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Wannsee Conference - II

Lead: In January 1942, a group of high-ranking Nazi bureaucrats met in the Berlin suburb of Grosse-Wannsee. Their host was Reinhard Heydrich, affectionately known as der henker, the hangman.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: The men were in Wannsee to plan the implementation of one of Adolf Hitler's great desires: the continent-wide extermination of the Jewish race and all other groups he felt were genetically subhuman.

Heydrich's career as a German Naval Officer had been cut short in 1931 after an aborted flirtation with his civilian superior's daughter, and he joined the Nazi SS. His talents soon attracted the attention of Heinrich Himmler, and as a result Heydrich's rise to power was swift and decisive. After the Nazis came to power he helped Himmler consolidate party control over national police forces. By 1939 Heydrich was in charge of the Reich Central Security Office in charge of all police functions including the secret police, the Gestapo.

He masterminded the fake attack on a German radio transmitter that Hitler used as an excuse for his invasion of Poland on September 1,

1939. Rising to the opportunity presented by the war, Heydrich organized the *einsatzgruppen*. These were mobile execution units that followed the army into occupied territory. A million Soviet and Polish Jews fell victim to his campaign, but even this enormity did not slake the Nazi blood lust. A more efficient plan was needed.

At the end of July 1941 Hermann Goering ordered Heydrich to develop a plan for a final solution, the systematic removal of Jews from the continent. The Wannsee Conference was called to insure that all the major Nazi agencies were on board and cooperative as this plan was put into effect.

Heydrich's loyalty was rewarded in September 1941 when he received the coveted post of deputy *Reichsprotektor* of Bohemia and Moravia, but the following spring the unwary Heydrich was assassinated by Free Czech agents. Ironically his life of destruction received an unexpected extension. As revenge for his death the Gestapo killed the men and destroyed what was left of the Czech village of Lidice. Next time: The banal exercise of extermination.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

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