

## Himmler's Secret Speech: when "extermination" replaced "evacuation"

### Headnote

The Source I have chosen to examine is excerpts from "Speech to SS Officers in Posen". This source is an excerpt from a secret 3 hour speech given by Heinrich Himmler (7 October 1900 – 23 May 1945), who was the Reich leader of the SS and an important member of the German Nazi party. Under his leadership the SS grew both stronger and larger. The SS were responsible for the running of the concentration camps and the ghetto system. This speech was delivered in the town hall of Posen, in German Nazi occupied Poland on October 4, 1943. In the speech Himmler discusses the hard work of his men and proposes plans for further action. This speech is particularly useful as it is one of the first available documents in which a high-ranking officer discussed the extermination of the Jews. Excerpts from the source can be found in Moeller's "The Nazi State and German Society" and on the GHDI website.

- 'GHDI - Document'. Accessed February 17, 2016. [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_document.cfm?document\\_id=1513](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=1513).
- Moeller, Robert G. The Nazi State and German Society: A Brief History with Documents (the Bedford Series in His.. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2009. Pg.139-140

The German History in Documents and Images website highlights that the original version of the speech, before translation can be found in Der Nürnberger Prozess gegen die Hauptkriegsverbrecher. The English translation can be found in the fourth volume of United States Chief Counsel for the Prosecution of Axis Criminality, Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression. The English translation is attributed to the Nuremberg staff. These books are part of a series that published the documents that were used as evidence in the Nuremberg trials. According to Worldcat, both the German and English versions cannot be found in any of the UC or surrounding libraries. However, a pdf of the full Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression can be found online on the Library of Congress website.

- Source of English translation: Excerpt of Himmler's Speech to the SS-Gruppenführer at Posen (October 4, 1943). In United States Chief Counsel for the Prosecution of Axis Criminality, Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression, Volume IV. Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1946, Document 1919-PS [Speech of the Reichsführer-SS at the Meeting of SS Major-Generals at Posen, October 4th, 1963], pp. 558-59 and 570-72. Edited by GHI staff.
- Source of original German text: Auszug aus Himmlers Rede an die SS-Gruppenführer in Posen (4. Oktober 1943). In Internationaler Militärgerichtshof Nürnberg, Der Nürnberger Prozess gegen die Hauptkriegsverbrecher vom 14. November 1945 bis 1. Oktober 1946: Urkunden und anderes Beweismaterial. Published in Nuremberg 1948. Munich: Delphin Verlag, 1989. Volume XXIX: Amtlicher Text – Deutsche Ausgabe, Nummer 1850-PS bis Nummer 2233-PS, Document 1919-PS [Rede Himmlers bei der SS-Gruppenführertag in Posen am 4. Oktober 1943: Ausführung

des Gedankens: andere Völker sind als Sklaven für die deutsche Kultur zu betrachten (Beweisstück US-170)], pp. 111-12, 122-23 and 170-73.

- Etats-Unis. 1946. United States Chief Counsel for the Prosecution of Axis Criminality. Nazi conspiracy and aggression. Volume 4. Washington: United States government printing office. Accessed February 17, 2016.  
[www.loc.gov/rr/frd/Military.../NT\\_Nazi\\_Vol-IV.pdf](http://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/Military.../NT_Nazi_Vol-IV.pdf)

### Biographical information

Heinrich Himmler was a leading member of the NSDAP. According to his extensive Wikipedia page he was one of the most influential men in Nazi Germany and one of the main protagonists of the Holocaust. It implies, due to his prominent role in the setting up and running of the concentration camps, it could be said that he was the overseer of between 11 and 14 million deaths. His diary is said to contain antisemitic entries from an early age and he was a member of the Bund Reichskriegsflagge, an anti-Semitic nationalist group. This is important, as his increasingly anti-Semitic ideologies are prominent in his speech at Posen. The Wikipedia webpage also discusses how he rose to power after Hitler had the SA leadership killed and appointed Himmler to the highest formal SS rank. Furthermore, it highlights how Himmler was the main engineer of the killings and how he supported the ideology of Germans as the elite race. This webpage also tells us of his early life, his role as a Nazi activist, his role in world war two and his death by suicide.

- Himmler Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation, 2016. s.v 'Heinrich Himmler'. Accessed February 4, 2016. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heinrich\\_Himmler](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heinrich_Himmler).

### Description of the Original publication

According to the Library of Congress website, the original English publication, Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression, is made up of 8 volumes (12 books). They were published between 1946 and 1948. The books consist of collections of documented evidence that was used by the US and Britain in the prosecuting of Nazi war criminals in Nuremberg, Germany 1945-46. The Holocaust Historiography Project website tells us that the documented evidence was made up of diaries, letters, reports, official archive documents etc. The books are sometimes referred to as "the red volumes" due to the red binding on the original hardcover version of the book. They are particularly useful when studying the History of the Nazis and the Holocaust as they are the most detailed and full accounts that exist of the evidence presented at the trials.

- 'Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression: Military Legal Resources (federal Research Division: Customized Research and Analytical Services, Library of Congress)'. Accessed February 18, 2016. [https://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/Military\\_Law/NT\\_Nazi-conspiracy.html](https://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/Military_Law/NT_Nazi-conspiracy.html).
- 'Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression (NCA)'. Accessed February 18, 2016. <http://www.historiography-project.com/nca/>.

### The speech itself and its context

There were two Posen speeches that Himmler presented to Nazi officials, one on October 4<sup>th</sup> and the other October 6<sup>th</sup>, of 1943. According to the "Posen speeches" Wikipedia page the first speech, the one at which this exploration is looking at, was known as the only Posen speech in literature until around 1970 when the second one was discovered. Thus, these two speeches are often mistaken as one speech. The first speech given in the town hall, before 92 SS officers, discussed mainly the unstable situation on the Eastern front as many of the officers came from occupied Eastern Europe. Although the Posen Speeches Wikipedia page tells us only a very small proportion of the speech, approximately 2 minutes, discussed the Jewish Solution, it was prominent as it provided documentation of a high ranked Nazi official openly talking about the extermination of the Jews without using euphemisms. According to Himmler's Wikipedia page this was a way of making sure all officers were aware of the actions and plans that were to be carried out, thus they could not deny knowledge of the killings if the Allies pursued criminal charges for Nazi war crimes. Thus, it was a way of keeping them quiet and loyal to the party by making them all accomplices in the planned genocide. Sound clips of parts of Himmler's original speech can be found online, for example on The History Place website which is accompanied with an English translation.

- Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation, 2015. s.v 'Posen speeches'. Accessed February 4, 2016. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Posen\\_speeches](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Posen_speeches).
- Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation, 2016. s.v 'Heinrich Himmler'. Accessed February 4, 2016. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heinrich\\_Himmler](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heinrich_Himmler).
- 'The History Place - Holocaust Timeline: Himmler's Speech at Posen'. Accessed February 4, 2016. <http://www.historyplace.com/worldwar2/holocaust/h-posen.htm>.

### Summary of Results

My exploration yielded a number of informative results. The main findings implied that Himmler's speech at Posen was of great importance as it was the first formal speech where he referred directly to the extermination of the Jews, rather than using ambiguous concepts. However, it also found that some argue Himmler did not refer to the "extermination" of the Jews, rather that this was a mistake in the translation. My exploration also highlighted that not only was the speech significant but the location too. In addition, it provided arguments for why people, including the SS, did not speak out against what Himmler and the Nazis ordered.

### Further Sources

"All Blame put on Hitler," is a newspaper article written in the Times of London in 1946, and is available to read on their website. This newspaper article addresses the question of why so many ordinary Germans stood by Hitler and the Nazi regime. Although it does mention this was mostly due to fear it also addresses a different view. This article is particularly useful as it argues that people all over the world were blaming all the German people for

the cruelties carried out by the Nazis. However, as it implies, Himmler's Posen speech and the fact that it was private/secret highlights that many ordinary Germans didn't know of the atrocities that were being carried out. His speech urged the attendees to keep the concentration camps and action against the Jews private.

- Times of London - "All Blame Put On Hitler." Times [London, England] 27 Mar. 1946: 3. The Times Digital Archive. Web. 29 Jan. 2016.  
<http://find.galegroup.com/ttda/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=TTDA&userGroupName=ucsantabarbara&tabID=T003&docPage=article&searchType=BasicSearchForm&docId=CS51200635&type=multipage&contentSet=LTO&version=1.0>

The Posen speech was used as evidence against Pohl after the war. The article From the New York Times, "Pohl, SS Chief of Staff, Captured While Toiling as a Farm Laborer," published on May 9 1946 discusses Pohl's capture and how he would be put on trial at Nuremburg. It calls him "the greatest mass murderer in history," as he was the chief administrator of the concentration camps. It also tells of Pohl's roles as chief of staff of the entire SS, adjutant general and quartermaster general of the SS, head of Central Office of Administration and Economy and head of the SS racketeering business. It highlights how he was to become a star witness and defendant in the Nuremburg trials. It goes on to explain how in order to save their own necks, Nazi leaders accused him of setting up Oswiecim camp that killed 4 million prisoners alone. It also tells how he was accused for coming up with the German "extermination by labor" policy in which slave workers were worked/starved to death.

- Pohl, SS chief of staff, captured while toiling as a farm laborer. (1946, May 29). New York Times (1923-Current File) Retrieved from  
<http://search.proquest.com/docview/107790114?accountid=14522>

The Harvard Law School Library website provides copies of the original documents used at the Nuremburg trials. It provides the original version and the cases in which it was used. According to the Webpage this speech was used as evidence in 2 trials. These included Milch Case - USA v. Erhard Milch (3 February 1947) and Pohl Case - USA v. Oswald Pohl, et al (16 June 1947).

- Himmler. "Speech of the Reichsfuehrer-SS at the meeting of SS Major-Generals (SS Gruppenfuehrer) at Posen October 4th, 1943," (1947). Nuremberg Trials Project. Harvard Law School Library  
<http://nuremberg.law.harvard.edu/php/search.php?DI=1&FieldFlag=11&NMTID=2&MTNo=1919&MTNoSuff=>

I was curious as to whether there are any arguments of discrepancies in the translation of Himmler's speech. Thus, searching on Google I came across an article in the Los Angeles

Times. The article discusses how documents, including handwritten notes by Himmler, were to be put on display in the National Archives. It quotes Robert Wolfe, a supervisory archivist for captured German records, who argues that Himmler was supposed to destroy the notes he made for his speech at Posen, however he did not obey by his own rules and kept them. The notes were hidden outside Berlin and recovered after WW2 from a salt mine in Austria. It goes on to argue that there is some uncertainty in the translation of the speech. It explains that the German word used in the speech, which is translated to “extermination,” is “ausrottung,” however Wolfe argues that this actually translates as “extirpation” or “tearing up by the roots.” Thus, suggesting that Himmler did not directly say that the Jews should be killed but that they should be completely removed. I looked “ausrottung” up on Google translate and it translates it to “extermination,” however Google translate isn’t always correct. Furthermore, it tells us that in the handwritten notes Himmler uses the euphemism “Judenevakuierung” which translates as “evacuation of the Jews,” however archive officials argue that he actually spoke the word “extermination,” which can be proven by audiotapes they have in the US National archives. Thus, suggesting that there are possible discrepancies in the translation of the speech, which could be problematic to its understanding. It also suggests that Himmler’s notes of the speech and what he actually spoke were not completely the same.

- Times, Los Angeles. ‘Himmler’s Pleasure at Killing of Jews Exhibited in Document’. April 17, 1993. Accessed March 7, 2016. [http://articles.latimes.com/1993-04-17/news/mn-24023\\_1\\_heinrich-himmler](http://articles.latimes.com/1993-04-17/news/mn-24023_1_heinrich-himmler).

By searching “Himmler, Posen” on Google books I came across the book “The Nazi Elite.” The book itself presents twenty-two biographical sketches of some of the Nazis most infamous leaders. When discussing Himmler the authors refer directly to the Posen speech. It discusses how the speech reveals the true mental attitude of both those who gave the orders and those who followed them. It explains how, if anyone, the SS generals present at the speech could have objected to what he was saying, but they didn’t. The authors argue this was because, by 1943, they had been indoctrinated with Nazi ideology and stripped of their individual philosophies.

- Smelser, Ronald and Rainer Zitelmann. The Nazi Elite. n.p.: Springer, 1993. <https://books.google.com/books?id=NueuCwAAQBAJ&pg=PA111&dq=Himmler+posen+1943&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKewj5pvnS4LLLAhUruYMKHQItDEMq6AEIOzAF#v=onepage&q=Himmler%20posen%201943&f=false>.

Again with a simple search of “Himmler, Posen” in Google books I came across the book “Heinrich Himmler: The Sinister Life of the Head of the SS and Gestapo.” The book examines Himmler as a seemingly ordinary boy and how he became an obsessive leader and believer of the superiority of the Aryan people. I was not able to access a preview of all the parts of the book that discuss Himmler’s speech but according to Worldcat it is available in the UCSB library. In the pages I could access on Google books it discusses how before Himmler’s speech at Posen all terminology used to discuss the genocide, for example “special treatment” and the “night and fog” symbolism had been ambiguous. But, in his Posen

speech he made his determination to exterminate the Jews explicitly clear, for the only time at a formal conference.

- Manvell, Roger and Heinrich Fraenkel. Heinrich Himmler: The Sinister Life of the Head of the SS and Gestapo. Greenhill Books, 2007.  
<https://books.google.com/books?id=IOqHgn7Eyb8C&pg=PA203&dq=Himmler+Posen&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjD6Ne4gg7LahUImIMKHffYBJMQ6AEIHTAA#v=onepage&q=Himmler%20Posen&f=false>

Furthermore, when searching a quote from the speech, "It's in our program, elimination of the Jews, extermination, we're doing it," in Google books I found an interesting book that referenced this quote. The book is called "Denying History: Who Says the Holocaust Never Happened and Why Do They Say It?" and it examines arguments some historians use to try and deny the Holocaust. In the passage in which this quote appeared there is a discussion between two historians, Irving and Shermer. Irving uses the extract from Himmler's Posen speech that contains this quote in an attempt to argue that the number of Jews Himmler intended to get rid of has been exaggerated and that this number was in the thousands rather than the millions and that his main aim was deportation. However, Shermer argues that Himmler's speech at Posen in fact highlights his calls for the necessity of executions of all Jews. Thus, it highlights the differing views between two historians.

- Shermer, Michael and Alex Grobman. Denying History: Who Says the Holocaust Never Happened and Why Do They Say It?. n.p.: University of California Press, 2009.  
<https://books.google.com/books?id=uACiJKy-cbgC&pg=PA193&dq=Most+of+you+here+know+what+it+means+when+100+corpse+lie+next+to+each+other,+when+there+are+500+or+when+there+are+1,000&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwigxbO0roLLAhUEPxQKHbZZB1AQ6AEILTAD#v=onepage&q=Most%20of%20you%20here%20know%20what%20it%20means%20when%20100%20corpses%20lie%20next%20to%20each%20other%2C%20when%20there%20are%20500%20or%20when%20there%20are%201%2C000&f=false>.

The book "Hitler's Master of the Dark arts," discusses Himmler's role as Hitler's "witch doctor" in Nazi Germany. It explains that much of Himmler's paper trail was destroyed, both on purpose and by destruction during the war. On the other hand, it describes that many of Himmler's speeches made it to magnetic tape and over 100 of Himmler's speeches were recorded on "acetate discs" or "red oxide," which still exist. It highlights that his speech at Posen was recorded on an audiotape before being transcribed by SS Untersturmfuhrer Werner Alfred Wenn. His speech was intended to be kept secret so the tapes were locked away however after the second world war they were found by American forces and now remain in the National archives. The book goes on to discuss the tone of the speech noting it was "candid, direct and visionary." Yenne also argues, that the location of the speech, was highly meaningful. He describes it as possessing a "schizophrenic identity" as the Poles saw the city as important to their identity, whereas the Germans saw it as symbolic of traditional Prussian and German hegemony in Eastern Europe. According to the book, the first Polish king was crowned in Posen in 1025 and thus the Poles saw it as the birthplace of the earliest

Polish Kingdom. Thus, he argues whilst most historians see the location as incidental it actually holds great significance.

- Yenne, Bill. *Hitler's Master of the Dark Arts: Himmler's Black Knights and the Occult Origins of the SS*. Minneapolis: MBI Pub. Co. and Zenith Press, 2010.

Finally, the Wikipedia page "Posen Speeches," cited Longerich's book "Heinrich Himmler: A Life." This book discusses Himmler's position of power and control in Germany, under the Nazis. I found this book on Google books and used the search tool to look within the book for the term "Posen." In one chapter of the book, Longerich refers to the fact that Himmler's speech at Posen was unusual as it discussed the Jewish question, which he usually refrained from talking about in his speeches. He provides an excerpt from the speech where Himmler praises the SS men for being tough and for coping, after seeing hundreds of dead corpses. In this passage Himmler also describes the killing of the Jews as a "glorious" "unwritten" page in Germany's history. The book also tells, how Himmler described the Jewish Question as "the most difficult Question," he ever had to face and argued that Jews would have been a burden and troublemakers during the war, to try and justify his actions. Furthermore, it addresses that where Himmler refers to the officers showing "decency" towards the "animals in human form"/ the Jews, this was not out of moral values but simply a matter of expediency.

- Longerich, Peter. *Heinrich Himmler: A Life*. n.p.: OUP Oxford. Copyright. 2012.  
<https://books.google.com/books?id=GBQchepZ-7EC&printsec=frontcover&dq=%09Longerich,+Peter.+Heinrich+Himmler&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKewi1n-Cng67LAhVmuYMKHUFVAIEQ6AEIHTAA#v=onepage&q=Posen&f=false>.