end of the war, the *Waffen-SS* would number almost 1 million men and Himmler's SS would control almost all aspects of life within Hitler's Reich.



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