

Himmler's Hunt of Homosexuals

- Source of original German text:
Todesstrafe gegen Angehörige von SS und Polizei (November 15, 1941), Bundesarchiv Film 2782/AN 2741216.
- Reprinted in:
Günter Grau, ed., *Homosexualität in der NS-Zeit: Dokumente einer Diskriminierung und Verfolgung*. 2nd revised edition, Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2004, p. 244.

Homosexuality in Germany was not seen by the Nazi regime as being part of the purity of the German Volk, as it was 'unnatural' and 'wrong.' Heinrich Himmler, the Reich Leader of the Nazi Protection Squad (the Schutzstaffel, SS) and head of Germany's secret state police (the Geheim Staatspolizei, Gestapo), was especially against homosexuality and began attempts at eliminating its existence in the Reich. For example, on October 24, 1934, the Gestapo sent a letter circulating throughout police headquarters in Germany instructing police to mail in lists of "somehow homosexually active persons" (Reddebek, 1). In 1935, Paragraph 175 of the German criminal code was revised to make homosexual acts between men illegal in Germany, which further encouraged Himmler's homophobic actions (Paragraph 175, 1). Himmler, being the chief of the SS, saw the squad as being comprised of elite individuals and therefore believed homosexuals could not be among those members. Although Paragraph 175 was enforced, homosexuals within the SS still existed, and in order to officially rid the SS of homosexuality, Himmler pushed for a formal decree from the Führer, Adolf Hitler, to declare that homosexuality within the SS be punishable by death. In the decree, there were exemptions, such as for those under the age of 21 who were seduced, as well as a decrease in severity of sentences (penal servitude or imprisonment) for more mild cases (GHDI - Document, 1). On November 15, 1941, the Führer signed the decree. This decree, with the support and authorisation of the Führer himself, was utilised by Himmler to justify actions taken against homosexuals within the SS. An interesting finding is that a year following the Führer's signing of the decree on 'Preserving the Purity of the SS and the Police,' a decree that was originally applied only to men in the SS, the decree was extended to include *any male* engaging in homosexual activities (Reddebek, 1). This

demonstrates that Himmler's goal of eradicating homosexuality in the Reich were gradually coming to fruition through the implementation of decrees and criminal code.

The first publication of the original decree directed at the SS, can be found in Germany's federal archives (das Bundesarchiv) in its original German text under the title "Todesstrafe gegen Angehörige von SS und Polizei." It was reprinted in 1995 in Günter Grau's *Homosexualität in der NS-Zeit: Dokumente einer Diskriminierung und Verfolgung* and republished by the German History in Documents and History database (GHDI) from the English translated *Hidden Holocaust? Gay and Lesbian Persecution in Germany* by Günter Grau.

Annotated Bibliography in Chronological Order:

1. Todesstrafe gegen Angehörige von SS und Polizei (November 15, 1941), Bundesarchiv Film 2782/AN 2741216.
The Bundesarchiv is Germany's national archive and is the source of the original decree in German which was signed by the Führer on November 15, 1941. The title translates to "death sentence against members of SS and police" in English. The decree was a secret order to 'cleanse' the SS and Police.
2. Richard Breitman, *The Architect of Genocide: Himmler and the Final Solution*, Hanover, 1991.
In this bibliography of Heinrich Himmler, there is no mention of the 1941 decree, and Himmler's actions towards homosexuality are mentioned minimally. Himmler stated that there were over 1.5 million members of homosexual organisations in Germany in 1933, and government suppression has rendered these organisation unable to recruit new members. The types of government suppression is not elaborated upon, nor was Himmler's attitude towards homosexuals or efforts to eradicate homosexuality within the SS or the Reich.
3. M. Burleigh & W. Wippermann, *The Racial State: Germany 1933-1945*, Cambridge, 1991, pp.136-138, 182.
This source translates a speech Himmler made on February 17, 1937 to a conference of SS officers and includes his response to the 'question of homosexuality.' He says, "...all things which take place in the sexual sphere are not the private affair of the individual, but signify the life and death of the nation" and creates a connection between having many children with a powerful nation and having few children with a dead nation. This speech meant to explain the 'danger' of homosexuality to Germany and inspire action to fight it, explains his persistence in getting the Führer to sign the purity decree. Although Burleigh and Wippermann mention the 1941 decree's implementation into SS and police disciplinary procedures, they do not cite the decree, thus Grau looks to be the first to have found it.

4. Günter Grau, ed., *Hidden Holocaust? Gay and Lesbian Persecution in Germany, 1933-45*, London: Cassell, 1995.

The GHDI reproduced the English translation of the Führer's decree from this source which was written by Grau with a contribution by Claudia Schoppmann and translated by Patrick Camiller. This source discusses the repression of homosexuals in Nazi Germany and the fact that this was a 'hidden holocaust' because it was kept out of the public sphere. Many of the documents related to homosexuality during the Third Reich were kept in closed East German archives which were off limits to scholars and researchers until the unification of East and West Germany. This source uses the decree as an example to showcase the discrimination inflicted upon and murder of homosexuals in the SS.

5. "The Führer's Decree on Preserving the Purity of the SS and the Police (November 15, 1941)." *GHDI - Document*.

The GHDI copy of the English translation of the German decree and holds it in its database for public access. The decree is listed in the Nazi Germany time period under the category 'The SS and Police System' in the documents section. Although the decree is directed at the SS, it demonstrated the attitude of the Nazi regime towards homosexuals and later explains the expansion of the decree to include all men in Germany, as well as additional state actions against homosexuality. One such example is Paragraph 175, which was also amended under Hitler by Paragraph 175a which included any form of 'criminal indecency' between men or actions that offended 'public morality' or 'arouse[d] sexual desires in oneself or strangers' (Burleigh and Wippermann, 190).

6. Lothar Machtan, *The Hidden Hitler*, 2002, pp. 1-468.

This source questions whether Hitler was a homosexual. This relates to the purity decree in that it was clear that its conception is credited to Himmler and that he had to ask the Führer to sign the decree to fully enforce it with the 'support' of Hitler. Was Hitler reluctant to persecute homosexuals? The main focus of homosexual persecution is on Himmler rather than Hitler. Attitudes towards homosexuality appears occasionally in biographies about the Führer, however, Machtan dedicated his entire book to Hitler's relationship with homosexuality (directly or indirectly). Machtan cites Günter Grau's *Homosexualität in der NS-Zeit: Dokumente einer Diskriminierung und Verfolgung*, but does not use the text of the decree. He merely uses Grau's work as a reference to Hitler instructing Himmler to decree that a register be kept of all 'homosexual misdemeanors' within the Reich.

7. Günter Grau, ed., *Homosexualität in der NS-Zeit: Dokumente einer Diskriminierung und Verfolgung*. 2nd revised edition, Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2004, p. 244.

The original German text of the purity decree stored in the German archives is reprinted in this source. This is the source cited most by other scholars, which is curious as it is a second edition. The GHDI also cites the second edition as the source of reprint, thus the first version seems to be difficult to get a hold of.

Source of the first edition:

Günter Grau and Claudia Schoppmann, ed., *Homosexualität in der NS-Zeit: Dokumente einer Diskriminierung und Verfolgung*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1993.

Grau uses the text of the decree to demonstrate Hitler's attempts to 'cleanse' the Reich of homosexuality. He references a decree made by Hitler on August 18, 1941, "...it is necessary to act with ruthless severity against any case of homosexuality that appears in its ranks."

Upon signing the 1941 purity decree a few months later, legal provisions had to be bypassed and courts were forced to declare their lack of competence so that cases were to be handed over to the special courts. The decree was not published, but was rather a confidential order conveyed orally and forbidden to be discussed outside of the SS and Police. The decree and court transferrals were clearly a violation of the law, which is why the order was not made public.

8. Reddebrek. "Chapter Four- Persecution" in *The Pink Triangle: The Nazi War against Homosexuals*, revised edition, Holt Paperbacks, New York City: 1988.

This source discusses Himmler's increase in his pursuit of eradicating homosexuality in the Reich. The year after the purity decree, it was extended to all males. The following year, Himmler's authority over homosexual punishment increased.

9. Longerich, Peter. *Heinrich Himmler*. Oxford, 2012.

This source is a biography of Heinrich Himmler and a small section of about ten pages of the book is dedicated to 'the fight against homosexuality.' Paragraph 175 and Himmler's speech in 1937 on the question of homosexuality are mentioned (p. 237), however the 1941 purity decree is not mentioned. This source mainly discusses Himmler's beliefs in relation to homosexuality, and focuses less on the policies he implemented.

10. "Paragraph 175." *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*

This source contains the English version of the 1935 revised law criminalising homosexuality between men.

Source of English translation:

Warren Johannson and William Perry in "Homosexuals in Nazi Germany," Simon Wiesenthal Center Annual, Vol. 7 (1990).