

Dictating the Holocaust:
Female administrators of the Third Reich

Rachel Century

PhD Candidate

2012

Department of History
Royal Holloway, University of London

Declaration of Authorship

I hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own.
Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Rachel Century

Signed:

Date:

Abstract

This thesis investigates the background, activities, and motivations of German women who provided administrative support for Nazi institutions and agencies of the Third Reich. It compares women who specifically chose to serve the Nazi cause in voluntary roles with those who took on such work as a progression of established careers. Using a variety of sources, including post-war testimony in criminal cases, it shows how much they knew about the repressive and genocidal aspects of the regime and evaluates the role that ideology, as against other factors, played in their loyalty to their employers.

Secretaries, *SS-Helferinnen* (SS female auxiliaries) and *Nachrichtenhelferinnen des Heeres* (female communication auxiliaries of the army) held similar jobs: taking dictation, answering telephones, and sending telegrams. Yet their backgrounds differed markedly. While secretaries were habitually recruited on the basis of their prior experience and competencies, the *Helferinnen* predominantly volunteered, sometimes motivated by ideology and the opportunity to serve their country, sometimes enticed by the prospect of foreign travel or the lure of the uniform.

The thesis sheds light on these women's backgrounds: their social status, education, career patterns. It seeks to explain the situations and motives that propelled them into their positions and explores what they knew about the true nature of their work. These women often had access to information about the administration of genocide and are a relatively untapped resource. Their recollections shed light on the lives and work of their superiors, the mundane tasks that contributed to the displacement, deportation and death of millions of people across Europe, and the extent to which information about these atrocities was communicated and comprehended. Attention is paid to the specific role played by gender amongst perpetrators of the Holocaust. The question of how gender intersected with National Socialism, repression, atrocity and genocide forms the conceptual thread linking the separate chapters on these three groups of women who had varied backgrounds and degrees of initial commitment to Nazi ideology.

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Introduction

The women who provided administrative support for the Nazis, both as their secretaries and as auxiliaries, have not been a major focus within the historiography of the Third Reich. Perhaps they have not been written about because little is known of them, who they were or what work they did. Perhaps they have not been written about because the role they played is considered less interesting than that of concentration camp guard, or brave resistor. These women may have played a crucial role in National Socialism, but were they victims, forced into the role, or perpetrators, willingly administrating for the Nazis? And if their involvement was crucial, why have they been ignored?

History has all too often been presented from a male perspective. What women were doing while the men were fighting, plundering, conquering, is rarely told. This may have been because, in the main, historians have been men, or perhaps this is the product of the predominantly patriarchal nature of society. Through the centuries, there have been occasional publications giving a woman's perspective but these were few and far between.¹ Women's history can refer to events that are specific to women and particularly concern them, and it can refer to the account given of these events. The purpose of women's history has been defined as to "restore women to history, and to restore our history to women".² In the 1970s it was contested whether women had their own history, or whether research into their experiences belonged to anthropology.³ Today, historians no longer doubt that women have their own history and therefore that such gendered history can be written.

Women's history concerns not merely half of humankind but all of it.⁴

¹ See, for example Glückel von Hameln, *The Life of Glückel von Hameln*, Beth-Zion Abrahams, ed., (London: Horovitz Publishing Company, 1962).

² Joan Kelly-Gadol, "The Social Relation of the Sexes" in Sandra Harding, ed., *Feminism and Methodology* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1987), p.15.

³ Michelle Perrot, ed., *Writing Women's History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), p.1.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.106.

“Talking about women without talking about men, is like clapping hands with one hand only”:⁵ it cannot be done. While a piece of work may specifically explore the experiences of women, men are always present – as their fathers, husbands, brothers, perhaps as soldiers, workers, doctors. There will always be interaction between the two genders. Gender history requires a close look at how “men and women construct their ‘experience’ within a dialectic of power”.⁶ Lynn Abrams and Elizabeth Harvey consider this an especially valuable insight in the context of German history. Traditionally, political power in Germany has been seen as particularly authoritarian and repressive; with women given very little power or chance of resisting.⁷ Using a framework of gender studies offers an alternative perspective to the traditional narrative. Looking at the Holocaust through gender provides a “more complex and more complete account of what happened”⁸ and a “richer and more finely nuanced understanding of the Holocaust”.⁹ Conversely, certain concerns may arise with the use of a gendered approach. Differentiating between male and female victims might be considered to detract from the fact that all Jews were equally persecuted by the Nazis. Lawrence Langer asserts that during the Holocaust both men and women were living in extreme circumstances in which they faced no choice.¹⁰ Others argue that focusing on gender trivializes the Holocaust: differentiating the victims diminishes the horrors they faced. Countering these arguments, historians point out that this approach restores “individuality and humanity to the victims”.¹¹ However, a gendered approach is not without pitfalls. Zoë Waxman warns of the danger of using a pre-determined agenda, arguing that “using a familiar, gendered, conceptual framework, women’s testimonies are often used to show us what we already want to see”:¹² that the woman’s role was that of

⁵ Eric Cohen, quoted in Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation* (London: Sage, 1997), p.1.

⁶ L. Roper, “Will and Honor: Sex, Words and Power in Augsburg Criminal Trials” in *Radical History Review* 43 (1989), p.45.

⁷ Lynn Abrams and Elizabeth Harvey, eds., *Gender Relations in German History: Power, Agency and Experience from the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Century* (London: UCL Press, 1996), p.4.

⁸ L. Weitzman and D. Ofer, “Role of Gender” in D. Ofer and L. Weitzman, eds., *Women in the Holocaust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), p.3.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.1.

¹⁰ Lawrence Langer, “Gendered Suffering? Women in Holocaust Testimonies” in Ofer and Weitzman, eds., *Women*, p.362.

¹¹ Weitzman and Ofer, “Role of Gender” in Ofer and Weitzman, eds., *Women*, p.14.

¹² Zoë Waxman, *Writing the Holocaust* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), p.124.

mother and caregiver. Waxman asserts that

“the function of collective memory is not to focus on the past in order to find out more about the Holocaust, but to use the past to inform and meet the present concerns. In the case of women, the purpose is to say something universal about women, not about their particular Holocaust experiences”.¹³

Although she focuses solely on survivor testimony, this admonition is equally applicable to using the framework of gender to assess female perpetrators. This caveat should not prevent research into female perpetrators. As most of the research into perpetrators to date has been male-orientated, a study of the female protagonists is sorely needed.

This study needs to be placed within the appropriate historiographical context. Women’s history, the precursor to both feminist history and gender history, can be said to have revitalized theory “for it has shaken the conceptual foundations of historical study”.¹⁴ The research methods used for women’s studies and feminist studies differ, so definitions of these disciplines must be considered. Women’s history, defined by its subject matter, does not need to evoke a feminist perspective at all. Feminist history is defined by the very specificity of its theoretical agenda,¹⁵ infused with a concern about the past and present oppression of women. Gender history has shifted the debate away from a focus on women to an examination of the interdependence and relational nature of female and male identities. Judith Bennett argues that the central issue of women’s history should be feminism,¹⁶ and that it should be integrated with the histories of race and class to break down the marginalisation of women’s history. Yet there are problems with such an approach to the study of women and gender. For example, studies of women as victims of male dominance create a false impression that women have only been victims.¹⁷ A

¹³ Ibid., p.151.

¹⁴ Joan Kelly-Gadol, “The Social Relations of the Sexes: Methodological Implications of Women's History”, *Signs*, 1:4 (Summer, 1976), p.809.

¹⁵ June Purvis, “From “Women Worthies” to Poststructuralism? Debate and Controversy in Women's History in Britain” in June Purvis, ed., *Women's History, Britain 1850-1945: An Introduction* (London: UCL Press, 1995).

¹⁶ Judith M. Bennett, “Feminism and History” in Sue Morgan, ed., *The Feminist History Reader* (London: Routledge, 2006), p.70.

¹⁷ Sandra Harding, *Feminism and Methodology* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1987), p.5.

different approach, to examine women's contributions to activities which are already the focus of social science analysis, only examines those activities that men have found it important to study. These problems lead Sandra Harding to suggest that the best feminist research and scholarship is that which does not follow a "feminist method". It is far better to apply the general structure of scientific theory to research on women and gender, whereby the researcher is not an "invisible, anonymous voice of authority, but ... a real, historical individual with concrete, specific desires and interests".¹⁸ Focusing directly on the lives of women as a framework incorporates both women's subjection, and their subjectivity.¹⁹ In this sense, a study of those female administrators who supported the Nazis may be considered women's history, rather than feminist history; whether they were oppressed by men is the deciding factor.

Studies in women's history in Germany have often focused on the Third Reich, and the topic has been politicized by the importation of wider debates over relations between the sexes.²⁰ The women of Nazi Germany have been the subject of numerous studies partly as the result of growing interest in questions of coercion and consent. There has been great debate among feminist historians of Nazi Germany as to the extent to which German women in the Third Reich were perpetrators or victims. Gisela Bock's research led her to conclude that all German women were simply victims of the state, valued only for their reproductive ability.²¹ Contrary to this, Claudia Koonz has shown that German women were fully supportive of the Nazi Regime, either by committing crimes alongside men or by ensuring that their menfolk were made to feel accepted and nurtured.²² Koonz sees women as perpetrators within the role of caring housewife and mother, which society allotted to them. Bock disagrees, accusing Koonz of "investigating [the] past

¹⁸ Ibid., p.9.

¹⁹ Karen Offen, Ruth Roach Pierson and Jane Rendall, *Writing Women's History* (London: Macmillan, 1991).

²⁰ Ute Frevert, Heide Wunder and Christina Vanja, "Historical Research on Women in the Federal Republic of Germany" in Offen, Roach Pierson and Rendall, *Writing Women's History*, pp.294-5.

²¹ Gisela Bock, *Zwangssterilisation im Nationalsozialismus. Studien zur Rassenpolitik und Frauenpolitik* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1986).

²² Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1987).

with one eye on its usefulness in the present”.²³ Bock’s more recent research emphasizes the multiplicity of the positions of women under the National Socialist system of government²⁴. Margarete Mitscherlich is of the opinion that

“women were themselves victims who shared the anti-Semitic and racist views only out of an urge to conform and had no motives of their own for taking part in the criminal system”.²⁵

However, if all German women are seen as victims, this threatens the recognition of victims of Nazi persecution. Yet, Robin Morgan takes this contention one step further, claiming that women who participate in hate crimes are also victims of these crimes, since they must have been forced into them.²⁶ Christina Thürmer-Rohr offers a different perspective, viewing women as joint perpetrators: “both the complementarity of man and woman (difference) and conformity by women to make male strategies (equality) ultimately form the basis of joint perpetration”.²⁷ Kathrin Kompisch uses case studies to demonstrate that women in the Nazi state were every bit as brutal as men.²⁸ Like Bock, Christina Herkommer considers the “issue of women as victims or perpetrators under National Socialism...largely resolved by emphasizing the multiple roles of women”.²⁹

These multiple roles may be seen in the development of women’s movements in German history. Movements for girls and women existed in Germany long before the Nazis utilised them as both a means of inclusion in a common ideology and a method of indoctrination. Marion De Ras charted the progression of the youth movements, noting that they allowed girls to define their identity for the

²³ Christina Herkommer, “Women under National Socialism: Women’s Scope for Action and the Issue of Gender”, translated by Richard Littlejohn, in Olaf Jensen and Claus-Christian W. Szejnmann, eds., *Ordinary People as Mass Murderers* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p.108.

²⁴ Gisela Bock, “Ordinary Women in Nazi Germany. Perpetrators, Victims, Followers, and Bystanders” in Dalia Ofer and Lenore J. Weitzman, eds., *Women in the Holocaust* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), p.95.

²⁵ Ibid., p.103.

²⁶ Robin Morgan, writing in *Ms. Magazine* in 1991, cited in Susannah Heschel, “Does Atrocity Have a Gender? Feminist Interpretations of Women in the SS” in Jeffrey Diefendorf, ed., *Lessons and Legacies. New Currents in Holocaust Research* (2004), p.314.

²⁷ Herkommer, “Women” in Jensen and Szymann, eds., *Ordinary People*, p.104.

²⁸ Kathrin Kompisch, *Täterinnen: Frauen im Nationalsozialismus* (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2008).

²⁹ Herkommer, “Women” in Jensen and Szymann, eds., *Ordinary People*, p.110.

first time, “both as girls, as members of a youth culture, and a girls’ community”.³⁰ Similarly, Richard Evans examined the formation of both youth movements for girls and feminist movements for women in Germany since the 1870s.³¹

The feminist movements which had flourished in Weimar Germany were challenged by the NSDAP, which offered women an opportunity to fulfil their aspirations within the Nazi structure. The NSDAP recruited its female support from the middle-class Protestant-based organisations, as did the *Bund Deutscher Frauenvereine* (BDF).³² At first, the BDF tried to stress the common elements between the two ideologies. Some branches of the BDF embraced the change. Forced to dissolve on May 7, 1933, the Women’s Teachers’ Association, for example, recommended to its member associations that they should join the new national organisation of male and female teachers being set up by the NSDAP. The BDF’s magazine, *Die Frau*, continued to publish until almost the end of the war; in order to do so, they refrained from commenting on the position of women in the Third Reich.³³ Claudia Koonz concludes that many organisations within the BDF did not resist the Nazis at all because these associations

“subscribed to an ideal of motherhood shared by Hitler and his followers, and their nationalism made women susceptible to a dictatorship that promised a restoration of order”.³⁴

Richard Evans believes that the BDF’s response to the Nazis was “ambivalent”, in part because the similarity between some of the BDF’s ideas “and much of what the NSDAP had to say about women was too striking to overlook”.³⁵ Indeed, within a year of its founding, one in ten of the members of the Nazi Party were women,³⁶ and in 1936 the *NS-Frauenschaft*, the only women’s organisation officially affiliated

³⁰ Marion E. P de Ras, *Body, Femininity and Nationalism, Girls in the German Youth Movement 1900-1934* (New York: Routledge, 2008), p.185.

³¹ Richard Evans, *The Feminist Movement in Germany 1894-1933* (London: Sage, 1976), pp.253, 255, 258, 259.

³² For a translation of all German terms used in this thesis, see the glossary.

³³ Evans, *Feminist*, pp.253-259.

³⁴ Koonz, *Mothers*, p.144.

³⁵ Evans, *Feminist*, pp.258-9.

³⁶ Dorothee Klinksiek, *Die Frau im NS Staat* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1982), p.20.

to the party, attained a membership of 2 million women.³⁷

Pre-existing youth movements were also absorbed by the Nazis once they came to power, becoming subordinate to the National Socialist *Hitlerjugend* and *Bund Deutscher Mädel* (BDM). The BDM was the Nazi girls' organisation, a division of the Hitler Youth, for girls aged 14 to 21. Membership only became compulsory in March 1939, when 10 year old girls were obligated to register for the branch of the Hitler Youth catering for younger girls, the *Jungmädel* (JM). Although the earlier youth groups faded and were later banned, mirroring the experience of the feminist movements, their very structure and purpose influenced the Nazi youth movements.

The various movements shaped their members and thereby influenced the contribution of some German women to the Holocaust. But did young girls and women choose to support the Nazi regime by taking on an active role within the movements? And what opportunities were offered to those who embraced the Nazi party view of women? Were they – consciously or otherwise – demonstrating their support and loyalty to the cause? Who exactly was the ideal Nazi woman and were women who were active proponents of the Nazi regime considered to fit this ideal?

The Reich Women's Leadership aimed, in the words of its head, Gertrud Scholtz-Klink, to "infuse the daily life of all German women – even in the tiniest villages – with Nazi ideals".³⁸ Under the slogan "Kinder, Küche, Kirche" [Children, Kitchen, Church], women were encouraged by the Nazis to stay at home and tend to their children, with incremental rewards depending on the number of children they bore. Women who supported Nazism "accepted their inferior status in exchange for rewards".³⁹ Yet Hitler expected more than simply reproduction from German women. At the outbreak of war, on September 1, 1939, in a speech delivered to the German Reichstag, Hitler stated what he anticipated: "that they integrate

³⁷ Jill Stephenson, *The Nazi Organization of Women* (London: Croom Helm, 1991), pp.148-150³⁸
Koonz, *Mothers*, p.xxv.

³⁸ Koonz, *Mothers*, p.xxv.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.3.

themselves, with an exemplary iron discipline, into the combat community”.⁴⁰ This message was reprinted in the BDM Yearbook of 1940, and reinforced by the other contents, including patriotic lyrics, motivational quotations, and photographs of BDM girls. A statement by the BDM *Reichsreferentin*, Jutta Rüdiger, ended “whatever the coming year 1940 may bring, whatever the Führer expects of us: we are ready”.⁴¹ The Nazis ensured that at every stage in a female life, there was a corresponding organisation for her to join, so that at all times women were under party control.⁴² Girls were drawn to the BDM by the uniforms, the bands, flags and symbols, designed especially to increase the impact of “strong words by evidence of strong deeds”.⁴³ Melita Maschmann was one of those carried away by the excitement of the marching songs and youth rallies; watching one torchlight procession she longed to hurl herself into the parade, “to be submerged and borne along by it”.⁴⁴ As members of the BDM, girls were engaged in a wide variety of activities including sports, community work, parades and camping trips, all of which the girls were expected to do with “dedication and pride”,⁴⁵ creating dutiful, loyal and ardent members of the Nazi state. Hitler believed that “the future of the German nation depends upon its young people”,⁴⁶ and stated that the BDM was a form of education for youth in Germany. As part of the educational benefits of the BDM, girls were encouraged to spend time abroad. The 1940 yearbook report on the previous year included work placements abroad, to improve foreign language abilities. Anticipating that in the following year more girls might be sent to “connected countries”, the purpose of these trips was, “through professional work”, to learn about “the lives of Germans abroad”.⁴⁷ There were many opportunities for

⁴⁰ “daß sie sich in eiserner Disziplin vorbildlich in diese große Kampfgemeinschaft einfügt!”, reprinted in *Wir Schaffen. Jahrbuch des BDM, 1940* (Munich: Zentralverlag der NSDAP, 1940), p.105. Unless stated otherwise, all translations in this thesis are the author’s own.

⁴¹ “was das kommende Jahr 1940 uns bringen mag, was der Führer von uns fordern wird: Wir sind bereit!” *ibid.*, p.157.

⁴² Paul Johnson, *Hitler’s League of Young Maidens* (Hull: Historia Press, 2007), p.53.

⁴³ T. H. Qualter, *Propaganda and Psychological Warfare* (New York: Random House, 1962), p.112.

⁴⁴ Melita Maschmann, *Account Rendered. My Dossier on my Former Self* (London: Abelard-Schumann, 1965), p.11.

⁴⁵ Johnson, *Hitler’s League*, p.12.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.10-11, from Hitler’s decree establishing the Hitler Youth as the Nazi Party’s only youth organisation, December 1, 1936.

⁴⁷ “betreffenden Ländern”, “durch berufliche Arbeit”, “das Leben der Auslandsdeutschen”, *Wir Schaffen*, p.173.

young German women to work abroad, both in German colonies and in countries Germany conquered during the war.

In February 1938, Herman Göring introduced the *weibliche Pflichtjahr*, a civil year of duty for women, which had to be completed between the ages of 14 and 25. All single women had to give a year of service working in agriculture or as a domestic, as a precursor to employment, and as a preparation for war, when they would have to relieve the projected labour shortage.⁴⁸ In 1938, 130,000 young women did their service and the following year 300,000 women took part.⁴⁹ It was considered beneficial for the whole of their future lives⁵⁰ and a means “to support the rebuilding of Germany”.⁵¹ The positions available were limited to three fields: agriculture, which involved gardening and teaching; housekeeping, which included kindergarten assistants; and social care, such as nursing and dieticians.⁵² Women who completed this year of duty would have been ideal candidates to work for the military as they would have already gained many of the necessary skills, both at the regular meetings of the BDM and during their time abroad.

In 1933, the Nazi Women Student’s Association, a subdivision of the National Socialist German Student League, introduced a range of compulsory extracurricular activities for female students. In addition to this, students in their first six semesters of university (the first three years) had to follow special courses in “women’s service” – *Frauendienst* – which included communications, air raid protection and health courses. However, as “most female students decided they had better things to do during their leisure time...they ignored the instructions of their Nazi leaders”.⁵³ Two years later, a large scale *Landdienst* programme was introduced for students of both sexes. This was also unsuccessful, with less than 2% of all German

⁴⁸ Dagmar Reese, *Growing up Female in Nazi Germany* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2006), p.24 and Birgit Jürgens, *Zur Geschichte des BDM von 1923 bis 1939* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1994), p.186.

⁴⁹ Jürgens, *Zur Geschichte des BDM*, p.188, and also Gertrud Albrecht, *Das Pflichtjahr* (Berlin: Junker und Dünnhaupt Verlag, 1942), p.11.

⁵⁰ Albrecht, *Das Pflichtjahr*, p.11.

⁵¹ “die Wiederaufbauarbeit in Deutschland zu unterstützen”, *ibid.*, p.14.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp.39-41.

⁵³ Jacques R. Pauwels, *Women, Nazis and Universities* (London: Greenwood Press, 1984), p.58.

university students volunteering. After various other agriculture schemes were attempted, female students were eventually called up for *Osteinsatz* and *Westeinsatz*. These were intended as “an elitist undertaking restricted to students whose National Socialist integrity was firmly established”.⁵⁴ In 1941 only 260 university students of both sexes were found worthy of participation in *Westeinsatz*. Despite the entry restrictions, the scheme was not a particular success. Many of the young women did not take it seriously: “female students behaved very poorly in the *Westeinsatz*”;⁵⁵ protesting loudly, and departing prematurely for leave or returning late from leave. Elizabeth Harvey’s *Women in the Nazi East* observed that *Osteinsatz* paved the way for women to be sent east to assist in the Germanization of occupied Poland.⁵⁶

The *Deutsch-Kolonialer Frauenbund* had been founded to send white women from Germany to Germany’s overseas colonies in order to prevent racially mixed marriages.⁵⁷ In 1943, the Colonial School for Women at Rendsberg (in north Germany) was the last remnant of pro-colonial activity in Germany, but it acquired a new function under the Nazis. Despite an inherent tension within its mission, “colonialist women’s organisations...showed almost continuous intensification of racism and nationalism between 1885 and 1933”; thus the Rendsburg school’s cooperation with the SS was not coincidental. The school prepared women for all domestic and agricultural work, specifically with “settlement purposes both at home and abroad”, and consequently these women were in high demand in the east. In 1940, the school newsletter noted “with the victorious end of the war...many female workers for the reconquered colonies will probably be needed”, as a result the attendees were required to have a “flawlessly National Socialist attitude”. During the war, graduates of the school took part in *Osteinsatz*. A school history mentions graduates filling “guest” positions on Norwegian farms in early 1944, arranged by the Reich Nutrition Estate and Reich Youth Leadership, although

⁵⁴ Ibid., p.66.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p.122.

⁵⁶ Elizabeth Harvey, *Women and the Nazi East: Agents and Witnesses of Germanization* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

⁵⁷ Evans, *Feminist*, p.239.

the nature of the work and their exact location is unknown.⁵⁸ Lora Wildenthal believes that the Rendsburg school epitomized the deep contradictions in Nazi policy toward women:

“In a profoundly woman-hating state, these racially selected and specially trained women found a space of freedom in which to enact, or at least imagine, their own domination of colonial space”.⁵⁹

This was not the only contradiction evident in the Nazi policy towards women. In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler stated that women would only attain citizenship in the future Reich when they married,⁶⁰ implying that single women were not as important to the Reich. Although this policy was never implemented, married women were more highly valued and were rewarded for marriage. Notwithstanding this doctrine, single women contributed “more than their share to Nazi organisational life”;⁶¹ having fewer household responsibilities, they had more time to devote to non-domestic activities. As Elizabeth Heineman notes, the regime’s reliance on single women in organisations such as the BDM, was ironic:

“if all adult, racially approved women had married and devoted themselves to raising children – as they, in theory, were supposed to – the party would have been hard-pressed to keep its women’s organisations functioning”.⁶²

Despite relying on single women to run the movement, the BDM still encouraged girls to assume that “the woman’s world, when she is lucky, is the family, her husband, her children, her home”.⁶³

The jump between parading as a member of the BDM and working for the army can be explained by factors such as propaganda, peer pressure and patriotism,

⁵⁸ Lora Wildenthal, *German Women for Empire, 1884-1945* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), pp.197- 198, from the *Mitteilungsblatt der Kolonialen Frauenschule Rendsburg*, June 1940, unpaginated.

⁵⁹ Wildenthal, *German Women for Empire*, pp.200-201.

⁶⁰ Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf, Volume 2* (Munich: Franz Eher Nachf., Munich, 1927), p.79.

⁶¹ Elizabeth D. Heineman, *What Difference Does a Husband Make?* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p.38.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p.39.

⁶³ “Reden des Führers am Parteitag der Ehre 1936” in Klinksiek, *Die Frau*, p.23 and in Heineman, *What Difference*, p.39.

alongside the *weibliche Pflichtjahr*. Although it may be surprising that women, as mothers and nurturers, would work for the army, Nira Yuval-Davis argues that the military and warfare have never been exclusively male: “women have always fulfilled certain, often vital, roles within them – but usually not on an equal, undifferentiated basis to that of the men”.⁶⁴ Not all countries agree on the definition of roles within the army, and the difference between civil tasks and military. In West Germany in 1980, the female clerical workers servicing the army were considered civilians, whereas the female military medical officers were formally considered part of the military.⁶⁵ Whether male clerks are considered part of the military is rarely discussed. The role women play within an army needs to be defined to determine if they are civilians, which in turn may determine level of involvement. If the military does not regard a clerk as part of the military, how can the clerk then be responsible for any actions of the military?

The general Nazi vision was of separate but complementary spheres for men and women; women remaining at home, rearing children, and men fighting for their country, although this was not applied consistently. The decision not to conscript women reflected the traditional attitudes, that women were nurturers, held by some of the Nazi leadership: promises to keep married women out of the labour market, for example, had been prominent in the National Socialist election campaign. The preservation of a semblance of family unity and purity was of utmost importance. *Lebensborn* homes were specially set up by Himmler as part of his *Lebensborn* association to ensure that German blood remained pure.⁶⁶ The two main objectives of the *Lebensborn* society, created on December 12, 1935, were to support large families considered racially and genetically valuable and to care for the mothers of these families, and the children they produced.⁶⁷ To achieve these goals, the association set up maternity homes and orphanages throughout

⁶⁴ Yuval-Davis, *Gender*, p.93.

⁶⁵ Wendy Chapkis, *Loaded Questions: Women in the Military* (Amsterdam: Transnational Institute, 1981), p.89.

⁶⁶ See Lisa Pine, *Nazi Family Policy, 1933-1945* (Oxford, New York: Berg, 1997), pp.38-43. Note that most of the secondary literature on this topic is rather sensationalist, particularly as it has been rumoured that the *Lebensborn* programme was a breeding programme and that the homes were the location for men to choose the woman they wished to procreate with.

⁶⁷ Marriage files, BArch NS 41/122.

Germany and occupied northern and western Europe. The first such home opened in 1936.⁶⁸ A further purpose of the *Lebensborn* organisation was to aid childless SS men in the “selection and adoption of racially valuable children”.⁶⁹ While not a secret, the *Lebensborn* programme was exclusive;⁷⁰ as with SS membership, it was restricted to those deemed to be biologically fit and racially pure. Additionally, the programme was able to protect single, pregnant women from the shame of bearing an illegitimate child, as they could turn to the association rather than family members for support. Thousands of non-German women who had become pregnant by German soldiers faced ostracism from their families and communities and so applied for help from the *Lebensborn* programme. The programme was also able to protect SS men who had impregnated women other than their wives from the shame of their wives discovering their misdemeanours. In cases where the SS man expressed a desire to marry the mother of his illegitimate child, the staff at the *Lebensborn* home would assess the character and suitability of the mother.⁷¹ When the mother of an illegitimate child did not wish to rear them, the home would find suitable SS parents to adopt the child.⁷²

The formation of a woman’s office within the *Deutsche Arbeitsfront* (DAF) was a direct contradiction to this vision of woman as child-bearer and child-rearer. The main aim of the DAF was to reconcile the industrial working class to the new regime.⁷³ This was in contrast to the *Reichsmütterdienst* (RMD), set up in 1934, to train women in childcare.⁷⁴ However, certain schemes were brought in to mobilize women, such as the *Pflichtjahr*. A general obligation for all women to work was sought by the *Wehrmacht*, parts of the bureaucracy and some party leaders, yet it never became reality because Hitler “was principally opposed to forcing women to

⁶⁸ Robert Lewis Koehl, *The Black Corps* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), p.119.

⁶⁹ Catrine Clay and Michael Leapman, *Master Race. The Lebensborn Experiment in Nazi Germany* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1995), p.59.

⁷⁰ Volker Koop, >>Dem Führer ein Kind schenken<< *Die SS-Organisation Lebensborn e.V.* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2007), p.2.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p.20.

⁷² Clay and Leapman, *Master Race*, p.60.

⁷³ Jill Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Germany* (Harlow: Longman, 2001), p.60.

⁷⁴ Ute Frevert, *Women in German History* (New York: Berg Publishers, 1997), pp. 215, 233.

work”.⁷⁵ Women were not mobilized en masse; for example, employment offices were instructed to only call up women who had previously worked and were now unemployed.⁷⁶ When there was a need for women to join the workforce, Nazi propaganda emphasized that it was a woman’s duty and

“just as Nazi ideology before the war compared mothers to soldiers...so propaganda during the war made mothers on the assembly line the analogue of men at the front”.⁷⁷

The long hours and low pay caused many women to seek excuses to avoid employment, arranging to ‘work’ in the homes of acquaintances, becoming ill, and even in some cases conceiving to avoid registration.⁷⁸ That some women opposed mobilisation demonstrates a refusal to act as the ideal Nazi woman. Whether this was a conscious decision or not, many German women expressed their indifference to (at least one aspect) of Nazi propaganda.

By contrast, almost 4,000 women worked as concentration camp guards⁷⁹ and thousands more supported them and the German army in administrative roles. As administrators, they typed, answered telephones, took dictation and wrote letters; they worked across the whole spectrum of Nazi offices, both prior to and during the war. Their work covered all aspects of Nazi administration, encapsulating economic, political, domestic and foreign policy.

The *Gestapo* was founded in April 1934, and employed female administrators from its inception. The *Gestapo*, which was able to imprison opponents of the Third Reich without any judicial proceedings, had offices across Germany and later throughout occupied Europe.⁸⁰ Heinrich Himmler created the

⁷⁵ Dörte Winkler, *Frauenarbeit im Dritten Reich* (Hamburg: Hoffman and Campe, 1977) p.251.

⁷⁶ Leila J. Rupp ““I don't call that *Volksgemeinschaft*”: Women, Class and War in Nazi Germany” in Carol R. Berkin and Clara M. Lovett, *Women, War and Revolution* (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, Inc., 1980), p.38.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.39.

⁷⁸ *Meldungen aus dem Reich* (MadR), in the Bundesarchiv Koblenz: MadR, No.120, Sept. 2, 1940, BA, R 58/154 and MadR, No. 356, February 4, 1943, BA, R 58/180 in Rupp ““I don't call that *Volksgemeinschaft*””, pp.42-3.

⁷⁹ Stephenson, *Women*, p.60.

⁸⁰ Heinz Höhne, *Der Orden unter dem Totenkopf* (Munich: Bertelsmann, 1976).

Reichssicherheitshauptamt (RSHA) in 1939, by merging the *Gestapo* with the criminal police and the security service. The RSHA employed around 50,000 people during the war;⁸¹ the *Gestapo* was just one of many offices it administered. There were seven offices in total, including personnel, inland security and security abroad, each of which was split into several smaller departments. Each department had a typing pool, and the women working in these were given general tasks, such as dictation and letter writing, by any of the men in the department. Some secretaries working at the RSHA were attached to specific men, acting as their assistant, and working only for them. In common with the headquarters of most Nazi operations, the RSHA offices were based in several locations in Berlin. Towards the end of the war several sites were bombed and then evacuated, and so some women found themselves transferred several times, working at various locations in Berlin, Southern Germany and even as far away as Prague.⁸²

The office for economic policy, the *Wirtschaftsverwaltungshauptamt* (WVHA), was, initially, a separate entity from the RSHA. Headed up by Oswald Pohl, the WVHA, responsible for managing the finances of the SS, and for running the concentration camps, was also based in Berlin⁸³. Himmler also founded the Race and Settlement main office, *Rasse- und Siedlungshauptamt* (RuSHA); its purpose was to safeguard the racial purity of the SS members. It did this by controlling who SS members were able to marry.

The so-called 'Euthanasia' programme began in spring 1939, murdering approximately 5,000 children considered worthless because they were physically or mentally disabled. The programme was extended to include adults, and was known by the codename T4, after the address of the head office: *Tiergartenstrasse 4*. More than 70,000 mentally and physically disabled adults were gassed at six clinics located in Germany and Austria under the auspices of the 'Euthanasia' programme.

⁸¹ *Topography of Terror* (Berlin: Stiftung Topographie des Terrors, 2010), p.127.

⁸² See, for example, the post-war testimony given by Ingeborg Schoenemann and Ursula Rogge, both in Bundesarchiv Berlin (BArch) B162 4173.

⁸³ Peter Ferdinand Koch, *Himmlers Graue Eminenz. Oswald Pohl und das Wirtschafts-Verwaltungshauptamt der SS* (Hamburg: Facta Oblita, 1988).

The female administrators working for T4 had one main task: to write *Trostbriefe* to the families of those who were in most cases murdered.⁸⁴

In addition to working for the RSHA, the WVHA and the T4 programme, German women were urgently required, as *Helperinnen* - auxiliaries. A variety of women volunteered to become *Helperinnen*, ranging from *Volksdeutsche* to German royalty. The women served in distinct organisations, supporting various sectors of the *Wehrmacht*, and the SS. They contributed to the functioning of the German army, navy and air force, operating as telecommunication auxiliaries, nurses, and anti-aircraft auxiliaries. The women were organized into distinct groups, each holding a specific role varying from predicting and monitoring the weather, packing parachutes, controlling air traffic, to working in the communications service and the fire brigade.⁸⁵ The army, navy and air force each had their own training system, methods of handling, and uniform for, their respective *Helperinnen*. The fragmentation of women's employment reflected the fragmentation of the Third Reich and the German Armed Forces. All the *Helperinnen* in the German Armed Forces, whichever unit they were supporting and whichever role they performed, were considered civilian employees of the individual armed services that they served; they had no military status and were classified as wartime "*Wehrmachtgefolge*" [army supporters].⁸⁶

As Germany rapidly expanded her territory across Europe, hoping to create a new world order, efficient administration was fundamental. Two groups of women, *Nachrichtenhelferinnen des Heeres* and *SS-Helferinnen*, worked in communications, a vital function for the German war effort. Their tasks - operating radios, telephones and teletype machines - enabled both the army and the SS to maintain links spanning their ever-expanding territory. In total, 8,000 women

⁸⁴ Michael Burleigh, *Death and Deliverance: 'Euthanasia' in Germany c.1900-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

⁸⁵ See Franz W. Seidler, *Frauen zu den Waffen* (Koblenz/Bonn: Wehr&Wissen, 1978), pp.59-64 and Franz W. Seidler, *Blitzmädchen* (Koblenz/Bonn: Wehr&Wissen, 1979).

⁸⁶ Ursula von Gersdorff, *Frauen im Kriegsdienst* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1969), pp.60-61.

served as *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* during the course of the war,⁸⁷ and were sent to all German-occupied areas of Europe, supporting the army through their administrative work. Around 3,000 women were trained as *SS-Helferinnen*⁸⁸ to replace men as telephone, teletype and radio operators, specifically in SS offices.⁸⁹

Germany's conquests exacerbated her already severe deficiencies, as the occupied countries faced their own shortages of oil, coal and animal feed.⁹⁰ Both populations and resources required careful management. Each new occupied country brought with it its own challenges and opportunities, and a bewildering variety of administrative structures were used to govern Germany's new territories. Where possible, the Germans worked through existing structures, and used civil servants already in place, although in many instances they fled.⁹¹ Often, locals were used as translators, and sometimes they doubled up as administrators. Hitler personally appointed officials, who were in the most case answerable only to him, to run each of the occupied territories.⁹²

By the end of 1942, "Germany occupied approximately one-third of the European land-mass and ruled nearly half its inhabitants".⁹³ These territorial gains exacerbated Germany's already severe deficiencies, as the newly occupied countries faced their own shortages of oil, coal and animal feed.⁹⁴ The limited supplies, along with the local population, needed to be administered resourcefully. While the Germans "considered local government an indispensable instrument for the

⁸⁷ Jutta Mühlenberg, *Das SS-Helferinnenkorps. Ausbildung, Einsatz und Entnazifizierung der weiblichen Angehörigen der Waffen-SS 1942-1949* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2011), p.54.

⁸⁸ Seidler, *Frauen*, p.175.

⁸⁹ Betty Raab Kennedy, *SS-Helferinnen: the Women's Communication Corps-SS, 1942-1945* (Unpublished MA Thesis: Southern Illinois University, 1982).

⁹⁰ Adam Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction: The Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy* (London: Allen Lane, 2006), p.666.

⁹¹ Nico Wouters, "Localisation in the Age of Centralisation: Local government in Belgium and Nord-Pas-de-Calais (1940-1944)" in Bruno De Wever, Herman Van Goethern and Nico Wouters, eds., *Local Government in Occupied Europe (1939-1945)* (Gent: Academia Press, 2006), p.89.

⁹² Mark Mazower, *Hitler's Empire. Nazi Rule in Occupied Europe* (London: Allen Lane, 2008), p.223.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Adam Tooze, *Wages of Destruction: The Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy* (London: Allen Lane, 2006), p.666.

transmission of policies from the Reichskommissariat”,⁹⁵ allowing the utilisation of an already existing structure, this was not always possible: in many instances existing civil servants fled.⁹⁶ Moreover, Mark Mazower noted that Hitler “rejected the idea of a central office run by civil servants to coordinate occupation policy, or to supervise the introduction of Reich law”, because the “last thing he wanted was a standardisation of rules and procedures that would tie the hands of his men”.⁹⁷ Consequently, Hitler personally appointed officials, who were in the most case answerable only to him, to run each of the occupied territories.⁹⁸

Each conquest brought with it its own challenges and opportunities, so there was no consistency or common policy for controlling the newly occupied territories. While some territories were annexed immediately, and considered part of Germany, such as Alsace and Lorraine, and Luxembourg, others such as Norway and the Netherlands were occupied and dominated by party and SS functionaries, and others, including Belgium and northern France, were under a military administration. Vichy France operated as a semiautonomous puppet government, while Denmark retained its pre-war government. Eastern Europe was treated very differently to Western Europe. Often countries were split up into smaller territories as in the case of Czechoslovakia. Despite regional discrepancies, the Wehrmacht was a constant presence in each of the occupied territories. Wolfram Wette observed that

“there was close cooperation in the occupied countries between the various German organisations and authorities, that is, the civil administration, labor offices, regional SS and police forces, economic administrators, and also the Wehrmacht”.⁹⁹

The Germans wanted a quick return to administrative normalcy. Stable

⁹⁵ Peter Romjin, ‘Ambitions and Dilemmas of local Authorities in the German-Occupied Netherlands, 1940-1945’ in Bruno De Wever, Herman Van Goethern and Nico Wouters, eds., *Local Government in Occupied Europe (1939-1945)* (Gent: Academia Press, 2006) p.35.

⁹⁶ Nico Wouters, ‘Localisation in the Age of Centralisation: Local government in Belgium and Nord-Pas-de-Calais (1940-1944)’ in *ibid.*, p.89.

⁹⁷ Mazower, *Hitler’s Empire*, p.229.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.223.

⁹⁹ Wolfram Wette, *The Wehrmacht: History, Myth, Reality*, translated by Deborah Lucas Schneider (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2006), p.256.

administration was necessary to maintain public order, and large numbers of female administrators were needed to make this a reality.

While there is limited literature about the women who administered for SS men, female perpetrators, while not receiving the same degree of attention as their male equivalents, have been the subject of many studies. The fascination with female perpetrators of the Holocaust extends beyond the realm of academia, entering both popular fiction¹⁰⁰ and film.¹⁰¹ These women require further examination as both scholars and non-scholars grapple with the concept that daughters, mothers and wives were capable of perpetrating the most atrocious crimes. Indeed, the fact that “almost no women guards were prosecuted after the war arose from disbelief among the Allies that women could have committed atrocities”.¹⁰² While there is not one universal definition of ‘perpetrator’ within the context of the Nazi regime, a reflection of the multiple roles that were all necessary for the Holocaust to be carried out,¹⁰³ the women acting as concentration camp guards can be considered to be perpetrators, in roles that enabled them to exercise power over Nazi victims.¹⁰⁴ The circumstances which led these German women to become perpetrators within the regime were unique. They were, alongside almost all German women, immersed in Nazism, through constant propaganda, and through the movements which existed for every age group.¹⁰⁵ Many German women contributed to the German war effort; not all were perpetrators.

¹⁰⁰ See, for example, Pam Jenoff, *Kommandant's Girl* (Great Britain: MIRA books, 2007) and Bernhard Schlink, *Der Vorleser* (Zurich: Diogenes Verlag, 1997).

¹⁰¹ Films depicting female perpetrators include Andrzej Munk's *Passenger* (1963), Lina Wertmüller's *Seven Beauties* (1975), Don Edmond's *Ilsa, She Wolf of the SS* (1975), Daniel Mann and Joseph Sargent's *Playing for Time* (1980), Joseph Sargent's *Out of the Ashes* (2003) and *The Reader* (2008), an Oscar-winning adaptation of Bernhard Schlink's *Der Vorleser*. For a detailed discussion of the phenomena of films featuring Nazi female perpetrators, see Adam Brown, “Screening Women's Complicity in the Holocaust: The Problems of Judgement and Representation,” *Holocaust Studies: A Journal of Culture and History*, vol. 17, no. 2-3, Summer/Autumn, 2012, pp. 95-127.

¹⁰² Heschel, “Atrocity” in Diefendorf, ed., *Lessons and Legacies*, p.318.

¹⁰³ See, for example, Dan Stone, *Histories of the Holocaust* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), for a discussion of recent work on *Täterforschung* (perpetrator research).

¹⁰⁴ For a discussion of the definition of ‘perpetrators’ see, for example, Rebecca Wittmann, *Beyond Justice: The Auschwitz Trial* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2005), pp.40-41.

¹⁰⁵ The extent to which Nazi propaganda was successful is discussed by David Welch, *The Third Reich: Politics and Propaganda* (London: Routledge, 2002), and Jeffrey Herf, *The Jewish Enemy. Nazi Propaganda During World War II and the Holocaust* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 2006), for example.

Those women who were active as concentration camp guards have been studied in significant depth,¹⁰⁶ and while their counterparts in administrative roles have not been examined to the same extent, other groups of women in Nazi Germany have been the subject of some research. Jill Stephenson's works on women in Nazi Germany examined the way women's lives were organised under the Nazis, socially, culturally and economically.¹⁰⁷ More recent works have built upon Stephenson's work to look at specific groups of women and the role they played. Elizabeth Harvey's work on women as both agents and witnesses of Germanization¹⁰⁸ paved the way for further examination of women in - what had been previously perceived as - atypical roles. Elizabeth D. Heineman examined the different contribution single women and married women made as workers, in both Nazi and post-war Germany¹⁰⁹. The role of gender within the concentration camp system has recently been assessed by Jane Caplan.¹¹⁰

The contribution of women in the workplace was not a phenomenon unique to Nazi Germany; women had been employed as clerks in Wilhelmine Germany,¹¹¹ and the First World War then established a precedent demonstrating the worth of – and the need for – women workers. This trend was mirrored throughout Europe, as women replaced the men who were called up to fight. After the war, the services of the women were less urgently required, yet some women continued to work, as clerks, for example, and in factories.¹¹²

¹⁰⁶ See, for example, Daniel Patrick Brown, *The Camp Women: the Female Auxiliaries who Assisted the SS in Running the Nazi Concentration Camp System* (Atglen, PA: Schiffer Publishers, 2002), Ulrike Weckel and Edgar Wolfrum, eds., *"Bestien" und "Befehlsempfänger": Frauen und Männer in NS-Prozessen nach 1945* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003), and Olaf Jensen and Claus-Christian W. Szejnmann, eds., *Ordinary people as Mass Murderers: Perpetrators in Comparative Perspectives* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

¹⁰⁷ Stephenson, *Women, and Nazi Organization of Women*.

¹⁰⁸ Harvey, *Women and the Nazi East*.

¹⁰⁹ Elizabeth D. Heineman, *What Difference Does a Husband Make?* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p.38.

¹¹⁰ Jane Caplan, "Gender and the Concentration Camps" in Jane Caplan and Nicholas Wachsmann, eds., *Concentration Camps in Nazi Germany: The New Histories* (Oxford: Routledge, 2010).

¹¹¹ See Carole Elizabeth Adams, *Women Clerks in Wilhelmine Germany. Issues of Class and Gender* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), Catherine L. Dollard, *The Surplus Woman. Unmarried in Imperial Germany 1871-1918* (New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2009).

¹¹² See, for example, Miriam Glucksmann, *Women assemble. Women workers and the new industries*

The role women played in the waged economy in the 1930s was vital, and they were able to continue to contribute to the German economy once the Nazis had come to power.¹¹³ Initially, the Nazis showed a preference for the utilisation of foreign labour over the conscription of German women.¹¹⁴ Nevertheless, although Nazi principles dictated that a woman's place was at home, as women had been previously employed it was deemed acceptable for them to work. The extent to which foreign labourers, both male and female, were preferred to German women depended on the specific skill they were used for, the type of employer, and public opinion at the time.¹¹⁵ Ultimately, German women were able to make a significant contribution to the Third Reich as workers, in various roles, although the historiography has not yet uncovered the full extent of their contribution.

As Sybille Steinbacher noted, the history of the female auxiliaries of the German army is hardly known,¹¹⁶ although some authors have written about individual cases. For example, Gerda Szepansky records how the Second World War changed life for German women. Her account covers a wide range of these women, including a 16 year old *Flakhelferin* and a *Blitzmädchen*.¹¹⁷ Rosemarie Killius documents her interviews and correspondence with a variety of *Wehrmachthelferinnen*.¹¹⁸ Another example is Getrud Slotke, an employee in the Netherlands *Judenreferat* of the *Sicherheitspolizei* (SiPo), who is included in a book

in inter-war Britain (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), Marcelline J. Hutton, *Russian and West European Women, 1860-1939. Dreams, Struggles and Nightmares* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, inc., 2001) and Kathleen Canning, *Language of Labor and Gender. Female Factory Work in Germany, 1850-1914* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1996).

¹¹³ Carola Sachse, *Industrial Housewives. Women's Social Work in the Factories of Nazi Germany* (New York: the Industrial for Research in History, and the Haworth Press Inc., 1987).

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.79.

¹¹⁵ Ulrich Herbert, *Hitler's Foreign Workers: Enforced Foreign Labor in Germany Under the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp.225, 385, and see also, Robert Gellately, *Backing Hitler. Consent and Coercion in Nazi Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

¹¹⁶ Sybille Steinbacher, ed., *Volksgenossinnen. Frauen in der NS-Volksgemeinschaft* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2007), p.93.

¹¹⁷ Gerda Szepansky, *>Blitzmädel< >Heldenmutter< >Kriegerwitwe<. Frauenleben im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1986).

¹¹⁸ Rosemarie Killius, *Frauen für die Front. Gespräche mit Wehrmachthelferinnen* (Leipzig: Militzke Verlag, 2003).

on perpetrators.¹¹⁹ In her study on female perpetrators in Nazi Germany, Kathrin Kompisch includes a brief examination of *Wehrmachtshelferinnen*.¹²⁰ Gudrun Schwarz presents an overview of women working for the Nazis during the war, including those employed as *Helferinnen*. As just one chapter within broader compilations, the discussions do not probe sufficiently.¹²¹ More recently, books have been published in Germany regarding the *Helferinnen*, notably by Franka Maubach and Jutta Mühlenberg,¹²² bringing these women to the forefront of historical research. Yet these works do not concentrate solely on those *Helferinnen* in administrative roles, nor do they make a comparison between all those who performed administrative tasks.

By focussing on those *Helferinnen*, both *SS-Helferinnen* and *Nachrichtenhelferinnen*, in administrative roles for the Nazis, this thesis endeavours to redress this balance. This analysis is extended through the inclusion of a third set of female administrators who have not previously been considered as one group in the context of their wartime employment: the secretaries. The comparison of the three groups provides a more over-arching review of Nazi female administrators than has previously been conducted.

Although there have been studies of high-profile, individual secretaries, women who worked as secretaries for the Nazis have received relatively little scholarly attention as a collective. Although Gudrun Schwarz, in her book on the wives of SS men,¹²³ mentions secretaries of SS men who become their *zweitfrau* – second (and illegitimate) wife – in her analysis it is incidental that these women are the secretaries of the men whose *zweitfrau* they became. Schwarz is interested in

¹¹⁹ Elisabeth Kohlhaas, "Getrud Slottke – Angestellte im niederländischen Judenreferat der Sicherheitspolizei" in Klaus-Michael Mallmann and Gerhard Paul, eds., *Karrieren der Gewalt* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2004).

¹²⁰ Kompisch, *Täterinnen*.

¹²¹ Gudrun Schwarz, "'During Total War, We Girls Want to Be Where We Can Really Accomplish Something' What Women Do in Wartime" in Omer Bartov, Atina Grossman, and Mary Nolan, eds., *Crimes of War: Guilt and Denial in the Twentieth Century* (New York: The New Press, 2002), pp.121-137.

¹²² Franka Maubach, *Die Stellung halten* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), and Mühlenberg, *Das SS-Helferinnenkorps*.

¹²³ Gudrun Schwarz, *Eine Frau an seiner Seite* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1997).

the phenomenon of the *zweitfrau*, yet it would be interesting to look more closely at these secretaries. Were they chosen to be the SS men's *zweitfrau* because they were merely the women in the closest proximity? As their *zweitfrau*, did these women know more about the nature of their work than the other secretaries? Both Yaacov Lozowick and Hans Safrian refer, in passing, to secretaries who were aware of their nature of their bosses' work,¹²⁴ yet neither probe deeper to determine exactly how the women knew of their bosses' involvement in the persecution of the Jews, whether they took action, and what became of the women. Such books often present a general overview of women, and either have one small section on the secretaries or mention only one or two examples of women of this type.

This thesis will examine these women in detail, determining who they were, why they took the job and what work they did, in order to assess their contribution to the administration of the Nazi occupation. They can provide an insight not only into their own lives, work, and consequent culpability, but also into the lives and work of their bosses. The considerable and necessary contribution women made - some through coercion and some through choice - to the administration of National Socialism, needs to be examined in more detail in order for there to be a greater understanding of the Holocaust and the specific role played by gender.

This investigation will determine whether these women were victims of male domination and whether they were subdued into positions of inferiority, and made to remain there. It will endeavour to establish if these women were at the mercy of their male bosses for whom they had to work dutifully and whose order they were obliged to follow. Through the consultation of a wide range of sources, it will restore an identity to female administrators to discover whether they were victims or perpetrators of the Nazi regime, or whether these categories are mutually exclusive. Nazi propaganda and indoctrination may have forced women to take an active role in drawing up the paperwork for the implementation of the Holocaust. On the other

¹²⁴ Yaacov Lozowick, *Hitler's Bureaucrats: The Nazi Security Police and the Banality of Evil*, translated by Haim Watzman (London; New York: Continuum, 2002), and Hans Safrian, *Eichmann's Men*, translated by Ute Stargardt (New York: Cambridge University Press, in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2010).

hand, maybe some women chose the role and delighted in it.

The key sources consulted are the SS Personnel files and post-war trial documentation.¹²⁵ Every SS man who wanted to get married was required to apply for permission and complete paperwork; this is all preserved in the SS Personnel files. The paperwork includes detailed family histories and information about the careers of those applying. In some instances, SS men married women who worked for them or their colleagues. This documentation is inevitably limited. Firstly, the archives only contain what someone has seen fit to keep. Secondly, they only cover the years 1933-1945. Using the female personnel files which the Nazis meticulously maintained, a profile of the typical secretary will be depicted. This will help to determine whether secretaries chose their job, and if so, what their motivations were.

After the war, some secretaries were called to testify for, or against, their former bosses. A consultation of the trial documents will determine more about the women and the men they worked for. The historian must tread carefully here: the investigators employed a very specific line of questioning, which limits the usefulness of the sources. Christopher Browning warns that “some men deliberately lied, for they feared the judicial consequences of telling the truth as they remembered it”;¹²⁶ similarly some women may have lied. While some of the questioning took place immediately after the war, other interviews were carried out in the late 1970s, by which time some women may have had trouble recalling events that occurred 40 years beforehand. Their memories would have been shaped by their experiences since the war, and the German collective memory may have influenced the way they recalled their own involvement within the Nazi

¹²⁵ When referring, in the footnotes, to a file found in the archives, the name of the person to whom it pertains or the type of documents it contains will be listed. Where this is not possible, only the designated reference number where the file can now be found will be given.

¹²⁶ Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men. Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution* (New York: Aaron Asher Books, 1992), p.xvi.

regime. While these documents have limitations,¹²⁷ they can be invaluable and have already been used successfully to build up portraits of some of these women.¹²⁸

Oral testimony is a vital source. Using women's voices, in the form of interviews, allows them to tell their own story. Some secretaries and women working for the German army wrote their own memoirs.¹²⁹ These women also feature in the memoirs of civilians whom they encountered: for example, Synnove Christensen mentions "ugly grubby-looking German office-girls" whom she met when she was called to the *Reichskommissariat*,¹³⁰ and Jan Valtin, whom was interrogated and tortured by the *Gestapo*, refers to "smartly dressed girls working at high speed behind typewriters...seemingly indifferent to all the squalor and agony about them".¹³¹

This thesis will focus on three groups of women working in administrative roles: secretaries, *SS-Helferinnen* and *Nachrichtenhelferinnen des Heeres*. While the nature of their work was very similar, and all three groups were working for the National Socialist cause, many of the *Helferinnen* specifically chose to do so, while the secretaries continued their everyday job. Secretaries were recruited to the service of the party, state, and armed forces because of their skills and experience; many of them already had careers as secretaries underway by 1933. Some may have been party members or followers, but they were not employed, and did not offer their services, for ideological reasons. So how did they relate to their bosses and the work? By contrast, *SS-Helferinnen* worked their way up through the movement and volunteered their services. Were they, therefore, more ideologically motivated, and dedicated to the cause? While many women were conscripted to the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen des Heeres*, others actively chose this route to serve their

¹²⁷ See, for example, Dick de Mildt, *In the Name of the People: Perpetrators of Genocide in the Reflection of their Post-War Prosecution in West Germany: The 'Euthanasia' and 'Aktion Reinhard' Trial Cases* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, London, 1996).

¹²⁸ For example, Kohlhaas, "Getrud Slottke".

¹²⁹ See, for example, Ilse Schmidt, *Die Mitläuferin* (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 2002), and Gretel Wachtel and Claudia Strachen, *A Different Kind of Courage. Gretel's Story* (Edinburgh and London: Mainstream Publishing, 2009).

¹³⁰ Synnove Christensen, *Norway is my Country* (London: Collins, 1943), p.11.

¹³¹ Jan Valtin, *Out of the Night* (Edinburgh, Oakland, and West Virginia: AK Press/Nabat, 2004), p.499.

country. What would make a woman choose to become a *Nachrichtenhelferin* rather than an *SS-Helferin*? Were those who volunteered to be *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* as supportive of the regime, or were they exploiting an opportunity to wear a uniform or to travel abroad?

The first two chapters of this thesis will examine the *SS-Helferinnen* and the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen des Heeres*. While both groups of women performed similar duties in support of the Nazi war effort, there was an ostensible dichotomy between the long-term purposes of the two groups. The *SS-Helferinnen*, although modelled on their counterparts within the *Wehrmacht*, were designed by Himmler not only to assist their male superiors in the short-term, but also to eventually become the exemplification of the ideologically devoted Nazi woman, and fulfil the Nazi goal of perpetuating Aryan supremacy. The selection process for the *SS-Helferinnen* was therefore necessarily more rigorous than that for the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen*, and as a consequence the personnel differed markedly. How did this disparity manifest itself in their training, work, and relations with the outside world? In particular, was there a discernible difference between the attitudes of each group to their masters' role in Nazi persecution?

The next three chapters will be devoted to the secretaries of the Nazis. These women will be examined to determine how much they learned about the Holocaust, and by what means. To this end, the actual work the women performed, and their contribution to the acts of persecution perpetrated by the Nazis will be considered. Did they attempt to find out more about the consequences of their paperwork, or were they content to perform their tasks, deliberately ignoring the deeper implications? What they discovered about the Holocaust through their work put them in a precarious position: did they take action and risk everything, or stay silent and remain complicit? Did any of the women take a stand, and what consequences were suffered as a result?

Were secretaries, the majority of whom were non-Nazi women, as loyal to their bosses as the *Helferinnen*, women instilled with Nazi values? Were

relationships based on feelings rather than ideology? Did the collapse of ideology release Nazi women from loyalty to the servants of the regime while personal bonds of respect, affection or love led non-Nazi women to defend their bosses to the bitter end? In order to answer these questions, secretaries who were romantically involved with a male boss or superior will be examined. This allows for an insight into the status of women in the Nazi period and will determine if the stereotypical image of the Nazi woman, having a higher value as a mother than a worker, still stands. Office romances have taken place in many societies and institutions; this thesis will explore whether such liaisons occurring during the Third Reich were unique. For example, SS men were encouraged to procreate; therefore, a number took their secretaries as a second wife. Many secretaries were asked to make statements after the war and these will be assessed to determine how much the secretaries knew about the Holocaust, and other acts of persecution.

The end of the war brought chaos and confusion. Secretaries were evacuated out of Berlin to avoid heavy bombing raids; *Helferinnen* were evacuated back to Germany to escape the oncoming Allies. In post-war Germany, the women were forced to reflect on their activities amidst the realities of internment, denazification, and prosecution. The final two chapters will consider the difficulties which the women had to contend with, both as the war came to an end and afterwards. What were the consequences of their wartime actions under Allied occupation, and later, German governance? And how did their actions reverberate with future generations?

This thesis will seek to answer three key questions: who was the typical woman working in an administrative role in Nazi Germany? What was her relationship to the Nazi men that she worked with? And how much did she know about the Holocaust? The three selected groups of women - the secretaries of the Nazis, *SS-Helferinnen* and *Nachrichtenhelferinnen des Heeres* - will be used to answer these questions and determine if it is possible to define these women as victims or perpetrators of National Socialism - or whether such categorisation is an over-simplification.

Part 1: Hitler's Helferinnen

Chapter 1: Women in Service for the Fatherland

The changing role of German women throughout the Third Reich reflected Germany's fluctuating fortunes during the Second World War, forcing the Nazis to reconsider their initial policies. At a German Women's congress in Nuremberg in September 1934, Hitler painted a picture of the German woman, in which her world was "her husband, her family, her children, her home".¹ As the *Wehrmacht* swept through Europe, conquering country after country, it needed additional manpower to maintain order in the newly conquered territories. As more German men were called up for military service, the Nazis turned to women to take their place in support roles. The women called up to support the army became known collectively as *Helferinnen* and they were involved in a large number of diverse activities, from packing parachutes, predicting the weather, to working in the fire brigade, and in telecommunications exchanges. By the end of the Second World War, around 450,000 women (not including those who worked in hospitals) had worked in the German army; for every 20 soldiers, there had been one female assisting.² This chapter will undertake an examination of these women by placing specific focus on auxiliaries employed in communications roles for the SS and for the army.

Two groups of women provided assistance in administrative roles: *Nachrichtenhelferinnen des Heeres* and *SS-Helferinnen*.³ Despite the overlapping features of the role, the groups were situated in fundamentally dissimilar segments of the Nazi apparatus. Their respective masters vastly differed in both purpose and position in Nazi society. The treatment of the women within the SS and armed forces respectively reflects this disparity. A comparison between these two different groups of women will shed light on the expectations placed upon both

¹ "ihr Mann, ihre Familie, ihre Kinder, ihr Haus", Franz W. Seidler, *Frauen zu den Waffen* (Koblenz/Bonn: Wehr&Wissen, 1978), p.43, taken from Hitler's speech, reprinted in Ellen Semmelroth and Renate von Stieda, eds., *N.S Frauenbuch* (Munich: Lehmann, 1934), p.11.

² See Seidler, *Frauen*, p.59 and Franz W. Seidler, *Blitzmädchen* (Koblenz/Bonn: Wehr&Wissen, 1979), p.12.

³ '*Nachrichten*' can be translated as communication, intelligence, news, and messages; since those working in '*Nachrichtendienst*' were tasked as telephone, radio and telegraph operators, the chosen translation here is 'communication'.

groups, the varying recruitment methods and application procedures, and will determine why a woman would volunteer to be a *Nachrichtenhelferin*, rather than allow herself to be nominated to become an *SS-Helferin*, or vice-versa.

Despite the general Nazi policy that women should stay at home, caring for the family, there was an urgent need to mobilize some women to fill the void created by the loss of the soldiers. When the German Armed Forces deployed on campaigns, garrisons were significantly reduced. There was a constant deficiency of police and administrative staff. In a vain attempt to match the vast numbers of the Soviet Union's Red Army, the Third Reich suffered from a "catastrophic drain of manpower".⁴ Between June 1941 and May 1944, the German Army lost an astonishing 60,000 men on average every month on the Eastern Front, and the rate of loss increased in the final year of the war, even though the extent of occupied territory decreased. This was not sustainable; the German armed forces were under considerable stress, their supplies severely stretched.⁵ Support for the armed forces was urgently required, and while men in administrative roles could provide assistance, there was a stronger need for these men to fight.

The First World War had set a precedent in Germany for the mobilisation of women to support the German Army. In May 1918, a *Weibliches Nachrichtenkorps* was established, with the intention of replacing thousands of men in the communications corps who could then be redeployed to fight at the front. The female members of this communication corps were trained to operate radios, telegraphs and telephones. There was no German model to base this on, and inspiration was taken from an English project, which used female motorcycle drivers to great effect.⁶ Although 500 women were trained for the *Weibliches Nachrichtenkorps*, the end of the war ensured that they were never deployed.⁷

⁴ Adam Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction: The Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy* (London: Allen Lane, 2006), p.513.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.513-515.

⁶ Ursula von Gersdorff, *Frauen im Kriegsdienst* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1969), p.31.

⁷ Jeff M. Tuten, "Germany and the World Wars" in Nancy Loring Goldman, ed., *Female Soldiers – combatants or noncombatants. Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1982), p.49.

The *Wehrmacht* employed women as communication *Helferinnen* from the beginning of the Second World War.⁸ Initially these women formed part of the collective *Wehrmachthelferinnen*. The founding of the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* training school in Gießen in 1940 marked a separation between the various groups of *Helferinnen*.⁹ The *Nachrichtenhelferinnen des Heeres* in the Second World War worked in telephone exchanges and telegraph agencies, specifically so that men could be released from these jobs and sent to the front. Male superiors trained the women at the school in Gießen, which was run along military principles and led by a staff officer of the *Nachrichtentruppe*.¹⁰

Heinrich Himmler used the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* as a model for the *SS-Helferinnen*. In 1942, Ernst Sachs, the *SS-Chef des Fernmeldewesens*, was ordered to establish the WNK, *Weibliches Nachrichtenkorps*, which was renamed the *SS-Helferinnenkorps* in 1943. The WNK trained women at the *Reichsschule-SS* in Oberehnheim, in Alsace. Although these women were sent to do men's work, their training was supposed to reinforce their femininity. When the WNK changed its name to *SS-Helferinnenkorps*, the remit of the women changed too. This adjustment was based on a Finnish female voluntary organisation established in 1921. The girls of "Lotta Svärd" helped to protect their homeland and strengthen the will of the people, by relieving men who could then go to the front. The willingness of these women to fill the shoes of their male counterparts inspired the third Commandant of the *SS-Helferinnen* school, Karl Mutschler, who expanded the role the *SS-Helferinnen* played. From this point on, the tasks of the *SS-Helferinnen* included, as Mutschler wrote in a report:

⁸ Rosemarie Killius, *Frauen für die Front. Gespräche mit Wehrmachthelferinnen* (Leipzig: Militzke Verlag, 2003), p.17.

⁹ Jutta Mühlberg, *Das SS-Helferinnenkorps. Ausbildung, Einsatz und Entnazifizierung der weiblichen Angehörigen der Waffen-SS 1942-1949* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2011), p.42.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.61, 63.

“service in command posts of the SS, welfare at the front, ambulance and security service, as auxiliaries in the household and agriculture and, crucially, the SS auxiliary should even be a good German mother”.¹¹

However, the majority of their tasks remained within the *Nachrichtendienst*.¹²

Although the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* provided the template for the creation of the *SS-Helferinnen*, Himmler sought from the outset to disassociate the two groups. The motivation was clear: the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* were held in low esteem and did not enjoy a good reputation among the local population in Berlin. They were looked down upon and were “judged somewhat disparagingly”.¹³ The local women insulted the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* with the nickname “Offiziersmatratzen” [officer’s mattresses].¹⁴ This insulting moniker came about as the girls who finished the nightshift at six in the morning “looked bad”, causing the locals to suspect they had been out all night enjoying themselves.¹⁵ Familiarity with this reputation spread beyond the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen*: Elisabeth M.*, a *Helferin* in the navy, knew that this name was given to the *Blitzmädchen*.¹⁶ When *Nachrichtenhelferin* Ursula R.* and her friends first heard that they had been given this title, they cried.¹⁷ Ruth A.*, stated that it was “baseless insolence and ignorance” that many called *Helferinnen* “Offiziersmatratzen” and she asserted that the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* “were not prostitutes”.¹⁸ On one occasion *Nachrichtenhelferin* Karola M.* went home on leave, wearing her uniform. When

¹¹ “Dienst bei Kommandostellen der SS, in der Frontfürsorge, im Sanitäts- und Sicherheitsdienst, als Helferinnen in der Haus- und Landwirtschaft und, was entscheidend ist, die SS-Helferin soll einmal eine vorbildliche deutsche Mutter sein”, Gesamtbericht: Mutschler, Reichsschule-SS, September 15, 1944, Bundesarchiv Berlin (BArch), NS 19/3334.

¹² The term ‘*Nachrichtenhelferinnen*’ will be used to refer to those women working in this position for the Army; those working in this position for the SS will be referred to as ‘*SS-Helferinnen*’. Although this term includes their colleagues who performed other tasks, in this context it will denote those *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* in the SS-Helferinnenkorps to differentiate them from the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* of the Army.

¹³ “etwas abfällig beurteilt”, interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Ursula R.* in Killius, *Frauen für die Front* p.46. All names marked with one star (*) are pseudonyms allocated in the given sources.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ “schlecht aussahen”, *ibid.*

¹⁶ This term was given to the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen*, as their uniform featured a *blitz* – lightning – symbol; interview with *Marinehelferin* Elisabeth M.* in *ibid.*, p.133.

¹⁷ Interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Ursula R.* in *ibid.*, p.46.

¹⁸ “bodenlose Frechheit und Unkenntnis”, “waren doch keine Prostituierten”, interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Ruth A.* in *ibid.*, p.165.

she changed trains, two women sitting at the station commented that she was one of the “Offiziersmatratzen”. This was not an isolated instance; “such phrases were heard very often”.¹⁹ It was moments such as these that made Karola regret being a member of the German Army.²⁰ The flirtations, sexual relationships and even marriages between *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* and German soldiers suggest that there were kernels of truth in the rumours.²¹

The derogatory perception of *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* was not confined to local women. German soldiers referred to the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* as “Blitz whores” and “Wehrmacht mattresses”, while female Red Cross workers were known as “bed sisters” and “Red Cross tarts”. These terms were repeated so often that *Wehrmacht* officials became concerned,²² and German soldiers were warned not to make any “ambiguous jokes and derogatory remarks”,²³ especially as the Germans were aware of a whisper campaign which their enemies were carrying out to portray the women as unfeminine.²⁴ According to one *Nachrichtenhelferin*, the reputation of the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* was tarnished through the dissemination of defamatory statements by the Allies for propaganda purposes. Presenting the girls as a type of *Flintenweiber* was a “welcome opportunity” for the Allies to damage Germany’s reputation and to sow “dissension and resentment” among Germans.²⁵

Himmler took great pains to ensure that the two groups of *Helferinnen* were not mistaken for one another; he was particularly concerned that the bad reputation of the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* would impact and reflect on his elite

¹⁹ “solche sätze hörten wir öfter”, interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Karola M.* in *ibid.*, p.173.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ The relationships between German soldiers and *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* will be explored in the following chapter.

²² “Blitznutten”, “Wehrmachtmatratzen”, “Bettschwestern”, “Rote Kreuznutten”, Udo Pini, *LeibeskuIt und Liebeskitsch: Erotik im Dritten Reich* (Munich: Klinkhardt & Biermann, 1992), p.328.

²³ “zweideutige Witze und herabziehende Bemerkungen”, Erlaß des Oberkommandos der Wehrmacht, reprinted in von Gersdorff, *Frauen*, pp.61-62.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ “willkommene Gelegenheit”, “zwiespalt und abneigung”, Ina Seidel and Hanns Grosser, eds., *Dienende Herzen Kriegsbriefe von Nachrichtenhelferinnen des Heeres* (Berlin: Wilhelm Limpert-Verlag, 1942), pp.77-78. It is likely that the term was considered derogatory as the women were portrayed as ‘unladylike’.

group of women. To ensure that the two groups were visibly distinct, their uniforms were markedly different. The *SS-Helferinnen* were also forbidden from wearing the *blitz* symbol that the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* usually wore on their sleeves.

Despite the effort that went into ensuring the two groups remained apart from one another, in autumn 1944 170 *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* switched roles from the army to the SS because the army no longer required their services. In addition to this, women such as Sofie E. independently left the service of one of these groups for the other. Sofie had been a *Nachrichtenhelferin* in the Wehrmacht from April 1943 until July 1944 and had been sent to Riga. She then chose to enlist as a *Nachrichtenhelferin* for the SS in August 1944.²⁶

The army and the SS had quite different long term intentions for their female personnel. While the army *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* only ever performed *Nachrichten* tasks, and were to be sent home when the war ended, the *SS-Helferinnen* had much greater demands placed on them; they were being groomed for higher purposes. In the short-term they would replace men to free them up to fight at the front. The mid-term aim was that, having been racially vetted and selected along the same criteria as SS brides, they would be deliberately placed in offices where they would meet SS men, and, ideally, marry them. All SS men had to apply for permission to marry. The intrusive procedure required family trees, medical examinations, racial examinations and references.²⁷ The detailed application did not guarantee success. If the prospective bride did not meet the requirements, for example because she had a Jewish-sounding surname, or had health issues, permission to marry would not be granted. Some SS men had angrily quit the SS when Himmler refused to grant them permission to marry their fiancée. By placing women who had already been vetted and deemed suitable in situations where they would meet and marry SS men, the intention was that this would prevent Himmler from losing promising officers while simultaneously preventing

²⁶ Letter, July 2, 1944, personnel file of Sofie E., U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C. (NARA), A 3343-SF-A0017-1516-1690.

²⁷ For details of the criteria for SS brides, and for the marriage application procedure, see chapter 5.

unsuitable matches. Ultimately, Himmler aimed to replace all civilian female office personnel in the SS with *SS-Helferinnen*.²⁸ In the long-term it was hoped that these women would become the female pillars of the *SS-Sippengemeinschaft*. 'Mating' between racially selected and ideologically trained men and women would contribute towards the super race.

As every woman chosen for a role within the SS was considered a potential wife for an SS man, public job advertisements were expressly forbidden. These women were not recruited; rather, they were targeted. Suitable women were approached, through their involvement in Nazi movements such as the BDM and *NS-Frauenschaft*. SS men were also encouraged to recommend their wives, daughters and sisters. Specifications, such as the minimum height and age requirements of the applicant, were explicit.²⁹ Even though the women were targeted, they still had to fill out an application form, submit their C.V.s, and complete entrance exams.

Unlike the *SS-Helferinnen*, the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* of the army were publicly recruited. This process went through four phases. When the number of women who volunteered fell short of the number of men who were to be replaced, conscription was used. The first phase of recruitment coincided with the first two years of war and the German occupation of Poland, Belgium, Netherlands, and Luxembourg. Initially, the German Red Cross lent the army thousands of women from its reserve to be trained as communication auxiliaries. The women were trained in Germany and then sent abroad to work in offices and telecom exchanges, air traffic control, air-raid warning services and the meteorological agency. The second stage of recruitment, in winter 1941-2, coincided with the attack on Russia. This time, women capable of work were compelled to serve an extra six months. The battle of Stalingrad began in August 1942 and resulted in an estimated 750,000 German, Italian and Romanian casualties and losses,³⁰ and this necessitated the

²⁸ Mühlenberg, *Das SS-Helferinnenkorps*, p.272.

²⁹ Seidler, *Frauen*, p.179.

³⁰ See Antony Beevor, *Stalingrad* (London: Penguin Books, 1998) and Christer Bergström, *Black Cross*,

third phase of recruitment; all women between the ages of 17 and 45 who had no small children were now instructed to report for duty. In mid-1944, in the final phase of recruitment, 10,000 male members of the air force were reassigned, and women were conscripted to replace them.³¹ While this marked the end of mass recruitment, women were continuously sought throughout the duration of the war.³²

The *Nachrichtenhelferinnen des Heeres* initially began its recruitment programme through the Red Cross. Then, the general public were targeted, in several different guises. Women were encouraged to volunteer. Posters, advertising for women to volunteer for the *Wehrmachthelferinnenkorps*, called upon German women and girls to aid Germany in her time of need. The posters evoked a historical precedent, notably that of the First World War, whereby, “in all fateful times of need of our people, women and girls have provided military assistance to the fighting front”.³³ The women were required because, according to the advertisement, “the Germans can only be helped by Germans”.³⁴

Books were published, and serialised in magazines, in order to attract young women into the service, and to inspire them to volunteer. Erika Schulemann’s account of a *Nachrichtenhelferin*’s experiences in France, *Als Nachrichtenhelferin in Frankreich*, was sold for just 20 pfennigs and was serialised in a popular girls’ magazine.³⁵ In 1942, a book of wartime letters written by *Nachrichtenhelferinnen*, *Dienende Herzen, Kriegsbriefe von Nachrichtenhelferinnen des Heeres*, was published “at the instigation of and with the agreement of the Communication

Red Star: Air War Over the Eastern Front: Everything For Stalingrad, Volume 3 (Royston, Hertfordshire: Eagle Editions, 2006).

³¹ Franka Maubach, *Die Stellung halten* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), and von Gersdorff, *Frauen*, pp.60-2.

³² Seidler, *Frauen*, pp.59-60.

³³ “in allen schicksalhaften Notzeiten unseres Volkes die Frauen und Mädels der kämpfenden Front Wehrhilfe geleistet haben” Bundesarchiv Koblenz Plakatsammlung, Autumn 1944, reprinted in von Gersdorff, *Frauen*, pp.438-439.

³⁴ “Den Deutschen kann nur durch Deutsche geholfen werden”, *ibid.*

³⁵ Erika Schulemann, *Als Nachrichtenhelferin in Frankreich* (Berlin: Junge Generation Verlag, 1943). Also appeared as a serial novel in the BDM magazine, ‘Mädels – eure Welt’.

corps in the Department of the Army High Command”.³⁶ These books highlighted to prospective recruits the benefits of becoming *Nachrichtenhelferinnen*, and the good they did for Germany. Clearly, these works were used for propaganda purposes and portrayed mainly the positive side to being a *Nachrichtenhelferin*.

Dienende Herzen served as a means to counter the traditional stereotypes of women’s roles. The introduction to the book confirmed that the suitability of women for the profession of telex, telephone and radio operator “had long since been proven and tested in public enterprises”. The book also emphasised the benefit to those who served their country; that they would go through “an inner transformation”, giving them “an expanded world view” which would stay with them for the rest of their lives. The collection of letters was designed to inspire young women to volunteer. The book wished to give “a bright, joyful testimony” to the current German public of the great work that happened behind the front lines; that of “the important, joyful and courageous service women provided”. By doing so, it aimed to reassure parents of potential new recruits. The book would provide future German women with strength and courage when faced with hardships, and to demonstrate to future generations “how it was back then”.³⁷

Nachrichtenhelferinnen were asked to supply any suitable letters they had written for publication in *Dienende Herzen*, because their letters would “show the strongest experience of the war effort”, and demonstrate the emotions of the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen*.³⁸ Despite concerns by the editor of the book that the girls would not wish to share their private thoughts, or that their families would not allow them to, 900 letters were sent in.³⁹ The book cost a mere 3.20 RM, ensuring it was widely accessible. A review in the *Königsberger Allgemeine Zeitung*, a daily

³⁶ “auf Veranlassung und im Einvernehmen”, Seidel and Grosser, *Dienende Herzen*.

³⁷ “war längst erwiesen und in staatlichen Betrieben erprobt”, “eine innere Wandlung”, “eines erweiterten Weltbildes”, “ein helles freudiges Zeugnis”, “einem wichtigen, froh und tapfer geleisteten Frauen Einsatz...abzulegen”, “wie es damals gewesen ist”, *ibid.*, pp.13, 22, 23.

³⁸ “drücken wohl am stärksten das Erlebnis des Kriegseinsatzes”, *ibid.*, p.145.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.146.

regional newspaper, called the book “gripping on each page”.⁴⁰ The *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, which had been a right-wing national newspaper since the Weimar period, commented that in the foreword, Ina Seidel, the editor, “illuminates the basic ideas, hurdles and the strong currents that move a group of young women”.⁴¹

The use of letters to attract publicity was a tactic which had previously been employed by the Nazis. In 1941, a collection of letters from soldiers on the Eastern Front was published,⁴² edited by Wolfgang Diewerge, a Nazi journalist and propagandist.⁴³ The volume opened with a quotation from Joseph Goebbels which indicated that the letters from the soldiers were intended to combat enemy propaganda which had given the German people a false picture of the battles being fought. Both the letters of the soldiers and the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* aimed to show the population back at home the heroic activities of their boys and girls.

Hanns Grosser, who edited and wrote the afterword to *Dienende Herzen*, also wrote the foreword to a diary of a *Nachrichtenhelferin* of the army, which was published in 1944. In his introduction to Edith Müller-Beeck’s diary, Hans Grosser noted that the “personal transcript” conveys both the “universally valid evidence of the spirit and attitude within the female auxiliary community” and the solidarity of the corps. Grosser wanted every reader to focus on and remember that what emerged was a “womanly power gain” which would be beneficial in future peacetime tasks.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ “auf jeder Seite fesselnd”, *Königsberger Allgemeine Zeitung*, September 4, 1942, reprinted in an advertisement for the book, placed at the back of Edith Müller-Beeck, *Mein kleines, großes Tagebuch. Aufzeichnungen einer Nachrichtenhelferin* (Chemnitz: Pickenhahn & Sohn, 1944).

⁴¹ “beleuchtet die Grundideen, die Klippen und die starken Ströme, die eine Schar von jungen Frauen bewegen”, *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, August 17, 1942, reprinted in an advertisement for the book, placed at the back of Müller-Beeck, *Tagebuch*.

⁴² Wolfgang Diewerge, ed., *Deutsche Soldaten sehen die Sowjet-Union: Feldpostbriefe aus dem Osten* (Berlin: Wilhelm Limpert Verlag, 1941).

⁴³ Derrick Sington and Arthur Weidenfeld, *The Goebbels Experiment: a Study of the Nazi Propaganda Machine* (London: Murray, 1942), pp.141-142.

⁴⁴ “persönlich Niederschrift”, “allgemeingültigen Zeugnis von Geist und Haltung der Helferinnenschaft”, “fraulichem Kraftgewinn”, Müller-Beeck *Tagebuch*, p.8.

Propaganda works, such as *Dienende Herzen* and Edith's diary, were not, however, universally optimistic. The girls' experiences were documented, and sometimes they expressed negative thoughts, impressions, or sentiments which they conveyed to their parents. There was also adverse publicity concerning the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen*, despite all reports and articles about them being subject to censorship. In order to limit the negative publicity surrounding the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen*, a confidential briefing in July 1941 forbade the Press from mentioning that the Red Cross had supplied women to become auxiliaries.⁴⁵ The books which were published and serialised served as counter-examples to the unfavourable coverage.

Recruitment methods did not proceed without problems. An electricity company complained to the National Labour Office that the *Organisation Todt* - the construction arm of the *Wehrmacht* - was attempting to hire one of their female employees; she had responded to a newspaper advertisement without informing her firm. The advertisement stated: "Female communication auxiliaries sought immediately for use in the territory of the Reich and occupied territories".⁴⁶ These advertisements caused "much unrest" among the female employees at the electricity company and the firm wished to ensure that its operations were not disturbed.⁴⁷ A letter from the President of the National Labour Office in Nordmark to the Reich Minister of Labour noted that newspaper advertisements recruiting female communication auxiliaries for the *Organisation Todt* caused concern among several businesses. The President requested the cessation of the advertisements. Companies resented the ability of the army and SS to trade on patriotism in order to lure women with experience away from the civilian sector. This aggravated the already severe labour shortage.

⁴⁵ Confidential Information for the Press concerning the communication auxiliaries, July 1, 1941, Bundesarchiv Koblenz Slg. Oberheitmann vom 1.7-31.7.1941 ZSg 109/16, reprinted in von Gersdorff, *Frauen*, p.335.

⁴⁶ "Nachrichtenhelferinnen für Einsatz im Reichsgebiet u. besetzten Gebieten für sofort gesucht. Meldung: Org. Todt, Nachrichtenwesen. Berlin", letter from the President of the Labour office, Nordmark, concerning advertisements of female communication auxiliaries to the Organisation Todt, July 17, 1941, Bundesarchiv Koblenz R 41/162 Bd II, reprinted in von Gersdorff, *Frauen*, pp.337-8.

⁴⁷ "viel Unruhe", *ibid.*

As large numbers of women were required to support the *Wehrmacht* the employment office was tasked with conscripting women to become *Nachrichtenhelferinnen*. The Reich Minister for Labour explained to the presidents of the regional employment offices the provision of female communication auxiliaries. He reported that “the development of the military situation makes it necessary to employ female communication auxiliaries to a large extent in the annexed and occupied territories”.⁴⁸ The women had to be willing to work in these regions, and their “suitability of character and attitude” was considered particularly important.⁴⁹

Both *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* and *SS-Helferinnen* were required to complete an application procedure. However, there were more restrictions governing who could apply to become an *SS-Helferin*, and the subsequent application process for those eligible to apply was much more rigid. From the outset applicants to be an *SS-Helferin* had to be aged between 17-30 and at least 1,65 m tall. These requirements were later modified so applicants aged between 30-35 and those between 1,58 m and 1,65m tall could apply;⁵⁰ presumably this was because of a dearth of applications. All applicants had to be recommended by either an SS man, a BDM leader, or by a leader in the *NS-Frauenschaft*. When Edith Beher applied, a letter was sent to her local party leader to ensure that she came from a “worthy, credible family”.⁵¹ The affirmative response highlighted her father’s membership of the Nazi party, and her own membership of the BDM.⁵²

In order to succeed in their application to become an *SS-Helferin*, candidates had to pass an extensive written examination, a racial examination and a medical examination. Ironically, given the purported vulnerability of employers to their staff

⁴⁸ “die Entwicklung der Kriegslage macht es erforderlich, Nachrichtenhelferinnen in starkem Umfange auch in den eingegliederten und den besetzten Gebieten einzusetzen”, letter from the Reichsarbeitsminister, December 5, 1941 Bundesarchiv Koblenz R 41/162 Bd II, reprinted in von Gersdorff, *Frauen*, pp.354-55.

⁴⁹ “charakterliche Eignung und Haltung”, *ibid.*

⁵⁰ Mühlberg, *Das SS-Helferinnenkorps*, p.62.

⁵¹ “achtbaren Familie”, *SS Frauen* (file Edith Beher) published in Henry Friedlander and Sybil Milton, eds., *Berlin Document Center* (New York; London: Garland, 1992), p.396.

⁵² *Ibid.*

leaving to become *Nachrichtenhelferinnen des Heeres*, approval from their place of work could be a requirement in the *SS-Helferinnen* application: in order for her application to be successful, Anneliese Rüber's employer had to provide written agreement that he did not object to her application.⁵³ The written examination, comprising 25 questions, tested spelling and dictation, and obliged applicants to demonstrate their knowledge of the Third Reich. For example, examinees were asked to give the date that Hitler became Reich Chancellor, and the name of the Reich Minister for the Interior. Certain questions tested their awareness and understanding of Nazi ideology: they were asked to define who was a *Mischlinge*, to explain who the "nordischen Völker" [northern peoples: people from Scandinavia; they were considered by the Nazis to be Aryan] were and to list the ideological opponents of National Socialism. Other questions examined geographical knowledge: naming the highest mountain in Germany, the capital of Slovakia and the postcodes for certain districts in Germany. The questions also assessed their knowledge of the war; applicants were asked to name a famous military leader from the current conflict.⁵⁴ The assessment of Gertrude Scheele's application commented that she had gaps in her general knowledge and that her spelling was not to a high enough standard. It was noted, however, that she "came from a purely rural district, where little inspiration and training was given".⁵⁵ These comments provide an insight into the extent and quality of education and indoctrination in the Third Reich. Despite the judgement passed on her, Scheele was approved to be an *SS-Helferin*, although if she was later deemed unsuitable for *Nachrichten* tasks, she would be found a position in management.

In a state which distinguished between the racially and biologically superior and inferior, health was paramount. Himmler himself was obsessed with both racial purity, and with good health and physical fitness, providing his SS men with advice

⁵³ Personnel file of Anneliese Rüber, BArch SF B0024.

⁵⁴ See Luise Hütteman's application, for example, personnel file of Luise Hütteman, BArch SF A0037 (undated).

⁵⁵ "rein ländlichen Bezirk herstammt, wo wenig Anregung und Schulung gegeben ist", assessment of Gertrud Scheele, Gertrud Scheele's personnel file, March 6, 1944, BArch SF B0026.

on nutrition.⁵⁶ Consequently, it was vital for *SS-Helferinnen* to pass the medical exam. Brunhilde Wenzel was found to be “unsuitable” as an *SS-Helferin* because of jaundice; Waltraut Schuster was rejected because she was five months pregnant; Gertraude Hardwiger was turned away due to “juvenile bleeding”, implying that she had an impaired ovarian function, which was undesirable; and Marianne Mach’s inflamed gall bladder prevented her from passing the medical test.⁵⁷ Even a personal clean bill of health was no guarantee of success: Margot Schamberger was deemed unsuitable as an *SS-Helferin* because her brother suffered from schizophrenia.⁵⁸ The Nazi state’s concern with eugenics and hereditary fitness was paramount; schizophrenia and other hereditary health conditions had to be rooted out before they could be passed on to future generations.⁵⁹

A candidate who was successful in all these initial tests would then receive an official call-up. The shortest call up time was half a day, but it could take up to two years after applying to receive a call up. The time it took depended on SS bureaucracy, although personal reasons, such as an employee being refused permission to leave their job, could also cause delay.⁶⁰

The requirements to become a *Nachrichtenhelferin des Heeres* were less stringent than those for the *SS-Helferinnen*. German women between the ages of 17 to 30 were eligible, and only those aged between 20 and 30 were suitable for deployment abroad. Those aged between 17 and 20 could still apply and they would be employed in telecommunications in Berlin. No special knowledge was required, as training would be given free of charge. All applicants had to be medically fit, proficient in both written and spoken German, of Aryan descent and have no previous convictions. Competency in spoken High German was required as regional and local dialects could cause difficulties when communicating via

⁵⁶ Peter Longerich, *Heinrich Himmler: A life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp.329, 334-5

⁵⁷ “untauglich”, letter written by the *SS-Helferin* school doctor, detailing why certain women were unsuitable for the position of *Nachrichtenhelferin*, BArch SF A0045.

⁵⁸ Letter written by the *SS-Helferin* school doctor, detailing why certain women were unsuitable for the position of *Nachrichtenhelferin*, BArch SF B0025.

⁵⁹ Longerich, *Heinrich Himmler*, pp.126, 302, 353, for example.

⁶⁰ Mühlenberg, *Das SS-Helferinnenkorps*, p.122.

telephone or radio. Those wishing to apply were asked to submit a hand-written CV to the commander of the local *Nachrichtentruppe II, Abteilung N H.*⁶¹

As the demand for *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* increased during the war, the requirements were relaxed.⁶² Towards the end of the war, when manpower was virtually exhausted, almost anybody would be accepted. An advertisement placed in Viennese newspapers in March 1945 called for women to train specifically as radio operators for the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen*. These applicants had to be a minimum of 17 years old, with “no special skills, but mental agility, good hearing and writing skills were required”.⁶³

The application criteria in theory and in practice demonstrate the arbitrariness of Nazi racial categorisation. While Aryan origins were ostensibly a requirement to become a *Nachrichtenhelferin*, Margaret Baacke, a *Mischlinge*,⁶⁴ found herself in a position where she could have become a *Nachrichtenhelferin*. Baacke was called to her local Employment Office, having completed the mandatory *Reichsarbeitsdienst* and *Kriegshilfsdienst*. She was turned down for a secretarial job in the RSHA because she was a *Mischlinge*, yet she was given the choice of joining the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen*, the *Flakhelferinnen*, or becoming a streetcar conductor. Although she chose the latter, it does not appear that her Jewish background would have prevented her from becoming a *Nachrichtenhelferin*.⁶⁵

⁶¹ See official requirements, printed in *Seelower Tageblatt*, No.97, 1943; April 27, 1943, p.4, available online: <http://tinyurl.com/7z92624> and *Die Grenz-Zeitung* (Stolp), No.34, 1943; February 4, 1943 p.6, available online: <http://bibliotekacyfrowa.eu/dlibra/plain-content?id=8295>.

⁶² Maubach, *Die Stellung halten*, p.129.

⁶³ “Keine besonderen Vorkenntnisse, aber geistige Wendigkeit, gutes Gehör und Rechtschreibkenntnisse erforderlich”, March 8, 1945, available online: <http://www.wien.gv.at/rk/historisch/1945/maerz.html> This advertisement also appeared in the Viennese weekly “*Deutsches Volksblatt*”, March 3, 1945.

⁶⁴ Baacke was classified by the Nazis as a *Mischlinge* (part-Jewish, part-Aryan person) of the second degree, as her mother’s mother was Jewish; therefore she was considered ¼ Jewish. Ironically, under Jewish halacha (law), she would have been considered fully Jewish.

⁶⁵ Margaret Baacke, *Tainted Blood? Memoirs of a Part-Jewish Girl in the Third Reich 1933-1945* (Bloomington, Indiana and Milton Keynes, UK: AuthorHouse, 2007), pp.340-342.

What would make a woman volunteer to be an *SS-Helferin* rather than a *Nachrichtenhelferin*? There was no differential financial incentive.⁶⁶ Both cohorts were responding out of patriotism, displaying a desire to serve their country and *Volk*. The women who joined the *SS-Helferinnen* were ideologically committed to National Socialism, as demonstrated by their membership of the party or party organisations. Anna Forck, born in 1919, became a member of the BDM in 1933 and joined the NSDAP in 1941.⁶⁷ Perhaps then it was inevitable that she became an *SS-Helferin* in 1941; it was an opportunity to extend her commitment to National Socialism. A statistical analysis of those who applied to be *SS-Helferinnen*, undertaken by Jutta Mühlenberg, revealed that these women had stronger Nazi sympathies than their contemporaries. Many applicants had connections to Nazi organisations, including the SS, through their fathers or husbands. By becoming an *SS-Helferin*, the applicants embraced both the prospect of immersion in the SS community, and the potential to be more active as a Nazi.⁶⁸

The ideological predispositions evident in *SS-Helferinnen* were less common among the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen*. There were, however, some *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* who were ideologically motivated. When she was just 12 years old, Isolde Springer* was “excited” when Hitler came to power.⁶⁹ The BDM provided an outlet for Springer to express her enthusiasm. She fondly recalled the activities in which she took part and two years later she became a young girls’ group leader within the movement. In spring 1941, she volunteered for the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen des Heeres*. Another girl who volunteered for the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* was Pauline Ihle*, a member of the *Jugendorganisation des Jungdeutschen Ordens*,⁷⁰ who felt left out as her friends in the BDM marched throughout her home city.⁷¹ A *Nachrichtenhelferin* wrote in a letter home that “with the sun in my heart I want to fulfil my duties for the German homeland here

⁶⁶ Mühlenberg, *Das SS-Helferinnenkorps* p.238.

⁶⁷ Personnel file of Anna Forck, BArch SF A0021.

⁶⁸ Mühlenberg, *Das SS-Helferinnenkorps*, p.68.

⁶⁹ “begeistert”, interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Isolde Springer* in Maubach, *Die Stellung halten*, p.323.

⁷⁰ This was the youth branch of the Young German Order, a para-military organisation, which had been banned by the Nazis in 1933.

⁷¹ Interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Pauline Ihle* in Maubach, *Die Stellung halten*, p.59.

now". She continued her letter confirming that she was "proud to be able to be away from home fulfilling patriotic duties as a woman".⁷² Nevertheless, these sentiments are significantly less evident in sources among *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* in comparison to *SS-Helferinnen*.

As seconded Red Cross nurses, the first *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* recruits did not necessarily have a choice, or an interest, in becoming *Nachrichtenhelferinnen*. After completing high school, Leni Ullmann* worked as a receptionist for a doctor. In a desire to further her knowledge, she chose to complete a course to become a Red Cross nurse. The trainer of the course arranged for Ullmann to become a *Nachrichtenhelferin*.⁷³ Some women specifically used the Red Cross as a direct route into the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen*. Pauline Ihle*, who had completed an apprenticeship as a commercial clerk, voluntarily applied for a Red Cross training course, so that she could become a *Nachrichtenhelferin*. She was accepted in February 1941, aged 19.⁷⁴ Ursula R.* became a Red Cross nurse, because, "that was the condition then, if you wanted to be a *Nachrichtenhelferin* for the army".⁷⁵ Other women had initially volunteered for the Red Cross to fulfil the requirements for their compulsory Year of Duty.⁷⁶ Many then volunteered for the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen*; it was a natural continuation of their service and they willingly carried on serving their Fatherland. Most of the women who became *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* came through the Red Cross.⁷⁷

Women came to the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* from a variety of backgrounds. Sigrid Meißner* was conscripted into the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* in 1943 and sent to Italy, aged 18. She had previously completed an apprenticeship in the textile

⁷² "Mit Sonne im Herzen will ich meine Pflichten für die deutsche Heimat nun hier erfüllen", "stolz darauf, nun fern von daheim als Frau vaterländische Aufgaben erfüllen zu können", undated letter, Seidel and Grosser, *Dienende Herzen*, p.37.

⁷³ Interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Leni Ullmann* in Maubach, *Die Stellung halten*, p.324.

⁷⁴ Interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Pauline Ihle* in *ibid.*, p.321.

⁷⁵ "Das war damals die Bedingung, wenn man Nachrichtenhelferinnen des Heeres werden wollte", interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Ursula R.* in Killius, *Frauen für die Front*, p.40.

⁷⁶ See the introduction for an outline of the Year of Duty.

⁷⁷ August Schalkhaeuser, Hellmuth Reinhardt, and H. Heitmann, *Personnel and Administration Project 2b, Part VI: German Women in War Service During World War II* (Headquarters, European Command, Historical Division: 1949), pp.134-135.

industry.⁷⁸ Having served as a street car conductor for two years after being conscripted, Käthe Minges* volunteered for *Nachrichten* service in 1942, aged 21.⁷⁹ Aged just 15, Ute Raven* volunteered after elementary school for *Landjahr*: a service year for members of the Hitler Youth and BDM to work in the countryside. After working in a sweet factory, Raven volunteered for service work in 1939 and was placed in the sweet factory's company. In 1944, she volunteered to become a *Nachrichtenhelferin* for the army.⁸⁰

Käthe Simon's employment as a clerk and department manager in the social office of the *Reichsjugendführung* was "contrary to her expressed wishes"; presumably, she had been conscripted.⁸¹ Having previously been a deputy head teacher in the BDM housekeeping school, and having trained as a teacher, Simon requested a transfer to a similar position. None of the schools which the Reich Youth Leadership were responsible for had a vacancy, and so it was suggested to Simon that she became head of the Department of Home Economics, or that she became a *Heimleiterin* in the *SS-Helferinnen* school in Oberehnheim. She agreed to the latter, and became a matron at the school, in July 1943.⁸² The routes to employment at the *SS-Helferinnen* school were evidently varied.

Volksdeutsche were also eligible to become *Helferinnen*, and by doing so, could display their commitment to National Socialism. Nelli Folkmann, who was born and grew up in Poland and was a former member of the Warsaw branch of the BDM, became a Police *Nachrichtenhelferin*, before she, along with her parents and sister, obtained German nationality.⁸³ In addition to the usual application documents required to become an *SS-Helferin*, Herta Joanowitsch's application had to be supported by the *Deutsche Volksgruppe* in Romania. The organisation confirmed that Joanowitsch was German, was recognised by the German minority in Romania as a German, and had knowledge of *Deutschtum*. Statements also

⁷⁸ Interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Sigrid Meißner* in Maubach, *Die Stellung halten*, p.322.

⁷⁹ Interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Käthe Minges* in *ibid.*

⁸⁰ Interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Ute Raven* in *ibid.*, p.323.

⁸¹ "entgegen meinen ausdrücklichen Wünschen", Käthe Simon's CV, undated, BArch SF B0034.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ Marriage application of Nelli Folkmann, BArch SF A0021.

verified that Joanowitsch had been a member of the *Deutsche Jugend* (DJ), and had risen through the leadership ranks. Her parents had to sign a statement to certify that they agreed for their daughter “to go into the Reich as an SS communication-auxiliary”.⁸⁴

Members of German nobility supported the Nazis, by becoming members of the party and the SS, and by becoming *Helferinnen*. Jonathan Petropoulos lists some 270 princes, princesses, counts, countesses, dukes and duchesses who were members of the Nazi Party. While the nobility was officially abolished in 1919, and the privileges afforded the nobles were removed, they were able to retain their titles, and were still associated with their respective regions. Waldeck and Pyrmont was a sovereign principality within western Germany until 1871. It then became a constituent state of Germany. After 1918, the Royal Family of Waldeck and Pyrmont became non-reigning. Josias, the heir apparent to the throne of the Principality of Waldeck and Pyrmont, was pro-Nazi, becoming a member of the Nazi Party in November 1929. He joined the SS a few months after, and one year later he became the chief of Himmler’s personal staff. Himmler was godfather to Josias’s only son. Josias was used as a role model for the SS: for example, he was appointed as head of the SS office for horse riding and frequently competed in international competitions in his SS uniform. He continued to rise within the ranks to become a General in the SS and in 1939, was appointed the Higher SS and Police Leader of Weimar.⁸⁵

Josias immersed his family in National Socialism. Two of his four daughters became members of the *SS-Helferinnenkorps*. Princess Margarethe, born in 1923, had been a member of, and a leader within, the BDM. A member of the NSDAP, she was conscripted in February 1943. In February 1944, she provided cover for an *SS-Helferin* attending a training course.⁸⁶ Margarethe’s younger sister, Princess Alexandra, born in 1924, had also been active within the BDM as a leader in the

⁸⁴ “als SS-Nachrichten-helferin ins Reich geht”, Herta Joanowitsch’s personnel file, BArch SF A0039.

⁸⁵ Jonathan Petropoulos, *Royals and the Reich. The Princes von Hessen in Nazi Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp.380-389, p.261, pp.264-265.

⁸⁶ The command for Margarethe zu Waldeck, January 18, 1944, BArch SF B0043.

movement. She was called up in November 1943.⁸⁷ Her royal status and her father's position within the SS (at this time he was High Commissioner of Police in German-occupied France) did not afford her favourable treatment; she underwent the same entrance exam as everyone else.⁸⁸ A report noted that she "was a zealous guide and always ready for action".⁸⁹

Margarethe and Alexandra's aunt, Princess Ingeborg Alix of Schaumburg-Lippe,⁹⁰ was also involved in the *SS-Helferinnenkorps*. Schaumburg-Lippe was a small principality, in western Germany. Princess Ingeborg's husband, Prince Stephan, was the fifth child of the ruler of the principality, Georg, Prince of Schaumburg. Stephan was a German diplomat stationed in Buenos Aires during the war, and he also held a position as SS major.⁹¹ His wife, born in 1901, was considerably older than her nieces and subsequently able to play a more prominent role within the *Helferinnenkorps*. Her brother-in-law, Prince Josias of Waldeck and Pyrmont, recommended Ingeborg as a matron for the *SS-Helferin* school.⁹² His recommendation was approved and she was conscripted to the *Helferinnenkorps* in February 1944.⁹³ She was asked to attend the basic training course to give her an insight into the *Helferinnen* school, before she became the director of those *Helferinnen* training as radio operators.⁹⁴ In this capacity, in March 1944, she was sent to Berlin to meet with the *Auslandsorganisation*, and to hear the German broadcasts which were being transmitted all over the world.⁹⁵ Later she was sent abroad as a leader of *SS-Helferinnen*.

Many families supported the applications of their daughters. Committed Nazis encouraged their daughters to serve; some were so dedicated or patriotic

⁸⁷ The call-up of Princess Alexandra of Waldeck and Pyrmont, November 20, 1943, BArch SF B0042.

⁸⁸ Princess Alexandra's entrance exam, *ibid*.

⁸⁹ "war eine eifrige und einsatzbereite Führerin", report written January 5, 1944, *ibid*.

⁹⁰ Sometimes Princess Ingeborg is given her husband's name, as was traditional in Germany, and she was therefore also known as Princess Stephan of Schaumburg-Lippe.

⁹¹ Petropoulos, *Royals and the Reich*, p.268.

⁹² Letter written by the commander of the School, January 19, 1944, BArch SF B0026.

⁹³ Call-up letter of Princess Ingeborg Alix zu Schaumburg-Lippe, February 7, 1944, *ibid*.

⁹⁴ Letter to Princess Ingeborg Alix, written by Sachs, February 19, 1944, *ibid*.

⁹⁵ Telegram sent to the Chef Fernmeldewesen Berlin, from the Reichsschule für SS-Helferinnen, August 4, 1944, *ibid*.

they tried to pull strings to ensure their daughters could become *Helferinnen*. In October 1943, Anneliese D. gave her father the birthday present he desired, by volunteering to be an *SS-Helferin*; an SS man himself, he wanted his daughters to follow in his footsteps.⁹⁶ When Charlotte Mangold did not receive a reply to her application to become a *Nachrichtenhelferin*, her father wrote a letter to the Head of Telecommunications requesting that his daughter be notified immediately whether she had been accepted. He had been a party member since 1932, and emphasised that he wanted his daughter to play her part in victory, to be given a role where she would be treated like a German girl, and “does not, as in other groups, fall into disrepute as a communications auxiliary”.⁹⁷ He wrote again in September 1943, this time to the local *SS-Oberabschnitt*, keen to ensure that Charlotte be placed in a unit in which “discipline and order prevail”, as he believed that the BDM, and other institutions his daughter had been involved in, were “very much corrupted”.⁹⁸ Family influence was important to Eline Kormann, who, as the mother of two SS men, wished to join the *SS-Helferinnenkorps*. She had been employed by the army since 1939 but left because she “did not have enough to do”.⁹⁹ The house leader, Princess Stefan von Schaumburg-Lippe, interviewed Kormann and determined she was a suitable candidate to complete the basic training course, and would be a valuable asset because she was not only a skilled seamstress, but also had years of experience working for the German army across the Third Reich. However, she was rejected because of her age: she was 42 when she applied. It was recommended that she be referred to the *Höheren SS- und Polizeiführer* so an appropriate use could be found for her.¹⁰⁰

If idealism and a sense of duty motivated some women, others were driven by more mundane factors. As a result of the “strained relationship” with her

⁹⁶ Mühlenberg, *Das SS-Helferinnenkorps*, p.65.

⁹⁷ “nicht wie in anderen Formationen als Nachrichten-Helferin in üblen Ruf gerät”, letter written by Edmund Mangold, May 14, 1943, BArch SF B0005.

⁹⁸ “in der Zucht und Ordnung herrscht”, “sehr viel verdorben ist”, letter written by Edmund Mangold, September 15, 1943, *ibid*.

⁹⁹ “nicht zu tun genügend zu tun bekam”, letter written by Princess Stefan von Schaumburg-Lippe to the commander of the Helferinnen school, March 26, 1945, BArch SF A0045.

¹⁰⁰ Letter written by Karl Mutschler, the Commander of the SS-Helferinnen school, March 30, 1945, *ibid*.

mother, Clare Varner-Rassmann embraced the opportunity to become a *Nachrichtenhelferin* because she wanted to leave home “as quickly as possible”.¹⁰¹ Other women leapt at the opportunity to serve their country primarily because it enabled them to travel abroad. Pauline Ihle* wished to do her duty and had originally applied to the Red Cross, receiving an instruction to complete a course. As she astutely thought that many women would be needed as nurses during the war, she was happy to oblige. However, she could not handle the sight of blood, and so she decided to join the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* instead. She realised this was an opportunity both to help and to see the world. Her motivations for joining were “a little bit of idealism and also a bit of travel for pleasure”.¹⁰²

Isolde Springer*, a group leader in the BDM, was enticed to volunteer for the communication auxiliary corps by the information that the women were sent all over Europe, and she thought “that would be something”.¹⁰³ After her successful application, she was sent to Zagreb in spring 1941 and then to Paris. She married in 1944 and left the service when she became pregnant with twins.

Ilse H* reported for duty as a *Nachrichtenhelferin* because it “was war” and, in her opinion, conscientious women signed up for the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen*. However, the moment they were given their uniform they began to march on the parade grounds, which did not appeal to Ilse. While considering her other options, she was informed that possibilities had opened up for *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* to replace men in both Poland and France. The prospect of travelling abroad was “interesting and appealing” and so she remained a *Nachrichtenhelferin*.¹⁰⁴

Originally signing up to the Red Cross, Edith Müller-Beeck was under the impression that she would be sent to a military hospital to assist as a nurse.

¹⁰¹ "gespannten Verhältnisses", "so schnell wie möglich", Clare Varner-Rassmann, "Briefe an Franzl" in Jürgen Kleindienst, ed., *Täglich Krieg Deutschland 1939-1945* (Berlin: JKL Publications, 2000) Reihe ZEITGUT, Band 9, p.180.

¹⁰² "n [sic] bisschen Idealismus und auch n [sic] bisschen Reisefreude", interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Pauline Ihle* in Maubach, *Die Stellung halten*, p.103.

¹⁰³ "das wär doch was", interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Isolde Springer* in *ibid.*, p.79.

¹⁰⁴ "Krieg war", "interessant und reizvoll", interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Ilse H.* in Killius, *Frauen für die Front*, p.21.

Although she was then selected to become a *Nachrichtenhelferin*, this did not deter her. It was a great comfort, and a source of pride, to know that she would be serving her country, in any position.¹⁰⁵ Edith wrote in her diary that she believed that the girls did not sign up merely because they were adventure-seekers, or due to a “quick passing fancy of enthusiasm”.¹⁰⁶

The potent mix of uniform and adventure could act as an enticement to potential recruits. For Ursula R.*, the war itself was irrelevant in comparison to the adventure and opportunity it brought. She eagerly volunteered to be a Red Cross nurse in order to become a *Nachrichtenhelferin*. Her Red Cross trainer had informed her that the women wore a uniform “which looks very chic”, and that they had the opportunity to go abroad, which only increased her enthusiasm. Ursula had been impressed by pictures of the “chic uniform” she had seen in magazines and had long admired the blend of idealism, represented by the uniform, and the desire to travel abroad.¹⁰⁷ Karola M.* volunteered after seeing a picture of a *Nachrichtenhelferin* in uniform in a magazine. The picture excited her, and her boss encouraged her, saying “that’s something for you. You could also be standing there” [in the picture]; she signed up immediately. In addition to her admiration of the uniform, Karola appreciated the opportunity to “go out into the world”.¹⁰⁸

At this time, “uniforms of any kind were ‘in’”.¹⁰⁹ This may have been because, immediately after the First World War, military aspects of the German uniform had been integrated into dress designs and these had been featured in women’s magazines. Donning a uniform may have been seen as fashionable, especially as most people who belonged to any group supporting the Nazis wore a uniform; those in the Wehrmacht, the SS, the Hitler Youth, the BDM. These women would have wanted to continue to wear a uniform, as it was a visible sign of

¹⁰⁵ Müller-Beeck, *Tagebuch*, pp.11-12.

¹⁰⁶ “Strohfeuer einer schnellen Begeisterung”, *ibid.*, p.12.

¹⁰⁷ “Uniform”, “Ausland”, “das sieht doch schick aus”, “schicke Uniform”, interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Ursula R.* in Killius, *Frauen für die Front*, pp.40, 42.

¹⁰⁸ “das wäre was für dich. Die würde dir auch stehen”, “rauskommen in die Welt”, interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Karola M.* in *ibid.*, p.167.

¹⁰⁹ Baacke, *Tainted Blood?*, p.209.

inclusion in the Nazi community. It is also likely that many young girls and women were enticed by the uniform because it gave them a sense of power and authority, and of “being part of a group”.¹¹⁰

The *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* uniform consisted of a skirt and suit jacket, two grey blouses, and a white blouse for special occasions. All of the blouses were long sleeved and every item of clothing had the emblems of an eagle, a swastika and a lightning flash, or *blitz* symbol. This symbol, together with a yellow stripe on the sleeve with the letters ‘NH’ - *Nachrichtenhelferin des Heeres* - formed the insignia of the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen*.¹¹¹ This gave them the nickname *Blitzmädel*, which, according to one *Nachrichtenhelferin*, brought to mind the image of a “pretty girl in handsome uniform, her cap daringly askew on her bright blond hair, smiling, and ready to joyfully fulfil her duty”.¹¹²

The *SS-Helferinnen* uniform was based upon that of the *Helferinnen* of the air force, but the uniform was clearly marked with the SS runes and an arm band indicating membership of the *Reichsschule-SS*. The women had to sew these insignia on to the uniform themselves.¹¹³ Initially they wore other badges on their uniforms, but Himmler ordered these to be removed as he was concerned they would be confused with the lightning symbol the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* wore.¹¹⁴ The leaders of the *SS-Helferinnen* attached a silver cord to the collar of their coats and jackets to denote their rank. From December 1943, all leaders, sub-leaders and trainers were required to wear a “field grey” uniform, and everyone else had to wear a sober grey uniform. This was due to the limited availability of alternative materials.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰ Irene Gunther, *Nazi Chic? Fashioning Women in the Third Reich* (Oxford, New York: Berg, 2004), pp.30, 119, 121.

¹¹¹ Interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Elfie R.* in Killius, *Frauen für die Front*, p.141.

¹¹² “hübschen Mädchens in schmucker Uniform, das schief sitzende Käppi verwegen auf dem leuchtenden Blondhaar, lächelnd bereit zu freudiger Pflichterfüllung”, report by *Nachrichtenhelferin* Elisabeth L.* in Szepansky, >*Blitzmädel*<, p.92.

¹¹³ Staff order, January 30, 1943, BArch NS 32 II/56.

¹¹⁴ Mühlenberg, *Das SS-Helferinnenkorps*, pp.230-231.

¹¹⁵ “feldgrau”, Daily command, December 9, 1943, BArch NS 32 II/56.

Not all the girls liked their uniform once they had received it, and this opinion was indicated in several accounts. Ursula R.* found the shoes she was given “very shabby” and the suspenders “horrible”.¹¹⁶ Her “grey *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* coat” helped Trudi Pätz earn respect from civilians, although as it was “embroidered with eagles”, she thinks she was mistaken for a nurse.¹¹⁷ The French nicknamed the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* “grey mice” because of the “unimaginative, bland attire” they wore.¹¹⁸ Hilde Kerer and her colleagues used to shorten their skirts to make their uniform more appealing; every Saturday before a uniform inspection at the school in Gießen they would have to roll them back down to the required length.¹¹⁹ However, apart from shortening their skirts, an arbitrary act which the women got away with because the leaders did not always notice, there was not much the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* could do to personalise their uniform and make it less bland. Their legs and feet, however, provided a suitable target to improve their uniform, which they could do by adding a touch of elegance. After turning her nose up at the stockings and shoes dealt out to her, Pauline Ihle* bought “suede shoes with a wedge heel” in Holland, and had silk stockings couriered over from Paris.¹²⁰ The “beautiful silk stockings and chic shoes”¹²¹ she acquired demonstrated, according to Franka Maubach, an attempt to enrich and improve the masculine military uniform, by making it more distinctly feminine. Simultaneously, Maubach believes, this shows the influence of French fashion and culture and the lasting impact this made on the women who had been deployed in France.¹²²

The uniform was not static, for either group, changing with the weather or

¹¹⁶ “ziemlich schäbig”, “schrecklich”, interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Ursula R.* in Killius, *Frauen für die Front*, pp.42-43.

¹¹⁷ “grauen *Nachrichtenhelferinnen*-Kittel”, “mit dem aufgestickten Adler”, Trudi Pätz, “Flucht aus dem Inferno” in Kleindienst, ed., *Täglich Krieg*, p.89. The uniform of the Organisation Todt *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* was embroidered with eagles, so it is likely that Trudi Pätz worked for the organisation.

¹¹⁸ Gunther, *Nazi Chic?*, p.126.

¹¹⁹ Author interview with Hilde Kerer, Brixen, Italy, April 22, 2012.

¹²⁰ “Wildlederschuhe mit Keilabsatz”, interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Pauline Ihle* in Maubach, *Die Stellung halten*, p.123.

¹²¹ “schöne Seidenstrümpfe und die schicken Schuhe”, *ibid.*

¹²² Maubach, *Die Stellung halten*, p.123.

location the girls were sent to. As East Prussia was cold, for example, the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* on duty were given more items of clothing. Long underwear, felt boots, rabbit fur jackets worn as a vest with fur on the inside were all provided.¹²³ This was not always sufficient; in Oslo, the wind went right through their stockings and gloves so the girls had to resort to “self-protection”; they campaigned for socks and boots. Their success meant warmth, making them feel, as Müller-Beeck wrote in her diary, like “the sun was shining over Oslo”.¹²⁴

SS-Helferinnen could also add a silver buckle to their uniform, as a reward for good behaviour and good service.¹²⁵ The *Silberspange* was awarded, albeit infrequently, from July 1943 onwards. It was given, according to the service regulations for SS auxiliaries, “in recognition of a good performance and a clear, clean and dignified attitude of the German woman, and after a suitable period of testing and probation”.¹²⁶ The silver clasp was worn on the uniform while on duty. If those awarded it later violated any rules or regulations, or demonstrated bad behaviour, the silver clasp was revoked, either temporarily or permanently. *SS-Helferinnen* had to have served two years before they could be considered for this distinction.¹²⁷

In order to save material, a *Führernotiz* in 1942 asserted that a uniform would no longer be possible for any female auxiliaries employed in the German Reich, whether it be in the army, navy or air force, therefore encompassing the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen*. Those employed in the occupied *Reichsgebiet* would wear work clothes, and the remaining women would wear their own civilian clothing.¹²⁸

¹²³ Interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Ursula R.* in Killius, *Frauen für die Front*, p.54.

¹²⁴ “selbstschutz”, “scheint ...die Sonne über Oslo”, Müller-Beeck, *Tagebuch*, p.90.

¹²⁵ Letters concerning the silver buckle, July 20, 1944 and July 31, 1944, BArch NS 19/1887.

¹²⁶ “Als Anerkennung für gute Leistungen und eine klare, saubere, der deutschen Frau würdigen Haltung [...] nach einer angemessenen Zeit der Erprobung und Bewährung”, *Dienstordnung für die SS-Helferinnen*, in BArch NS 32 II/7.

¹²⁷ Kurt Gerhard Kletmann, *Auszeichnungen des Deutschen Reiches 1936-1945: eine Dokumentation ziviler und militärischer Verdienst- und Ehrenzeichen* (Stuttgart: Motorbuch, 1981), p.193.

¹²⁸ Institut für Zeitgeschichte München MA 144/3, *Führernotiz*, 1942 (no exact date is given), reprinted in von Gersdorff, *Frauen*, p.356.

To pacify those women who were jealous of their uniformed peers, the *Führernotiz* noted that

“if the required number of female auxiliaries for the Air Defence is not achieved by means of voluntary recruitment and conscription, special uniforms can be requisitioned”.¹²⁹

Clothing shortage was a problem which all those employed by the *Wehrmacht* faced.¹³⁰ Formed in February 1942, the *Stabshelferinnen*¹³¹, for example, were initially required to wear civilian clothing; only in October 1943 did they begin to receive uniforms.¹³²

As German Red Cross nurses who were to become *Nachrichtenhelferinnen*, Edith Müller-Beeck and her comrades were told that they would have to wear grey stockings and black heels in their new roles.¹³³ This caused them great anxiety as they were concerned that they would be unable to find grey stockings, particularly in the required quantities, due to the uniform and material shortage. To resolve this issue, they dyed their stockings. Other items followed the stockings, with less success; not least because the girls did not like the “drab grey”. However, as the girls prepared to start their service as *Nachrichtenhelferinnen*, only one thing was important to them: “we would wear a uniform!”,¹³⁴ demonstrating that even an ugly, haphazard, thrown-together uniform was better than no uniform.

The *Helferinnen* had a strict dress-code. They were encouraged to dress demurely; when told this, some *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* removed their “red-painted fingernails” and gave their painted faces and sparkling jewellery “one last, wistful

¹²⁹ “Falls die erforderlichen weiblichen Hilfskräfte für die Luftverteidigung nicht auf dem Wege freiwilliger Werbung und Dienstverpflichtung erreicht werden, kann besondere Uniformierung erforderlich werden”, *ibid.*

¹³⁰ Brian L. Davies, *German Army Uniforms and Insignia, 1933-1945* (London: Brockhampton Press, 2000), p.9.

¹³¹ These were women tasked with general office work and administration; similar to *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* they released men so they could fight at the front. For more information see, for example, von Gersdorff, *Frauen*, p.64.

¹³² Gordon Williamson, *World War II German Womens Auxiliary Services* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2012), p.9.

¹³³ Müller-Beeck, *Tagebuch*, p.12.

¹³⁴ “ein Paar farbige Strümpfe nach dem anderen wanderte hinein”, “eintönigen Grau”, “wir würden eine Uniform tragen!”, *ibid.*, p.13.

farewell look”.¹³⁵ *SS-Helferinnen* were similarly forbidden from wearing any jewellery except watches and wedding and engagement rings. Conspicuous lipstick, nail varnish and make-up were also banned, and hairstyles had to be “plain and simple” to match the uniform.¹³⁶ This plain and simple image may have jarred with the “chic” image which enticed so many women to volunteer to become *Helferinnen*. Some of the women may have been disappointed with these rules, but would have been wary of the potential repercussions of flouting them. Indeed, the clean, uniform look resulting from these regulations augmented the sense of belonging to a single group, and thereby reinforced commonality which may have overridden any minor concerns.

The requirements placed on the *Helferinnen* were not limited to appearance: the *SS-Helferinnen* were also obligated to act in a specific manner. The girls were expected to give up smoking in public, in service areas and in their bedrooms, because Himmler believed all women who smoked were ideologically unreliable.¹³⁷ The consumption of alcohol was also forbidden. The *Vorläufige Einsatzordnung für SS-Helferinnen*, written by Ernst Sachs, outlined the original instructions they were expected to adhere to and the requirements expected of them. They were compelled to work for 56 hours each week, which included up to 14 hours of training.¹³⁸

Donning a uniform and acting in the prescribed manner formed only the basic requirements of becoming a *Helferin*. Each woman was there to perform a role, and she had to be trained for the tasks she was to perform. Initially, not all the girls knew which tasks these would be. When those girls who came via the German Red Cross were told they were going to be *Nachrichtenhelferinnen*, many of the girls could only answer the question of what a *Nachrichtenhelferin* was or did with “a

¹³⁵ “rotlackierten Fingernägeln”, “einen letzten, wehmühtigen Abschiedsblick!”, Müller-Beeck, *Tagebuch*. p.27.

¹³⁶ “schlichten und einfachen”, Staff Command, December 15, 1942, BArch NS 32 II/56

¹³⁷ Mühlenberg, *Das SS-Helferinnenkorps*, p.237.

¹³⁸ Der Reichsführer-SS, Reichsminister des Innern, [und] Der Chef des Fernmeldewesens, *Vorläufige Einsatzordnung für SS-Helferinnen* (Berlin: 1944), p.3, available in the Bundesarchiv, BArch NS 32 II/7.

shrug".¹³⁹ They wrote letters to soldiers, questioning them, but the soldiers knew as little as the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* themselves about what their future roles entailed. The newspapers remained silent about the creation of the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen*, which seemed incomprehensible to the girls; once they knew they had been drafted, they could not think about anything else. When they arrived at the training school, the girls besieged the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* with their questions. The monosyllabic answers did not satisfy the new girls' curiosity.¹⁴⁰ Before she was sent to undertake four weeks training in Königsberg, Elfie R.* had no idea what to expect of her future work as a *Fernschreiberin*. All she knew was that she was in the *Nachrichtendienst*, and she hoped to be sent abroad; that had been her motivation for joining.¹⁴¹

Initially the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* received basic technical training in their local military district,¹⁴² before being transferred to the Army General Staff in Berlin. When the army base became too small, a training school was established in Gießen, north of Frankfurt.¹⁴³ The women still received their basic training at a *Nachrichtenhelferinnen-Ausbildungstrupp* stationed at the Headquarters of their local military district. In 1942, basic training was undertaken in the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen-Ausbildungsabteilungen*, of which there were four.¹⁴⁴ Basic training involved theoretical and practical classes. In the evenings, the girls would socialise, singing, discussing books and films, and sharing stories of their home life and their work in the BDM.¹⁴⁵ After their basic training, they would arrive at the *Heeresschule für Nachrichtenhelferinnen* in Gießen for their advanced training. Karola M.* was trained in Nuremberg in the use of *Klappenschränken* as she was to become a *Fernsprecherin*, and then she was transferred to the school in Gießen.¹⁴⁶

¹³⁹ "ein Achselzucken", Müller-Beeck, *Tagebuch*, p.12.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.21.

¹⁴¹ Interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Elfie R.* in Killius, *Frauen für die Front*, pp.139-140, p.147.

¹⁴² Werner Niehaus, *Die Nachrichtentruppe 1914 bis heute, Entstehung und Einsatz* (Stuttgart: Motorbuch Verlag, 1980), p.286.

¹⁴³ Maubach, *Die Stellung halten*, p.94.

¹⁴⁴ Georg Tessin, *Verbände und Truppen der deutschen Wehrmacht und Waffen-SS, Vol.2: Die Landstreitkräfte 1-5* (Osnabrück: Biblio Verlag, 1973, 2nd edition).

¹⁴⁵ Schulemann, *Als Nachrichtenhelferin in Frankreich*, p.9.

¹⁴⁶ Interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Karola M.* in Killius, *Frauen für die Front*, p.167.

Trudi Pätz learned how to operate and repair the *Klappenschränken* at her initial training.¹⁴⁷ Some women were retrained in a different skill. After returning from a tour of duty in the Ukraine in November 1943, where she had been a teletype writer, Helga Th.* was sent to a *Nachrichtenhelferinnen-Ausbildungsabteilung* where she was retrained as a radio operator. The following year she was sent to Paris.¹⁴⁸

In spring 1944 the BDM started teaching signalling courses to some of its older members.¹⁴⁹ This training made these members ideal to become *Nachrichtenhelferinnen*, demonstrating a commitment by the BDM to develop its members to enable them to make a contribution to the Fatherland. Training the women through the BDM might also have sped up the application and training process, as potentially women could arrive at the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* school ready for service. However, by this stage in the war there was less demand for *Nachrichtenhelferinnen*, as occupied countries, where the majority of the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* were deployed, were liberated by the Allies over the following months.

After they had completed their training, the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* were required to complete a final written exam. All the girls studied “diligently” for their exam, because, according to Ursula R.*, they were “active and interested, and considered it as a job”.¹⁵⁰ After passing their final tests, the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* would be ready for their first assignments. There was no fixed duration between the test and the first assignment; some women were dispatched immediately while others waited weeks.

The education of the *SS-Helferinnen* started with an eight-week basic training course. After rising at 6.30am, the women would clean their dormitories,

¹⁴⁷ Pätz, “Flucht” in *Kleindienst, Täglich Krieg*, p.89.

¹⁴⁸ Interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Helga Th.* in Killius, *Frauen für die Front*, pp.150-151.

¹⁴⁹ Gisela Miller-Kipp, “Auch Du gehörst dem Führer”. *Die Geschichte des Bundes Deutscher Mädel (BDM) in Quellen und Dokumenten* (Weinheim: Juventa-Verlag, 2002, 2nd edition), p.230.

¹⁵⁰ “fleißig”, “aktiv und interessiert und betrachteten das als Job”, interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Ursula R.* in *ibid.*, p.42.

play sport and raise the flag. Breakfast was eaten at 7.30am. Classes began at 8.15am and would finish at either 5.30pm or 6.30pm. Evenings were taken up with gatherings and educational trips. During the basic training course the girls were taught ideology, first aid, personal care, German, history, geography, military knowledge, the composition and structure of the SS and singing.¹⁵¹ At the end of their basic training the *SS-Helferinnen* had to sit an exam. The exam covered theory, practical applications, and military issues. The questions ranged from the general - for example, the responsibilities of a telephone exchange - to the more specific, assessing the students' knowledge of priority levels for long-distance calls. The questions changed, presumably to prevent cheating.¹⁵² Each *SS-Helferin* was also issued with a *Kennbuch*, which contained their photograph and in which they had to note all personal details including holidays taken.¹⁵³

Following the completion of basic training, the women learnt how to work as either a radio, telephone or telegraph operator. These specialised courses lasted between six and twelve weeks depending on the field. The women learned, for example, about the equipment they would be operating, and its various components, such as capacitors, reactors, conductors, microphones, and remote headsets.¹⁵⁴ Alongside the separate strands there were communal classes, requiring the participation of all girls. These were often subjects which had been studied in basic training, including singing, sport, first-aid, literature, ideology and mother schooling. In mother schooling the women were educated in cooking, sewing, gardening, pet care, cleaning, mending, laundry and ironing.¹⁵⁵ The curriculum for their ideological education included the main features of the Nazi state, the obligations of the German women in action, and racial policy issues. The successful completion of a written exam marked the end of their training at the school, and

¹⁵¹ See, for example, Staff Orders, December 20, 1943, and January 10, 1944, BArch NS 32 II 59; Rules and Procedures, June 2, 1943, BArch 32 II 62; and Weekly and Daily Schedules March 20, 1945, BArch NS 32 II 71; and February 9, 1945, BArch NS 32 II 75.

¹⁵² See, for example, a blank test, April 6, 1944, BArch SF B0025, and the exam taken by Luise Hüttmann (undated), BArch SF A0037, or the exam taken by Princess Alexandra, BArch SF B0042.

¹⁵³ Der Reichsführer-SS, *Vorläufige Einsatzordnung*, p.3.

¹⁵⁴ Training course instructions, undated, BArch NS 32 II 15.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, and Mühlberg, *Das SS-Helferinnenkorps*, pp.218-223.

promoted the *SS-Helferin* into a higher pay bracket.¹⁵⁶ Once they had completed their training, the *SS-Helferinnen* were then able to apply for a position within an SS facility where they would receive on-the-job-training.

Health and fitness were very important at the *SS-Helferinnen* school. These women were being groomed to be the ideal German mother, both physically and mentally. As their bodies were the vessels for the future German super-race, it was imperative that they were healthy and well. Consequently, sports classes were crucial to the training of *SS-Helferinnen*, and the sports instructors were selected with the utmost care. Lieselotte Claar's successful application to become a sports teacher was similar to that of applicants to be *SS-Helferinnen* in that it included her hand-written resume, copies of her certificates, a photograph and evidence of her previous jobs and her salary requirements. As she was applying to be a sports teacher, she was also obligated to provide an indication of her body size. Born in 1917, Claar had been an active member and leader of the BDM. She had also been a sports leader and had shown herself to be "professionally qualified", according to the female regional leader of the Hitler Youth, where Claar had been a leader. As part of her training at the *Helferinnen* school, Claar participated in an 8-day course in sport for the war-disabled at the *SS-Reichsschule für Leibeserziehung*, in 1944.¹⁵⁷

After they had completed their basic training, the *SS-Helferinnen* were required to swear an oath. This would take place on either the last days of basic training or the first days of the technical training. Firstly, they swore allegiance to Hitler. The women shook hands to affirm that they would "behave honourably and immaculately, at all times, as befits the reputation and dignity of German women", and fulfil their "official duties honestly, conscientiously and selflessly". One of the service obligations of the *SS-Helferinnen* was the duty of confidentiality. The women were informed that they were not entitled to keep in their personal custody any records relating to their work, and "any violation of this requirement for

¹⁵⁶ Der Reichsführer-SS, *Vorläufige Einsatzordnung*, p.8.

¹⁵⁷ "fachlich befähigt", personnel file of Lieselotte Claar, BArch SF A0011.

confidentiality in the service” was punishable.¹⁵⁸ Signing the oath confirmed that the women were aware of this restriction, and had been taught the rules and regulations.¹⁵⁹ Some personnel files indicate that the women were asked to sign statements committing to be *SS-Helferinnen* for a defined period of time. On January 19, 1945, Elisabeth Schmitt signed a piece of paper stating: “I voluntarily commit myself hereby after my training to at least two years of service as an SS female auxiliary”.¹⁶⁰ Requiring volunteers to sign on for two years in January 1945 showed either delusion or wild optimism.

Nachrichtenhelferinnen were also asked to swear an oath of loyalty to Hitler, using the same words as the *SS-Helferinnen* oath.¹⁶¹ The oath obligated them to report any evidence of espionage attempts immediately to their superiors. They committed themselves to be loyal and obedient and agreed they would follow the rules and obey orders. The women were obliged to preserve the secrecy of their work and they were to be regularly reminded of this by their trainers. This obligation, which they confirmed in writing, was binding even after their service had ended.¹⁶²

Despite the strict application procedures and the exams that the girls had to pass, and the lack of willing volunteers to be *Nachrichtenhelferinnen*, many girls were dismissed from both strands of *Helferinnen* service. Ill-health and being pregnant were cause for dismissal and dismissal was also used as a form of punishment, demonstrating that the girls were expected to meet certain

¹⁵⁸ “jederzeit ehrenhaft und untadelig zu benehmen, wie es Ansehen und Würde deutscher Frauen verlangen”, “Dienstobliegenheiten ehrlich, gewissenhaft und uneigennützig”, “Dienstordnung”, “bei Verletzung dieser Pflicht ver Dienstverschwiegenheit”, Irene Krawcsyk’s oath, BArch SF A0047, for example.

¹⁵⁹ See, for example, Henry Friedlander and Sybil Milton, eds., *Berlin Document Center* (New York; London: Garland, 1992), p.398.

¹⁶⁰ “Aufgrund meiner freiwilligen Meldung verpflichte ich mich hiermit nach meiner Ausbildung zu einer Dienstzeit von mindestens 2 Jahren als SS-Helferin”, personnel file of Elisabeth Schmitt, January 19, 1945, BArch SF B0028.

¹⁶¹ “Ich gelobe: Ich werde dem Führer des deutschen Reiches und Volkes Adolf Hitler treu und gehorsam sein und meine Dienstobliegenheiten gewissenhaft und uneigennützig erfüllen”, Maubach, *Die Stellung halten*, p.189.

¹⁶² Dienstordnung für Nachrichtenhelferinnen des Heeres vom April 1, 1942, in: HVBl. 1942 B Ziff. 285, §8 [Pflichten], Abs.2, reprinted in Maubach, *Die Stellung halten*, pp.189-190.

requirements. If the girls fell short of their expectations, even if this did not impact on their work performance, they would be dismissed.

Many *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* feared the threat of punishment more than the punishment itself. Having been overheard by their leader in Arhus discussing their wish for the end of the war, a group of five *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* were called before the officer in charge. He informed them they were considered politically unreliable and told them they were being sent back to the school in Gießen to be punished. The fear and uncertainty on the journey to the school plagued the girls but when they arrived at the school, “everything was in disarray”; they were required to surrender their uniform and were put to work, loading clothes which were no longer required.¹⁶³ On one occasion, a friend of Karola M’s* was able to enter the offices of the *Oberkommando des Heeres*. Karola was blamed and summoned to the secret field police who warned her that she already had “one foot in the grave”, because she had “pursued espionage”. They recorded the incident and asked Karola to sign the minutes. She refused, and felt that consequently everyone around her started to “behave very strangely”.¹⁶⁴ However, she did not suffer any further repercussions.

Discipline was taken very seriously at the *SS-Helferinnen* school. To begin with, those who were called up to be *SS-Helferinnen* were informed that failure to follow their call-up orders was punishable by imprisonment, or a fine.¹⁶⁵ At all the various stages of their training and deployment, punishment and dismissal were a very real threat. Jutta Mühlenberg found that of 2,765 women known to have received a call-up to the Reich school, 22% were dismissed. Of these, 65% were dismissed from basic training, 9% were released during their technical training and the remaining 26% were discharged from their place of deployment.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³ “alles war in Auflösung”, report by Nachrichtenhelferin Elisabeth L.* in Szepansky, >Blitzmädel<, pp.95-96.

¹⁶⁴ “einem Bein in Grab”, “Spionage getrieben”, “sehr merkwürdig verhalten”, interview with Nachrichtenhelferin Karola M.* in Killius, *Frauen für die Front*, p.171.

¹⁶⁵ The call-up order of Princess Alexandra of Waldeck and Pyrmont, November 20, 1943, BArch SF B0042, for example.

¹⁶⁶ Mühlenberg, *Das SS-Helferinnenkorps*, p.239.

Given the importance of good health to the *SS-Helferinnen*, it is not surprising that those who were unwell were often dismissed. Women who contracted sexually transmitted diseases were dismissed.¹⁶⁷ Not only could they infect serving men, but they tarnished the reputation of the SS. Despite her prior experience as a deputy head teacher in the BDM housekeeping school, Käthe Simon was eventually sacked as *Heimleiterin* from the school as a result of eye trouble.¹⁶⁸ However, ill health did not always mean immediate dismissal; when Irmgard Berndt proved to be unable to hear any sound more than a metre away from her, she was deemed by the on-site (female) doctor “unfit” to be an *SS-Helferin*, but it was noted that she “could be used elsewhere in the school”.¹⁶⁹

In such a socially diverse group, personal morality could vary widely. Attitudes towards personal property were strained by the shortages and privations of wartime. Despite a rhetoric of unity, theft was endemic. Theft among the *SS-Helferinnen* occurred both at the school and when they were deployed. Six girls were thrown out of basic training for stealing from their colleagues. Soap, cigarettes, gloves and a handkerchief had been taken from their comrades.¹⁷⁰ Charlotte Gnaden was dismissed from the school on October 23, 1943 as she was suspected of having stolen from her roommates. It was alleged that she had taken eleven pairs of tights, one petticoat and ten handkerchiefs.¹⁷¹ However, Edith Müller, who also stole from her comrades, was punished but not dismissed.¹⁷² During her training at the school, she opened a letter addressed to her colleague, Thea Frick. The letter contained a clothing voucher and 5 RM, both of which Müller pocketed before burning the letter. She used some of the clothing coupon to

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., p.246.

¹⁶⁸ Käthe Simon’s CV, undated, BArch SF B0034.

¹⁶⁹ “untauglich”, “konnte jedoch anderweitig an der Schule verwandt werden”, personnel file Irmgard Berndt, September 3, 1943, BArch SF A0005.

¹⁷⁰ This is according to Mühlenberg’s statistical analysis of dismissals from the SS school. Of the 388 women who were dismissed from basic training six girls were dismissed for theft. Mühlenberg, *Das SS-Helferinnenkorps*, pp.239, 246.

¹⁷¹ Personnel file of Charlotte Gnaden, BArch SF A0025.

¹⁷² Please note, this is not the same Edith Müller whose diary was published (Edith Müller-Beeck), nor is she the same Edith Müller whose father wrote requesting her dismissal.

purchase socks and a scarf. The clothing coupon of another *SS-Helferin*, Charlotte Krupp, was found in Müller's closet and she gave a "confession during an interrogation".¹⁷³ Her punishment was five weeks "gentle detention".¹⁷⁴ Six girls were dismissed from their place of service because of theft from their comrades.¹⁷⁵ However, as with those found guilty of theft during their basic training, there was no consistency in the girls' treatment. While Gerda W. was dismissed on suspicion of misappropriation of a piece of jewellery (although she was later acquitted due to lack of evidence),¹⁷⁶ Anny H., guilty of stealing items of clothing, was given a four month prison sentence, which was postponed until the war was over.¹⁷⁷

The reputation of the *SS-Helferinnen* was to be upheld at all times. Consequently, any girl whose actions potentially damaged the reputation was deemed eligible for immediate dismissal. A letter written to the Chief of Telecommunications at the *Reichsführer-SS*, from Krakow, requested that Ilse Schilling be dismissed because "the feminine attitude of the female auxiliary Schilling does not match the prestige and dignity of a German woman".¹⁷⁸ Schilling had jeopardized the reputation of the *SS-Helferinnen* by receiving a visit to her room from "an SS lieutenant in pyjamas". She often took breaks while on duty, and was never lacking in "mendacious excuses".¹⁷⁹ When Else F. was suspected of conducting a lesbian relationship, she was dismissed from the school, "because of ethical and moral lapses". After she was released, Else worked as a *Nachrichtenhelferin* for the *Organisation Todt*.¹⁸⁰ The immediate dismissal of the *SS-Helferin* Margarete Safranek was called for after she was found "in a drunken

¹⁷³ "Geständnis bei der Vernehmung", personnel file of Charlotte Krupp, letter August 31, 1943, BArch SF B0010.

¹⁷⁴ "gelinden Arrestes", letter September 14, 1943, *ibid*.

¹⁷⁵ 155 women were dismissed from duty; of these, 6 were dismissed for theft. Mühlenberg, *Das SS-Helferinnenkorps*, pp.246, p.315.

¹⁷⁶ Personnel file of Gerda W., NARA, A 3343-SF-B0043-2410-2568.

¹⁷⁷ Enforcement ruling, personnel file of Anny H., October 19, 1943, NARA, A 3343-SF-A0031-2052-2292.

¹⁷⁸ "die frauliche Haltung der SS-Helferin Schilling entspricht nicht den Ansehen und der Würde einer deutschen Frau", personnel file of Ilse Schilling, letter March 21, 1944, BArch SF A0001.

¹⁷⁹ "einen SS-Untersturmführer im Schlafanzug", "lügnerischen Ausreden", letters March 17 and 21, 1944 in *ibid*.

¹⁸⁰ "wegen sittlicher und moralischer Verfehlungen", personnel file of Else F., NARA, A 3343-SF-A0018-1394-1972, and Meldebogen, procedural file of Else F., May 21, 1946, Staatsarchiv Ludwigsburg (StAL), EL 902/15 Spruchkammer 30 Ludwigsburg, bundle 5136.

state” in the men’s quarters where she was employed. The SS men involved were arrested and punished by the appropriate disciplinary superior. Safranek was sent back to the school and interrogated so a suitable punishment could be determined.¹⁸¹

SS-Helferinnen were expected to maintain a correct attitude, and appropriate personal conduct and sexual behaviour were considered fundamental and were strictly enforced. These women were more than just workers obliged to act according to the strict guidelines they were given; these women were the future SS brides and mothers of the Aryan race. Accordingly, it is not surprising that any deviation from the guidelines resulted in dismissal.

In order to enforce these regulations and punish transgressions, a *Gerichts-SS-Führer* was initially based at the school, meting out punishments as necessary. However, Himmler, the *Reichsführer-SS*, decided he did not wish the court to be active at the school and so he dismissed the court leader. In subsequent cases where individual *Helferinnen* proved themselves to be untrustworthy and their potential dismissal was contemplated, the decision was made by the head of telecommunications at the *SS-Reichsführer’s* office, without input from the school. The school was expected to comply with the judgment. Although the commander of the school expressed dissatisfaction at the school’s non-participation in the dismissal process,¹⁸² it was deemed a necessary measure to ensure that the reputation of the *SS-Helferinnen*, and by extension the SS, was upheld.

Occasionally, women themselves chose to leave the *SS-Helferinnen*. In January 1945, Lotti Arnold had requested her release because she was pregnant. Her request was granted. Arnold was simultaneously transferred to the reserve indicating that she could come back into service again in the future, presumably because she had been one of “the best” *Helferinnen* in her work detail and her

¹⁸¹ “im betrunkenen Zustand”, personnel file of Margarete Safranek, letters September 20, 21 and 27, 1943, BArch SF B0024.

¹⁸² Letter written by the SS-Obersturmbahnführer and Kommandeur, July 26, 1944, BArch SF B0047.

leadership on duty “was always exemplary”.¹⁸³ The *SS-Helferinnen* relied on women of a high calibre, so there may have been a reluctance to release women such as Arnold.

Pregnancy inevitably led to resignation or dismissal. On occasion, women arrived at the SS school unaware they were pregnant. However, once it was clear that they were carrying a child, or they were no longer able to perform the tasks expected of them, the pregnant women requested to be dismissed. Four months pregnant and suffering from related symptoms, Lore Gölling requested dismissal from the service.¹⁸⁴ Ingelore Röhl requested dismissal because she was seven months pregnant and intended to marry. She asked to be recommended to an SS maternity home.¹⁸⁵ Although only three months pregnant, Karl Eberhard requested that his wife be released from duty because she had been in physical discomfort. He even asked for her to be granted a leave of absence if the decision took a long time.¹⁸⁶

Sometimes, *Helferinnen* were needed at home to support their families. Elizabeth Grab’s father had originally supported her application to become an *SS-Nachrichtenhelferin*. However, when his wife fell ill, he needed Elizabeth to run the family home, and requested that she be allowed to defer her training at the *Nachrichten* school.¹⁸⁷ Similarly, Erika Huber’s father wrote a letter asking that the call-up for his daughter, who had registered as a *Nachrichtenhelferin*, be postponed. His wife, who was employed as a *Wehrmachtangestellte*, had serious health problems and was incapable of providing childcare and housekeeping. Erika was needed to care for her baby sister and run the household. “As soon as conditions allowed it”, Erika would be at the disposal of the *Helferinnen* school. Erika herself appended the letter, to withdraw her registration as a

¹⁸³ “der besten”, “war stets vorbildlich”, Lotti Arnold’s personnel file, letters January 3, 9, 13 and 23, 1945, BArch SF A0002.

¹⁸⁴ Letter, May 15, 1944, Lore Gölling’s personnel file, BArch SF A0026.

¹⁸⁵ Personnel file of Ingelore Röhl, BArch SF B0022.

¹⁸⁶ Letter, May 21, 1944, personnel file of Ruth Eberhard, BArch SF A0016.

¹⁸⁷ Personnel file of Elizabeth Grab, BArch SF A0026.

Nachrichtenhelferin.¹⁸⁸ Ruth Ploch requested release from the *SS-Helferinnen* school to enable her to take care of her child. As her work “left a lot to be desired”, it was “expected that her dismissal would cause no substantial loss to the Reich school”. Ploch was therefore granted her request and dismissed.¹⁸⁹ Gustav Müller asked for his daughter, Edith, to be dismissed from the SS service, because his wife was suffering from gout.¹⁹⁰ He needed his daughter to keep house, and included a medical certificate to support his case. Just two months earlier, Edith’s employer had requested for her to return as “it was impossible” to function without her. Edith Müller herself also wrote requesting her dismissal from the school, due to her mother’s ill health and urgent need for help at home. Her resignation was accepted, because Edith “showed no more interest” in her work.¹⁹¹ It was better to have women dedicated and interested in their work; they would perform better and be more committed to the cause.

Thousands of women volunteered to serve both the army and the SS as communication auxiliaries. Although each woman had her own reason for becoming a *Helferin*, some motivations were common to many of the applicants. The uniform, the prospect of foreign travel, and adventure were very popular reasons for applying. Other women were enticed by the opportunity to serve their country. These women, whether working for the SS or the army, were refined for their roles, told what to wear and how to act, and trained for their tasks.

The regimen for the army and SS auxiliaries evinced both traditional military values, and the racial thinking which was paramount to Nazi ideology. While taking these women out of one Nazi context, that of BDM member, and diligent daughter, sister, mother, it placed them in another; this was also crucial for the advancement of the Nazi party’s aims. For both groups of *Helferinnen* their ideological training

¹⁸⁸ “Solbald die Verhältnisse es ermöglichen”, letter May 12, 1943, personnel file of Erika Huber, BArch SF A0036.

¹⁸⁹ “zu wünschen übrig”, “für die nachrichtentechnische Ausbildung jegliches Interesse abgeht”, “dürfte durch ihre Entlassung kein wesentlicher Verlust für die Reichsschule-SS eintreten”, Ruth Ploch’s personnel file, letter November 22, 1943, BArch SF B0017.

¹⁹⁰ As noted earlier, this is not the same Edith Müller-Beeck whose diary was published.

¹⁹¹ “es ist unmöglich”, “kein Interesse mehr zeigt”, Edith Müller’s personnel file, letters June 19, 1943, August 23, 1943, and September 13, 1943, BArch SF B0010.

and inculcation of obedience was crucial, as well as adherence to the ideal type of woman – dutiful, efficient, demure, sober, and marriageable, rather than feisty, independent, sexually active and fun-loving. However, the underlying intention for the groups fundamentally differed. The *SS-Helferinnen*, groomed for a greater purpose, were more ideologically motivated than the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen*, and this was reinforced with training to ensure their steadfastness to the regime. They were being shaped not just into the ideal servants of the state, loyal to the Nazi cause and willing to fulfil the roles required of them, but also into the model Nazi woman.

Now that they were primed and ready for duty, where would they be sent, and what work would they do? And how would they interact with the local populations, both at home and abroad? These women were sent to work, but many of them were seeking adventure. What excitement awaited them in foreign parts?

Chapter 2: Women at Work

Primed for their roles, the women who constituted the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen des Heeres* and the *SS-Helferinnen* were dispatched across the whole of the Nazi Empire. For many girls, this was their first venture abroad. These women had to learn to work alongside German soldiers, and interact with local populations. Thrust into the unknown, how did they cope in these challenging circumstances? This chapter will examine what happened to these women after they had completed their training, to determine the contribution they made to the Nazi regime. Naturally, these women formed relationships with those around them: their peers, German soldiers, and the local population. Were these relationships defined by respect, mutual benefit, or resentment; were they just an inevitable consequence of war? Crucially, to what extent were their roles linked to the Nazi machinery of persecution?

The *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* school in Gießen acted as a hub for the women. After the completion of basic training, each *Nachrichtenhelferin* waited at the school until an appropriate position arose. In this capacity, the school functioned as an operations centre. After an assignment had ended, the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* returned to the school to await a new posting.¹ Those women who had been deployed early on in the war came back to Gießen several times to be re-assigned. Having been trained and employed in one capacity, some girls who returned to the school after an initial placement were offered the choice of retraining in one of the other areas the women were needed: as either telephone, radio or teletype operators.

As a focal point for the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen*, with girls constantly arriving and departing, the school encouraged, and contributed to, a positive relationship among the girls. The atmosphere in the school in Gießen was light-hearted. The girls did not talk about the war or the “serious side of life”. It was, according to

¹ Franka Maubach, *Die Stellung halten* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), p.94.

Karola M.*, one of the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen*, “very merry” because all the girls were friendly.² At her initial training at the school, Trudi Pätz described how she “became acquainted with nice young girls”.³ However, it was also crowded, with a thousand girls living in very close proximity. Edith Müller-Beeck described it as living like birds in a cage with other girls “before, over, under, next to you - the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* live everywhere!”.⁴ In autumn 1944, the *Heeresschule* in Gießen was moved to Coburg, in Bavaria.⁵ *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* who had retreated with the German army had already begun gathering in Coburg as the barracks in Gießen were overcrowded.⁶ The school officially completed its transfer to Coburg on October 30, 1944.

The women were dispatched to all corners of the occupied territories depending on where their services were required. Often this entailed being sent to locations newly captured by the Wehrmacht, where the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* were needed to establish the necessary communications structure in the occupied territory. A regional newspaper article calling for applicants stated that where they would be sent “depended on their desire and aptitude as telephone operator, teletype operator or radio operator”;⁷ implying that the women might have a choice. Indeed, some *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* were able to choose where they went and which area they specialised in. Ursula R.* chose to become a teleprinter operator because she thought, quite simply, it was the most appealing option.⁸

² “Ernst des Lebens”, “sehr lustig”, interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Karola M.* in Rosemarie Killius, *Frauen für die Front. Gespräche mit Wehrmachtshelferinnen* (Leipzig: Militzke Verlag, 2003), p.167.

³ “lernte nette junge Mädchen kennen”, Clare Varner-Rassmann, “Briefe an Franzl” in Jürgen Kleindienst, ed., *Täglich Krieg Deutschland 1939-1945* (Berlin: JKL Publications, 2000) Reihe ZEITGUT, Band 9, p.83.

⁴ “vor, über, unter, neben einem, - überall wohnen Nachrichtenhelferinnen!”, Edith Müller-Beeck, *Mein kleines, großes Tagebuch. Aufzeichnungen einer Nachrichtenhelferin* (Chemnitz: Pickenhahn & Sohn, 1944), p.41.

⁵ Allgemeine Heeresmitteilungen 1944, p.342, No.641 printed in Rudolf Absolon, *Die Wehrmacht im Dritten Reich. Vol. VI: 10 Dezember 1941 bis 9 Mai 1945* (Boppard: Harald Boldt Verlag, 1995), p.836.

⁶ Hilde Kerer’s account, “Vom Willen des Lebens getrieben” in *Brixner* (May 2006), pp.12-13, available online: <http://issuu.com/brixmedia/docs/brixner-196---2006-mai>.

⁷ “erfolgt je nach Wunsch und Eignung als Fernsprecherin, Fernschreiberin oder Funkerin”, *Die Grenzzeitung* (Stolp), No.34, 1943; February 4, 1943 p.6, available online: <http://bibliotekacyfrowa.eu/dlibra/plain-content?id=8295>.

⁸ Interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Ursula R.* in Killius, *Frauen für die Front*, p.40.

The girls frequently discussed amongst themselves their preferred choices of destination. The most popular countries were France, which was the first country girls were sent to, and Norway. Karola M.* was asked by a Major where she wished to be sent. She replied Bordeaux, “definitely to the South of France and at the very least France”, as that was her “heart’s desire”. Karola was “blessed” to be granted her wish and was sent with three other *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* to Bordeaux.⁹ Edith Müller-Beeck and her close friend, Hilde-Lore, made plans, expressing their desire to go to Paris or Riga, and Ursula R.* longed to be sent to Athens or Paris. France may have been the destination of choice as many of these girls had an interest in fashion, which they associated with Paris.¹⁰

Scandinavian destinations were high up on many girls’ lists, perhaps because they were considered Aryan territory. The Nazis perceived the Nordic race, of which the Norwegians were a constituent part, superior to Slavs and Eastern Europeans.¹¹ It would therefore be considered acceptable to form friendships, or even relationships, with Norwegian men, which may have appealed to many of the *Helferinnen*. The girls may also have been aware that France and Norway bore greater similarities to Germany than Eastern Europe, in terms of amenities and facilities.¹² Despite initially not wanting to be sent abroad, Elisabeth L. was delighted with her destination of Aarhus, in Denmark. She could not believe her “outrageous luck”, because Denmark was the “coveted bacon and cream front”.¹³ The German occupation forces called Denmark “the whipped-cream front”,¹⁴ because the quality of life was presumed to be better there than in Germany.

⁹ “Unbedingt nach Südfrankreich oder eben nach Frankreich”, “Herzenwunsch”, “selig”, interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Karola M.* in *ibid.*, pp.167-168.

¹⁰ See, for example, Valerie Steele, *Paris Fashion: A Cultural History* (Oxford: Berg, 1998, reprinted 2006), pp.21-22.

¹¹ See, for example, Christopher Hutton, *Race and the Third Reich: Linguistics, Racial Anthropology and Genetics in the Dialectic of Volk* (Cambridge: Polity, 2005).

¹² See, for example, James B. Davies, ed., *Personal Wealth from a Global Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

¹³ “unverschämtes Glück”, “begehrte Speck- und Sahnefront”, report by *Nachrichtenhelferin* Elisabeth L.* in Gerda Szepansky, *>Blitzmädel< >Heldenmutter< >Kriegerwitwe<. Frauenleben im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1986), p.95.

¹⁴ Fritz Karl Michael Hillenbrand, *Underground Humour in Nazi Germany, 1933-1945* (London, New York: Routledge, 1995), p.160 and Jørgen Sevaldsen, Bo Bjørke and Claus Bjørn, eds., *Britain and Denmark: Political, Economic, and Cultural Relations in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Copenhagen:

Most girls were compelled to go wherever they were sent.¹⁵ Sometimes this resulted in disappointment, while on other occasions, the girls were pleasantly surprised. When Müller-Beeck and Hilde-Lore discovered they were being sent to Oslo there was much “jubilation and rejoicing”, as they were excited at the prospect of foreign travel, even if Oslo had not been their first choice.¹⁶ Ursula R. *, however, was bitterly disappointed when she found out that she was being sent to Berlin, and “not abroad!”. Eventually, she and her colleagues accepted this decision, which was sweetened by the number of well-known officers who went in and out of the office in Berlin, whom many of the young girls “were smitten with”.¹⁷

Despite accepting her posting to Berlin, Ursula still nursed a desperate desire to go abroad. She was able to achieve her dreams through “trickery”: Ursula asked the nurse performing a medical to lie and pretend Ursula was ill; this would result in her being sent away from Berlin to recuperate. According to Ursula, the nurse obliged although this was at great risk both to herself and Ursula, as they were both guilty of “undermining the war effort”; clearly Ursula was prepared to go to great lengths to ensure a posting she was satisfied with. At later points in her wartime career, Ursula was able to voice her preferences and take control of her destination: she seized the chance to go to Belgrade, a posting she enjoyed due to the warmer weather conditions, and she turned down the opportunity to go to Norway as she found the idea “eerie”.¹⁸

The women arrived in these foreign territories to a variety of accommodation. They were not given special consideration because they were women; rather, they were treated as those in the *Wehrmacht* would be, frequently housed in challenging conditions, and expected to accept them. The

Museum Tusulanum Press, University of Copenhagen, 2003), p.459.

¹⁵ Interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Ursula R.* in Killius, *Frauen für die Front*, p.44.

¹⁶ “Jubelnd und frohlockend”, Müller-Beeck, *Tagebuch*, p.54.

¹⁷ “nicht ins Ausland!”, “haben...geschwärmt (für)”, interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Ursula R.* in Killius, *Frauen für die Front*, p.44.

¹⁸ “List und Tücke”, “wehrrkraftzersetzung”, “unheimlich”, *ibid.*, pp.46-49, 53. The reason for her fear is not stated.

accommodation was dependent on what was available, and what could be commandeered. As a consequence, the standard of housing ranged from palaces to hotels to barns. There was no consistency, even within one country. Some women enjoyed luxury but, for many, accommodation left much to be desired. The women were, however, afforded the privacy of single-sex barracks.¹⁹

Initially, the *Helferinnen* who were sent to Paris to assist the navy stayed in hotels.²⁰ In Dijon, the German Army seized Hotel l'Europe, in the town centre, and commandeered it for all female German personnel, including *Nachrichtenhelferinnen*, nurses, *Stabshelferinnen* and civil employees. These various groups had, however, very little contact with one another.²¹ When Springer* moved to Paris, she was housed in the Paris Cité University, in a section which had individual bedrooms and "other comforts like in Paradise".²² In Bordeaux, Karola M.* and her colleagues were housed in a confiscated monastery. The girls were happy with their bedroom, although the monastery itself was fairly simple; there was only one bathroom for the whole floor.²³ The meals in the monastery were basic, often consisting of bean stew. Karola accepted that the inferior quality was a result of wartime restrictions.²⁴ Overall, she greatly enjoyed her time in Bordeaux, and cried when she had to leave.²⁵

Standards of accommodation in the Balkans and Eastern Europe were lower. In Belgrade, Ursula and her comrades were housed in the guest house of the Royal Palace; King Peter had fled on the occupation of the city. The palace itself had been destroyed by German bombers, but the guest house was intact and so the occupying forces took full advantage.²⁶ A group of six *Oberhelferinnen* arrived in

¹⁹ Author interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Hilde Kerer, April 2012, and interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Ursula R.* in Killius, *Frauen für die Front*, p.42, for example.

²⁰ Maubach, *Die Stellung halten*, p.114.

²¹ Interview and correspondence with *Stabshelferin-Dolmetscherin* Eugenie S.* in Killius, *Frauen für die Front*, p.61.

²² "Haus England", "sonstigen Bequemlichkeiten fast wie im Paradies", interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Isolde Springer* in Maubach, *Die Stellung halten*, p.220.

²³ Interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Karola M.* in Killius, *Frauen für die Front*, p.168.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.169.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Ursula R.* in *ibid.*, p.49.

their accommodation in the *Generalgouvernement* to find it rather neglected. The women took off their uniforms, donned their training suits and went straight to work, determined to make the accommodation liveable. With “enthusiasm and endless laughter”, they set about filling the straw mattresses that they would sleep in with wood wool. At the end of the evening all six women had grey hair from the dust.²⁷ For one assignment, Ursula R.* was sent to East Prussia, where she had to work alongside male soldiers. The conditions here were fairly primitive; the toilet was situated in the yard.²⁸ The life in Minsk, where Hilde Kerer was stationed as a telephone operator, was difficult. Kerer found that the facilities were scarce and that “the food was lousy”. Despite these poor conditions, Kerer felt that she had witnessed very little of the “venom of war”.²⁹

Even in Germany, where the girls might have had higher expectations due to the proximity to home, the accommodation sometimes disappointed. Life in Zossen, perhaps inevitably as it was a significant army base, was not as glamorous as Karola M.*’s previous posting in Bordeaux.³⁰ Her accommodation had bugs in the beds and there were often air raids, forcing the girls to evacuate temporarily to a shelter.³¹ Ursula R.*, and the 30 other girls with whom she was sent to Berlin, were initially put up in a hotel for half a year. Subsequently, the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* were transferred to Zehlendorf, south-west Berlin, and they were housed in wooden barracks.³²

The combination of war and a deficiency of available alternatives made temporary accommodation a necessity in certain territories. Setting off from the

²⁷ “Begeisterung und endlosem Gelächter”, Ina Seidel and Hanns Grosser, eds., *Dienende Herzen Kriegsbriefe von Nachrichtenhelferinnen des Heeres* (Berlin: Wilhelm Limpert-Verlag, 1942), p.121.

²⁸ Interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Ursula R.* in Killius, *Frauen für die Front*, p.54.

²⁹ “das Essen war miserable”, “Gehässigkeit des Krieges”, Kerer, ‘Vom Willen des Lebens getrieben’ in *Brixner* (May 2006), p.12.

³⁰ For more information on Zossen, see Hans-Georg Kampe, *The Underground Military Command Bunkers of Zossen, Germany: History of Their Construction and Use by the Wehrmacht and Soviet Army, 1937-1994* (Atglen, PA: Schiffer Publishers, 1996), Matthew Cooper, *The German Army, 1933-1945: Its Political and Military Failure* (Modesto, CA: Bonanza Books, 1978), pp.187-188, and James P.O’Donnell, *The Bunker* (Boston and New York: Da Capo Press, 2001), p.45.

³¹ Interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Karola M.* in Killius, *Frauen für die Front*, p.171.

³² Interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Ursula R.* in *ibid.*, pp.44-46.

school in Gießen, one group of *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* bound for Kristiansand in Norway was unable to complete the journey due to the unfavourable weather conditions and was forced to take temporary lodging in a sports hall and provisional barracks for soldiers, despite a flea infestation and an absence of heating facilities. After the Baltic Sea unfroze, they were able to continue with their journey, and arrived after hours of travel.³³

The women were subjected to the rigours and dangers of war, especially air raids. In a suburb of Berlin, a group of 60 *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* were crowded in barracks which were “anything but nice”.³⁴ Frequent air raids while Elisabeth L.* was in Berlin necessitated evacuations to trenches, made all the more difficult because of the amount of uniform the girls had to pack into cases and take with them. They would drag the cases to the trench and sit, shivering, “often frozen and soaked through”.³⁵ After the all clear was given, the girls had to return to their barracks, and unpack their clothes. They were expected to arrive promptly for work the next morning, and they were undernourished. Their trainer noted that they were poor radio operators, never completing their workload. This was because “in the circumstances, none of us felt like it”.³⁶ In one bomb attack, when she was stationed in France, Hilde Kerer found herself buried under debris, with burst water pipes surrounding her. She screamed for help and was taken to a hospital; she was fortunate, but her two colleagues did not survive.³⁷

Despite difficult conditions, inadequate accommodation, and bombing, the women had been sent to perform specific tasks. Some did not relish their workload; others, especially those who were tasked with confidential work, did enjoy their duties. Even though she found the classified work she was tasked with interesting, Ursula R.* said she was not especially concerned with her work as she was “young and had other things on her mind”. She particularly enjoyed going out, exploring

³³ Interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Ilse H.* in *ibid.*, pp.24-25.

³⁴ “alles andere als schön”, report by *Nachrichtenhelferin* Elisabeth L.* in Szepansky, >*Blitzmädel*<, pp.94-95.

³⁵ “oft durchfrozen und durchnässt”, *ibid.*

³⁶ “weil keine von uns unter den gegebenen Umständen Lust dazu hatte”, *ibid.*

³⁷ Kerer, “Vom Willen des Lebens getrieben” in *Brixner* (May 2006), p.12.

the city, and getting to know soldiers.³⁸ Those *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* sent to Berlin replaced men working for the OKH. 100 girls worked each shift, and there were four shifts each day. Every four days, Ursula worked the night shift. Ursula's work in Berlin involved writing about troop movements, which she found uninspiring.³⁹ Her attitude is a little surprising, given that the work was intrinsically interesting and could have shed light on the fate of her country.

In sharp contrast, Karola M.* found her work at the OKH interesting, to her great pleasure. She had been assured that it would be an honour to serve in the OKH, and was instructed to discuss her work with no-one; perhaps the sense of privilege enhanced her pleasure. She was tasked with marking maps of the front with red needles; and from this, Karola was able to monitor the progress of the war.⁴⁰

Indeed, this sense of privilege manifested itself in Ursula's subsequent role. After three months in Belgrade, she was selected to work in the *Geheimraum*, with confidential telegraphs, which she could only write down encrypted. Each day the encryption key changed. She recalled documenting a sighting of Tito in Belgrade, and the news that Randolph Churchill had landed somewhere in the vicinity.⁴¹ Ursula was proud to have been chosen for this work, and her interest was sustained far more than in her previous roles.⁴²

Enthusiasm for work and a desire to actively contribute towards the war could lead to frustration. Upon their arrival in Zagreb, a group of *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* found that the men they were due to replace were still

³⁸ "jung und hatte andere Dinge im Kopf", interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Ursula R.* in Killius, *Frauen für die Front*, p.50.

³⁹ Interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Ursula R.* in Killius, *Frauen für die Front*, pp.44-47.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.169-171.

⁴¹ In 1941, Tito was living an underground existence in Belgrade and in early 1944, Randolph Churchill had parachuted into Bosnia, where he worked with Tito, supporting his efforts as leader of the Partisans, on behalf of the British. It is likely that they were spotted by the Germans, who were on the lookout for Tito, so Ursula's recollection may indeed be correct. See, for example, Anita Leslie, *Cousin Randolph* (London: Hutchinson, 1985), pp.83, 93.

⁴² Interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Ursula R.* in Killius, *Frauen für die Front*, p.49-50.

present. As a result, there was no work available for Isolde Springer* and her fellow *Nachrichtenhelferinnen*. They were “frustrated” because they “wanted to win a victory for the Fatherland”, demonstrating a desire to put their training to use, and to serve their country. Through sheer persistence, Springer was able to find a role for herself, although outside the parameters of her training, as a secretary to the German General in Zagreb, a role she revelled in.⁴³ Springer’s determination to serve the Nazi cause contrasts sharply with the disinterest displayed by many of her peers.

Within the roles they had been trained for, both *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* and *SS-Helferinnen* were given opportunities to gain promotion and rise through their respective ranks. Promotions for the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* seconded from the German Red Cross had to be approved by the Red Cross.⁴⁴ Before promotions were awarded, certain requirements had to be fulfilled.

When her group leader in Laôn had to return to Germany, Ilse H.* was appointed her representative and was responsible for the girls for four weeks. Following the successful completion of her duties, it was suggested that she become a *Führeranwärterin* back in Gießen, for which she was required to take an “etiquette test”. This entailed attendance at a feast, where her table manners could be assessed. Her success at this test brought new responsibilities for Ilse, including the maintenance of contact with military superiors, and control of rosters for the girls. As she progressed, Ilse was given greater responsibilities, and she was put in charge of 30 girls, ensuring they were properly dressed and punctual, and that they had enough food to eat. After a further test, Ilse was promoted to the position of *Führerin*. She was sent, with 35 girls for whom she was responsible, to Kristiansand in Norway. Ilse spent a total of three years in Norway; after Kristiansand, she went

⁴³ “frustriert”, “wollten ja den Sieg mit erringen für's Vaterland”, interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Isolde Springer* in Maubach, *Die Stellung halten*, p.144.

⁴⁴ This was noted in a regional newspaper, when Ursula Herold was promoted to become a *Nachrichtenhelferinnen Führerin*; *Die Grenz-Zeitung* (Stolp) No.13, 1943; January 14, 1943, p.4 available online: <http://bibliotekacyfrowa.eu/dlibra/plain-content?id=8275>.

to Oslo, where she was promoted to *Oberführerin* with responsibility for more girls and her own office.⁴⁵

There were strict guidelines in place for promotion to *Führerin* within the *SS-Helferinnen*. These guidelines were written by Ernst Sachs, the SS Chief of Communications, with Himmler's approval. The candidate for promotion had to meet all the specified criteria in order to succeed. Throughout her period of service, she must have demonstrated a perfect attitude and proven her suitability in every position served. She needed to have successfully completed the first training course at the Reich school, worked a minimum of six months practical probation, and successfully participated in a training course for vice-leaders. Each candidate was also required to have served a minimum of six months' probation as a "warden, matron, assistant teacher or in an elevated position".⁴⁶ Finally, they had to pass the leadership exam. Exceptions to these strict criteria could be made, but only if approved by Sachs.⁴⁷

As the war progressed, Germany suffered territorial losses and large defeats, leaving many men wounded and injured, notably on the Eastern front between 1942 and 1944, and in Normandy, in France between June and August 1944.⁴⁸ Army medical services were overwhelmed with the number of casualties, and were unable to take the strain;⁴⁹ simultaneously, communications requirements shrank as German-controlled territory was reduced. It was therefore logical to transfer the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* from their roles in communications and employ them in hospitals, particularly as many of the girls had been recruited via the Red Cross, and had been trained as Red Cross nurses in the first place.⁵⁰ The

⁴⁵ "Benimmprüfung", interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Ilse H.* in Killius, *Frauen für die Front*, pp.23-25, 28-29.

⁴⁶ "Heimwartin, Heimleiterin, Hilfslehrerin oder in gehobener Sonderstellung", BArch NS 19/401.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ See, for example, Lee Baker, *The Second World War on the Eastern Front* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2009), and Max Hastings, *Overlord: D-Day and the Battle for Normandy 1944* (London: Pan Macmillan, 2012).

⁴⁹ See, for example, Omer Bartov, *Hitler's Army: Soldiers, Nazi, and War in the Third Reich* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p.31, and David Stone, *Hitler's Army: The Men, Machines, and Organization: 1939-1945* (Norwalk, CT: MBI Publishing Company, 2009), p.236.

⁵⁰ See Seidel and Grosser, *Dienende Herzen*, pp.134-135: a *Nachrichtenhelferin* details in a letter

Nachrichtenhelferinnen were entrusted with additional responsibilities: supervising the wounded, cooking for, and supplying food for patients. It was increasingly difficult for the girls to get hold of the ingredients they needed, yet the girls were determined to do their bit and some voluntarily gave up their own rations.⁵¹ After the invasion of Normandy, Isolde Springer* worked in a hospital. Her services no longer required as a *Nachrichtenhelferin*, she, and some of her colleagues, saw this as a final opportunity to serve their country.⁵²

Some women actively chose to assist medically, even when not required to. Feeling that her “free time did not just belong to her alone”, Edith Müller-Beeck visited wounded German soldiers in hospitals. She viewed it as a meaningful leisure activity. Her compassionate approach was greatly appreciated: she received a letter complimenting her and her colleagues for always making time for their wounded comrades.⁵³ Shortly after the Allies landed in Normandy, Clare Varner-Rassmann assisted during her free time when wounded soldiers from the front were brought to a local hospital and “all hands were needed”. The girls helped to comfort wounded soldiers and wash their faces. Varner-Rassmann also volunteered to help the doctors in the operating room; she administered anaesthetic to the patients.⁵⁴

While some women were happy to treat the wounded, others, particularly the younger girls, found the experience of war horrific. They encountered scenes of horror and moments of terror: men missing limbs, blood, bones, innards, and open wounds. Working in hospitals and with the wounded, injured and dying, these women were confronted with the realities of war, perhaps for the first time. Some women were not emotionally prepared for these sights, or able to cope with them. Indeed, some welcomed any opportunity to escape the war-torn circumstances they found themselves in. After a retreat by the army in March 1945, Eugenie S.* found that many *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* were desperate to return to their families

home that she and her colleagues were put to work in hospitals for wounded Germans.

⁵¹ Ibid., pp.134-135.

⁵² Interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Isolde Springer* in Maubach, *Die Stellung halten*, p.237.

⁵³ “Freizeit nicht mehr allein gehört”, Müller-Beeck, *Tagebuch*, p.120.

⁵⁴ “alle Hände gebraucht wurden”, Varner-Rassmann, “Briefe an Franzl” in Kleindienst, *Täglich*, p.180.

as quickly as possible. Many of them were very young, and had been called up shortly after their final high school exams in the last few months of the war; they simply could not bear the horrors of the war.⁵⁵

Homesickness was experienced by many *Nachrichtenhelferinnen*. One girl wrote to her parents that she greatly appreciated their letters, describing how each letter “helped to purify and overcome the homesickness”. Another girl confirmed this emotion, writing that if only those at home knew, “how much joy a few lines” would bring, then the post would have much more work to do.⁵⁶ Women also missed Germany as much as family. A *Helferin* informed her family in a letter home how much she missed her “beloved Fatherland”. The women, she wrote, “longed for the German cleanliness and order, for the tranquillity and solidarity”.⁵⁷

There were, nevertheless, significant perks to the job. *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* did not have to pay for their uniform, meals, accommodation, or their training. Those called up for duty as *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* were given a train ticket to enable them to travel to the training school for free.⁵⁸ They were given a salary, and those who were deployed abroad were granted an additional cash allowance.⁵⁹ Gretel Wachtel, whose first posting was in Hamburg, earned 69 marks per month, plus meals, and although she was not given a uniform, she was allocated one mark per day as a clothing allowance.⁶⁰ Hilde Kerer was able to save some of her salary and send a small amount back to her family.⁶¹ The women were given free travel during their

⁵⁵ Interview and correspondence with *Stabshelferin-Dolmetscherin* Eugenie S.* in Killius, *Frauen für die Front*, p.66.

⁵⁶ “hilft das Heimweh läutern und überwinden”, “wieviel Freude...ein paar Zeilen”, Seidel and Grosser, *Dienende Herzen*, pp.73, 75.

⁵⁷ “geliebtes Vaterland”, “oft sehnen...nach der deutschen Sauberkeit und Ordnung, nach der Ruhe und Gediegenheit”, *ibid.*, p.74.

⁵⁸ *Einberufung* of Trude Herget, March 16, 1943, for example, Bundesarchiv, Berlin-Lichterfelde (BArch) SF A0033.

⁵⁹ *Seelower Tageblatt*, No.97, 1943; April 27, 1943, p.4, available online: <http://tinyurl.com/7z92624>.

⁶⁰ Gretel Wachtel and Claudia Strachen, *A Different Kind of Courage. Gretel's Story* (Edinburgh and London: Mainstream Publishing, 2009), p.118.

⁶¹ Author interview, April 2012.

vacations to return home,⁶² and, when they travelled, they had their own carriages on trains: signs emphasised “compartment for female staff of the army”.⁶³ In Schulemann’s 1942 account of a *Nachrichtenhelferin*’s experiences in France, she noted that this gave *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* an opportunity to “spread out and even get some sleep” on the train.⁶⁴

SS-Helferinnen, on the other hand, had to pay for their accommodation. The *Vorläufige Einsatzordnung für SS-Helferinnen* stated that while housing outside of the *Großdeutsches Reich* was provided free of charge, those stationed in the territory of the Reich had to pay six Reichmarks a month for their accommodation, which was deducted from their pay. It specified that *SS-Helferinnen* would receive an allowance for journeys made in the course of duty, although how much they received and whether they were permitted to travel in first, second, or third class depended on their status. They would be entitled to fee reductions when using the field postal services.⁶⁵

In 1942, Ullmann was employed in the vicinity of the *Führer*’s headquarters in Vinnitsa, Ukraine, which was close to a slaughterhouse. Ullmann recalls, somewhat ashamedly, that there was a constant supply of meat for the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen*; this would not have been extended to the locals. Ullmann was even permitted to send a *Führerpaket* – a gift sent to families of those supporting the war effort, in acknowledgement of the sacrifices they and their families made, and to indicate the success of those at the front - to her family, the opulent contents of which “utterly astounded” Ullmann.⁶⁶ Through her invitations to meals with soldiers, Karola M. enjoyed oysters, and other French delicacies. The

⁶² *Die Grenz-Zeitung* (Stolp) No.34, 1943; February 4, 1943, p.6.

⁶³ “Abteil für weibliches Wehrmachtgefolge”, interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Käthe Minges* in Maubach, *Die Stellung halten*, p.233.

⁶⁴ “sich ausbreiten und auch etwas schlafen konnte”, Erika Schulemann, *Als Nachrichtenhelferin in Frankreich* (Berlin: Junge Generation Verlag, 1943), p.10.

⁶⁵ Der Reichsführer-SS, Reichsminister des Innern, [und] Der Chef des Fernmeldewesens, *Vorläufige Einsatzordnung für SS-Helferinnen* (Berlin: 1944), pp.5-6, available in the Bundesarchiv, Berlin, NS 32 II/7.

⁶⁶ “bass erstaunt”, interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Leni Ullmann* in Maubach, *Die Stellung halten*, p.179.

girls were given chocolate and cigarettes, which they were able to swap with their peers, or give as gifts. Karola sent roasted coffee and Hennessy Cognac home to her family.⁶⁷ Special occasions were also marked: one Christmas, a group of *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* were each given a small gift and a large box with nuts, apples, oranges, biscuits, chocolates and sweets. They were also visited by Santa Claus and soldiers who brought baskets filled with more fruit, chocolate, bottles and glasses. This made Christmas, as one girl wrote home, an unforgettable experience.⁶⁸

Götz Aly has argued that Hitler ensured the allegiance of ordinary Germans by buying their support; using the proceeds from mass thefts – of Jewish furniture, property and assets – to support generous social programmes.⁶⁹ German soldiers benefitted from a “fantastic wage”, which allowed them to buy luxury goods while abroad.⁷⁰ Perhaps, akin to this, the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* were rewarded with perks, such as lavish food, when others around them were starving, to ensure they remained loyal and dedicated. The women also benefitted from a rigged exchange rate,⁷¹ which the Nazis employed to exploit local amenities, pricing out the locals and ensuring that the Germans were able to afford luxuries.

Sent as *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* and *SS-Helferinnen* across Germany and occupied Europe, the women were not kept in isolation. Both groups were encouraged to interact with their male compatriots, in the hope that romantic attachments would ensue. The women formed friendships with each other, bonding over their mutual experiences. They also experienced more fractious relationships as they interacted with the local population, sometimes out of necessity, as they bought commodities from them, and travelled alongside them on public transport.

⁶⁷ Interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Karola M.* in Killius, *Frauen für die Front*, pp.167-169.

⁶⁸ Seidel and Grosser, *Dienende Herzen*, pp.90, 94-95.

⁶⁹ Götz Aly, *Hitler's Beneficiaries: Plunder, Racial War and the Welfare State*, translated by Jefferson S. Chase (New York: Metropolitan, 2007), pp.124-131.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p.94.

⁷¹ R. T. Naylor, *Economic Warfare: Sanctions, Embargo Busting, and Their Human Cost* (Boston, Massachusetts: Northeastern University Press, 2001), p.27.

The *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* were able to provide more than just assistance in the workplace for German soldiers; they could provide emotional support and companionship. When soldiers were lonely, and had no one to share their experiences with, they were able to write letters that would be routed to an unknown *Helferin*, providing the companionship of a correspondent. They would address these to the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* and the post office ensured that the letters were passed on to any *Nachrichtenhelferin*, who would then choose whether to continue the correspondence. Sometimes the soldier would ask the girl to send a photograph.⁷²

In a letter to her parents, one girl wrote that whenever a group of German soldiers saw the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* “there was great enthusiasm”. Sometimes these meetings were brief, soldiers and *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* waving at each other as their trains passed by. Other occasions enabled conversations, and the soldiers “expressed their joy” at being able to speak to a German girl once again. In the same letter, the *Nachrichtenhelferin* informed her parents that she was often “very hoarse from shouting, telling stories and laughing” after an encounter with the soldiers. The male soldiers were also able to provide comfort and support to the female auxiliaries: “there is a beautiful feeling of security. The big strong German army spreads her mantle over us. There are so many German soldiers here”. In return, the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* were able to bring some light relief to the soldiers.⁷³

A number of *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* became romantically involved with German soldiers who they met while on active service. German soldiers were away from German women for long periods of time. Soldiers on the eastern front were forbidden from taking extended leave, and were consequently unable to see their wives or girlfriends. German soldiers were forbidden to fraternise with local women

⁷² Müller-Beeck, *Tagebuch*, p.113.

⁷³ “war die Begeisterung groß”, “ihrer Freude Ausdruck”, “ganz heiser vom vielen Rufen, Erzählen und Lachen”, “kommt noch dazu das schöne Gefühl des Geborgenseins. Die große starke deutsche Wehrmacht breitet ihren Mantel über uns aus. Es gibt ja so viele deutsche Soldaten hier”, Seidel and Grosser *Dienende Herzen*, pp.32, 37, 78.

in Russia, as they were considered racially inferior. There were severe punishments for having a relationship with a woman from Poland or Russia, for example.⁷⁴ German women, who also happened to be in the vicinity of the soldiers, would therefore be perceived as risk-free and highly appealing.

The need for immediate companionship meant that liaisons were frequently brief. In Belgrade, Ursula R.* and her comrade befriended two soldiers. When they could, the girls made the soldiers cakes, drank wine with them, and they could “flirt and cuddle a bit”, but they did not have “intimate relations”.⁷⁵ In Krakow, there was such camaraderie between the male soldiers and the female auxiliaries that romantic liaisons between the two could “hardly be avoided”.⁷⁶ Some of the relationships were fleeting, as soldiers did not always return from the front-line. Clare Varner-Rassmann met her boyfriend, an “Unterroffizier” [a rank equivalent to a corporal in the British Army], in France, where she was stationed, but he did not survive the war.⁷⁷ Hilde Kerer also began a relationship with a German soldier, but he died before the end of the war.⁷⁸ Other relationships were long-lasting. When Ruth A. visited a famous Parisian restaurant, she met the German soldier who would become her husband.⁷⁹ Pauline Ihle* was sent to work in Amsterdam and Rotterdam, where she met her future husband. They married in 1943 and Ihle was dismissed in June when she became pregnant; their son was born in 1944.⁸⁰ The women represented an oasis of calm, an alternative world which the men could escape to, to forget the troubles of war. In such brutal surroundings, it is not surprising that so many men and women began relationships with one another.

The relationship between German soldiers and the women sent to replace

⁷⁴ Birgit Beck, “The Military Trials of Sexual Crimes Committed by Soldiers in the Wehrmacht, 1939-1944” in Karen Hagemann and Stefanie Schüler-Springorum, eds., *Home/Front The Military, War and Gender in Twentieth-Century Germany* (Oxford: Berg, 2002), p.265.

⁷⁵ “flirten und ein bisschen schmusen”, “intime Beziehungen”, interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Ursula R.* in Killius, *Frauen für die Front*, p.50.

⁷⁶ “ließ sich kaum vermeiden”, interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Elfie R.* in *ibid.*, p.142.

⁷⁷ Varner-Rassmann, “Briefe an Franzl” in *Kleindienst, Täglich Krieg*, pp.180-182.

⁷⁸ Author interview, April 2012.

⁷⁹ Interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Ruth A.* in Killius, *Frauen für die Front*, pp.164-165.

⁸⁰ Interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Pauline Ihle* in Maubach, *Die Stellung halten*, p.321.

them was not, however, universally positive. Some men in these rear-area jobs resented being replaced by women, particularly as it resulted in them being redeployed closer to danger. Working in Oslo alongside soldiers who were at first mistrustful of them, one *Nachrichtenhelferin* noted in a letter home that she hoped she had been able to convince them of her trustworthiness.⁸¹ Often, the women had to prove themselves to the men they worked alongside. Writing home, one *Helferin* was “saddened” that some soldiers were misinformed or not informed at all of the purpose of the *Helferinnen*. The soldiers perceived the women to be “adventure seekers, light-footed and good-for-nothings”, who were of no further use in Germany. The *Nachrichtenhelferin* countered this, by reminding her family that the majority of girls were motivated by “true idealism”, and claiming that many of them, herself included, had left jobs in Germany, where they had been earning several times their current salary.⁸²

During their free time, *SS-Helferinnen* often interacted with SS men, as Himmler intended. The *SS-Helferinnen* working at Auschwitz concentration camp went on holidays to Solahütte, a nearby retreat, with a group of male SS leaders, where they enjoyed listening to music and eating blueberries.⁸³ One telegraph operator at Auschwitz, Hermine Schachtner, mingled occasionally with SS men either while working or during “evenings of organized entertainment”,⁸⁴ which could be theatrical performances, or film screenings.⁸⁵ SS personnel, including *SS-Helferinnen*, had the opportunity to participate in sports courses; there was a football stadium, a swimming pool and a sauna in the SS settlement.⁸⁶ The men

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p.98.

⁸² “betrübt”, “abenteuerlüsterne Leichtfüße und Nichtsnutze”, “wahren Idealismus”, Seidel and Grosser, *Dienende Herzen*, pp.76-77.

⁸³ Photograph album, belonging to Karl Höcker, the adjutant to the commandant of Auschwitz concentration camp, now held at the United States Holocaust Memorial and Museum. It can be viewed online: <http://www.ushmm.org/museum/exhibit/online/ssalbum/>.

⁸⁴ “Bunten Abend”, Fritz Bauer Institut (FBI), Frankfurt am Main, Pre-trial files of the First Frankfurt Trial, The Public Prosecutor’s Office at the District Court of Frankfurt am Main, 4 Js 444/59, Hermine Glücksman (Schachtner), Bd. 48, 8633-34.

⁸⁵ StB 17.71944 in Norbert Frei, Thomas Grotum, Jan Parcer, Sybille Steinbacher, Bernd C. Wagner, eds., *Standort- und Kommandanturbefehle des Konzentrationslagers Auschwitz 1940-1945* (Munich: Institute für Zeitgeschichte, 2000), pp.473-474.

⁸⁶ Gudrun Schwarz, “Frauen in Konzentrationslagern – Täterinnen und Zuschauerinnen” in Ulrich Herbert, Karin Orth, Christoph Dieckmann, eds., *Die nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager*.

treated the *SS-Helferinnen* “politely”.⁸⁷ Charlotte Schünzel, a fellow telegraph operator, chatted regularly with SS men who visited her office. She also met her husband, who had been sent to the concentration camp on a special commission to investigate theft, at Auschwitz: clearly, Himmler’s plan that *SS-Helferinnen* would interact with and marry SS men was working.⁸⁸

The *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* generally enjoyed good relationships with one another. In Krakow, the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* had a “very nice camaraderie”.⁸⁹ The “wonderful camaraderie” which existed among the girls in Bordeaux made it easy to repress any “uneasy thoughts about the war”.⁹⁰ One *Nachrichtenhelferin* based in Norway wrote in a letter home that they had to have a good relationship with one another, because in the occupied territory they were all very much co-dependent. Some found it difficult to be separated from their comrades. When they were sent to different locations, “there are always tears”.⁹¹ Watching a train take their colleagues onto their next mission, tears were shed and “handkerchiefs waved and crumpled”, until the train was out of sight. Müller-Beeck believed that it was the interdependence and shared impressions that had bound the girls to one another.⁹²

Nevertheless, not all *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* were like-minded, particularly in respect of their commitment to Nazism, occasionally leading to strained relations between colleagues. Frustrated that she remained in Berlin, Ursula R.* harboured a desire to be sent elsewhere. Her comrades resented her for wanting to leave; they did not have the same “voracious appetite” to go abroad as she did. Neither were they, in Ursula’s opinion, “fanatical for Hitler and the Fatherland”, rather they were concerned with “just doing our job”. Ursula was sceptical of her colleagues,

Entwicklung und Struktur (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch, 2002) Bd. 2, p.801.

⁸⁷ “höflich”, FBI, 4 Js 444/59, Bartsch (Schünzel), 12346-12353.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ “sehr nette Kameradschaft”, interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Elfie R.* in Killius, *Frauen für die Front*, p.142.

⁹⁰ “wunderbare Kameradschaft”, “unangenehmen Gedanken über Krieg”, interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Karola M.* in *ibid.*, p.168.

⁹¹ “es gibt immer Tränen”, Seidel and Grosser *Dienende Herzen*, pp.98-99.

⁹² “Taschentücher zerdrückten und winkte”, Müller-Beeck, *Tagebuch*, p.95.

suspecting that rather they were “excited” by the prospect of signing up. Although this was not a topic they discussed amongst themselves, Ursula was disappointed that they were not all like-minded, motivated by fanaticism for the cause.⁹³ Ilse H.* was also disheartened with the ideological attitudes of her peers. When she was transferred to Italy as *Hauptführerin* with responsibility for the *Stabsführerinnen*⁹⁴ in Verona and the surrounding area, in February 1945, Ilse H.* discovered that the women were not all convinced National Socialists. Rather, they were Germans, not necessarily Nazis, who wanted to do their bit for Germany, and were pleased when they succeeded.⁹⁵ At this late stage in the war, it is unsurprising that these women were not ardent supporters of National Socialism; rather it is remarkable that Ilse was still a “believer”. Most women did not sign up to the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* because they were fanatical for Hitler, or because they were staunch supporters of the Nazis. Rather, they took advantage of the opportunities that becoming a *Nachrichtenhelferin* would offer. Those women who were ardent Nazis may have been disappointed to discover that their peers did not feel the same way, and this prevented them from forming friendships.

Nevertheless, friendships between *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* were common. They were together through thick and thin, and they came to rely on one another for both companionship and support. Their friendships would help them through the nadirs of homesickness, air raids, evacuations and long marches, which they had to contend with. The women saw first-hand the horrors of war. Their prolonged friendship is testament to the comradeship which formed during their service.

Relations with the German population, on the other hand, could be fractious. Their poor reputation as “Offiziersmatratzen” [officer’s mattresses] adversely impacted their reception. Consequently, *Nachrichtenhelferin* Ullmann*, who took pride in her position, was embarrassed to walk through her hometown in

⁹³ “Heißhunger”, “fanatisch für Führer und Vaterland”, “halt unseren Job machen”, “begeistert”, interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Ursula R.* in Killius, *Frauen für die Front*, pp.42, 46.

⁹⁴ These were the leaders of the *Stabshelferinnen*, women tasked with general office work and administration.

⁹⁵ Interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Ilse H.* in Killius, *Frauen für die Front*, p.32.

her uniform; she was unable to anticipate the local population's reaction to her appearance so did not want to take any chances.⁹⁶ Whilst there were some who held the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* in high esteem - the renowned radar expert, Major Alexander Dahl, noted that the girls received little thanks, yet they "did their duty with a dedication seldom seen in the best soldiers"⁹⁷ - such views were not widely held.

Inevitably, given their status as the occupying force, the everyday relations of the German soldiers with the local populations of occupied territories could be fraught with tension. The level of contact varied, often depending on the German attitude to the occupied country. In Ukraine, where relations were "strained from the start", interaction with the local population was treated as a crime, punishable by death.⁹⁸ In other countries, contact was a necessity to ensure the smooth running of the newly occupied territory. Civil servants, for example, who remained in their jobs, were often forced to assist the occupiers in their administration.⁹⁹ In Northern France, the local population was so "nervous, volatile and easily excited" by the arrival of the Germans that they took to pillaging their compatriots' shops and farms, anxious that the Germans would cut off their food supply.¹⁰⁰ However, once the German administration became established, the local French population "worked within the new system...to better their lot, rather than trying to overthrow it".¹⁰¹ The French population, relieved that German brutality in France was restrained compared to the Germans' earlier actions in Poland, found common ground with the Germans, as both groups suffered from food and fuel shortages.¹⁰²

⁹⁶ Interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Leni Ullmann* in Maubach, *Die Stellung halten*, p.93.

⁹⁷ "taten ihre Pflicht mit einer Hingabe, die man auch bei den besten Soldaten kaum findet", Werner Niehaus, *Die Nachrichtentruppe 1914 bis heute, Entstehung und Einsatz* (Stuttgart: Motorbuch Verlag, 1980), p.287.

⁹⁸ Wendy Lower, *Nazi Empire-Building and the Holocaust in Ukraine* (North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press Chapel Hill, in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2005), p.110.

⁹⁹ Rab Bennett, *Under the Shadow of the Swastika. The Moral Dilemmas of Resistance and Collaboration in Hitler's Europe* (Hampshire and London: Macmillan Press LTD,1999), pp.47-48.

¹⁰⁰ Lynne Taylor, *Between Resistance and Collaboration. Popular Protest in Northern France, 1940-1945* (Hampshire and London: Macmillan Press LTD, 2000), p.15.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p.144.

¹⁰² Richard Vinen, *The Unfree French. Life Under the Occupation* (London: Allen Lane, 2006), pp.23, 111.

The availability of food often impacted on the relationship between the occupiers and the occupied. In Czechoslovakia, for example, the Czechs did not initially cause much commotion to being occupied as they were “almost as well fed as the Germans”.¹⁰³ The reception received by each *Helperin*, therefore, depended significantly on the location of her posting.

The local French population generally showed minimal hostility towards the girls. One *Nachrichtenhelferin* sent to Paris described the Parisians as “generally polite and friendly”, although she doubted their sincerity. Another *Nachrichtenhelferin*, Ruth A., found that the local population in Paris respected the “girls in uniform”.¹⁰⁴ A female leader and 30 *Nachrichtenhelferinnen*, including Ilse H.*, were despatched to Laôn, in France. When they arrived their accommodation was not quite ready for them and so they resided with local families, an experience Ilse found, “actually quite nice”.¹⁰⁵ Although she believed that two *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* were killed in Lyon,¹⁰⁶ Ilse maintained that the girls had a good relationship with the French. In Bordeaux, Karola M.* did not experience any unfriendliness towards her personally, and on her frequent visits to the market, she would “chat with the nice market women”. However, when the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* attempted to board the tram in Bordeaux, they were often pushed back by the locals. The French police would calm the locals, and admit the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* onto the tram, because, according to Karola, they were the “occupying power”.¹⁰⁷

The *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* found the local population in Norway welcoming. When Ilse H.* was transferred to Kristiansand, in Norway, she found the

¹⁰³ Werner Rings, *Life with the Enemy. Collaboration and Resistance in Hitler's Europe 1939-1945*, translated by J. Maxwell Brownjohn (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1982), p.66.

¹⁰⁴ “meist höflich und freundlich”, “die Mädchen in Uniform”, Seidel and Grosser *Dienende Herzen*, p.75.

¹⁰⁵ “eigentlich sehr nett”, interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Ilse H.* in *ibid.*, pp.22-3.

¹⁰⁶ While this is uncorroborated, *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* were pushed in front of the metro and killed in Paris in 1940. Ludger Tewes, *Frankreich in der Besatzungszeit 1940-1943: die Sicht deutscher Augenzeugen* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1998), p.216.

¹⁰⁷ “mit den netten Marktfrauen unterhalten”, “Besatzungsmacht”, interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Karola M.* in Killius, *Frauen für die Front*, pp.168, 173.

Norwegians were friendly to the girls, although cautious,¹⁰⁸ and one girl appreciated Oslo for its “life and bustle, through its people and their living habits”.¹⁰⁹ According to one *Nachrichtenhelferin*, the Osloites were characterized by their kindness towards their Germans.¹¹⁰

Thanks to the brutality of the conquest and occupation of Poland, Germans encountered little else but hostility or sullen acquiescence,¹¹¹ and this was reflected in the manner the locals treated the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen*. The Polish population were, according to Elisabeth L.*, “understandably hostile” to the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen*.¹¹² For their own safety, the girls only left the barracks in groups of four, and they would tease each other saying, “don't come back with a knife and fork in your back!”.¹¹³ Elfie R.*'s perception of the local population as “neutral” rather than hostile is an exception, indicative of her professed lack of direct contact with the local population, rather than of a wider trend amongst her colleagues.¹¹⁴

Resistance movements developed in each of the occupied countries. Mark Mazower observed that

“with the exception of the Eastern Front, where extensive partisan activity really did worry the Germans, there were few places or moments in the occupation of Europe when the Germans were seriously troubled for very long”.

Even then, the “draconian response” adopted by the Germans generally “proved sufficient to quell opposition”.¹¹⁵ Nevertheless, the remorseless German reprisals

¹⁰⁸ Interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Ilse H.* in *ibid.*, p.26.

¹⁰⁹ “Leben und Treiben, durch seine Menschen und ihre Lebensgewohnheiten”, *ibid.*

¹¹⁰ Seidel and Grosser *Dienende Herzen*, p.99.

¹¹¹ See, for example, Catherine Epstein, *Model Nazi: Arthur Greiser and the Occupation of Western Poland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), and Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, *Between Nazis and Soviets: Occupation Politics in Poland, 1939-1947* (Lanham; Oxford: Lexington Books, 2004).

¹¹² “verständlicherweise feindselig”, report by *Nachrichtenhelferin* Elisabeth L.* in Szepansky, *>Blitzmädel<*, pp.93-94.

¹¹³ “Kommt aber nicht mit Messer und Gabel im Rücken zurück!”, *ibid.*

¹¹⁴ “neutral”, interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Elfie R.* in Killius, *Frauen für die Front*, p.142.

¹¹⁵ Mark Mazower, *Hitler's Empire. Nazi Rule in Occupied Europe* (London: Allen Lane, 2008), p.516

spurred on the alienation of the locals and encouraged further resistance.¹¹⁶ As a result, German women had to be protected. Their contact with locals was restricted and their accommodation was guarded. Were the women aware of the cycle of resistance and reprisal?

Although Hilde Kerer admitted a fear of partisans, when she was stationed in Minsk the partisans were not considered to pose a significant threat to the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen*, because Minsk was a military town, heavily guarded and well-garrisoned. With the proliferation of German military in the surrounding area, Kerer and her colleagues felt protected from the partisans, and they were even allowed to walk freely around Minsk during their free time. Kerer and her fellow *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* bought produce from local farmers' wives, and Kerer perceived that there was an air of friendliness between the two groups.¹¹⁷

In Zagreb, Isolde Springer* heard "every now and then" that partisans attacked German soldiers, and cut off their tongues.¹¹⁸ Springer believed that those partisans who were caught were punished. Despite this, Springer and her colleagues "lived there, by and large, in a peaceful society",¹¹⁹ seemingly unperturbed by the atrocities committed both by, and towards, their own comrades.

Due to the threat of the partisans, in Belgrade the *Helferinnen* were only allowed to go out in pairs.¹²⁰ Ursula R.* claimed to hold no fear of guerrillas, even

¹¹⁶ See, for example, Marko Attila Hoare, *Genocide and Resistance in Hitler's Bosnia: the Partisans and the Chetniks, 1941-1943* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, published for the British Academy), Kenneth Macksey, *The Partisans of Europe in the Second World War* (New York: Stein and Day, 1975), Nechama Tec, *Defiance: The Bielski Partisans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), and O.A. Zarubinsky, "Partisan Warfare: The 'Red' Partisan Movement in Ukraine During the Second World War: A Contemporary Assessment", in *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, Vol. 9, no. 2 (1996).

¹¹⁷ Author interview, April 2012.

¹¹⁸ "hin und wieder", interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Isolde Springer* in Maubach, *Die Stellung halten*, p.158.

¹¹⁹ "lebten dort im Großen und Ganzen in ner friedlichen Gesellschaft", *ibid.*

¹²⁰ Interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Ursula R.* in Killius, *Frauen für die Front*, p.50.

though she heard that a *Stabshelferin* had been shot by them.¹²¹ The local population in Belgrade gave her no reason to fear them. She claimed that the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* were always polite to them, even learning a few Serbian words to ease communications.¹²²

While there was resistance to the German occupation of France,¹²³ the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* were not a specific target. Despite this, strict rules were enforced dictating that the *Helferinnen* could only go out in pairs, to ensure their safety. The *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* themselves found the regulations “annoying and unnecessary”, although they appreciated that “occupied territory is still very hostile”.¹²⁴ There were exceptions granted; Ruth A.*, for example, was permitted to go out alone, as she had expressed great interest in the monuments and culture.¹²⁵

The extent of interaction between *Helferinnen* and Jews also depended on their role and location. The women would have been aware that the Jews were considered the enemy, and they would have had some knowledge that they were being persecuted: depending on age, they might have studied *Rassenkunde* at school, or they might have read *Der Giftpilz [The Poisonous Mushroom]*, a children’s book which dehumanized Jews.¹²⁶ They would have participated in the boycott of Jewish shops, on April 1, 1933¹²⁷, and they might have witnessed *Kristallnacht*, on the night of November 9, 1938, when synagogues were burnt down, and 30,000 Jewish men were arrested.¹²⁸ Accordingly, it might be expected that the women would not be surprised to witness or hear of persecution of Jews in ghettos or

¹²¹ Ibid., p.52.

¹²² Interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Ursula R.* in *ibid.*, p.51.

¹²³ See, for example, Terry Crowdy, *French Resistance Fighter: France’s Secret Army* (Osprey Publishing, 2007), Matthew Cobb, *The Resistance: The French fight against Nazis* (Simon and Schuster, 2009), Robert Green, *Vive la France: The French Resistance During World War II* (London: F. Watts, 1995).

¹²⁴ “lästig und überflüssig”, “Besetztes Gebiet ist eben trotzdem noch Feindesland”, Seidel and Grosser *Dienende Herzen*, p.75.

¹²⁵ Interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Ruth A.* in Killius, *Frauen für die Front*, pp.163-165.

¹²⁶ See Lisa Pine, *Education in Nazi Germany* (Oxford: Berg, 2010), notably chapter 3, “The Curriculum and School Textbooks”.

¹²⁷ See, for example, Leni Yahil, *The Holocaust: The Fate of European Jewry, 193-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p.60.

¹²⁸ See, for example, Martin Gilbert, *Kristallnacht: Prelude to Destruction* (London: HarperPress, 2006), and Alan E. Steinweis, *Kristallnacht 1938* (London; Massachusetts: Belknap, 2009).

concentration camps. Yet most appear remarkably naive, despite manifest evidence of the mistreatment of the Jews.

In Berlin, when Ursula R.*, dressed in her uniform, walked passed a lady wearing a Jewish star, the lady pressed herself against the wall, “out of sheer fear”. This incident haunted Ursula for a long time, and she later claimed she wished she had told the woman that she had nothing to fear from her. This was, she said, her only encounter with any Jew.¹²⁹ Leni Ullmann, deployed to Poland, recalled seeing people walking through the city with the Jewish star affixed. Although she claimed to have no idea how inhumanely they were being treated, she admitted that she “probably” knew that they were going to die.¹³⁰ The *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* in Krakow were warned to avoid the ghetto. They were forbidden from taking the tram which passed through the ghetto. Despite serving for three years in Krakow, all Elfie R.* claimed to know about the ghetto was that the Jews were kept in isolation there.¹³¹

In Minsk, *Nachrichtenhelferin* Hilde Kerer and her colleagues were served by a Jewess in the kitchen. Even from a young age, Kerer was aware that “the Jews were held responsible for everything” and by the time she came to Minsk, she had already heard rumours regarding concentration camps and the fate of the Jews. Nevertheless, Kerer did not harbour concerns for the Jew in the kitchen; she claimed that she and her fellow *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* treated the girl respectfully and she assumed the girl would be safe as she held this position. Although Kerer was not aware whether the girl survived or not, she dwelled upon her fate, because the girl had been kind.¹³²

Ilse H.*, who was stationed in France and Norway, asserted that it was not until “much later” that they discovered the fate of the Jews, although she claimed it

¹²⁹ “aus lauter Angst”, interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Ursula R.* in Killius, *Frauen für die Front*, pp.45-46.

¹³⁰ “wahrscheinlich”, interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Leni Ullmann* in Maubach, *Die Stellung halten*, p.142.

¹³¹ Interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Elfie R.* in Killius, *Frauen für die Front*, p.149.

¹³² “hat man immer die Juden alles verantwortlich gemacht”, author interview, April 2012.

would “have been obvious” to her and her comrades that there were no Jewesses in the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen*, because they were “already all gone”.¹³³ This seemingly curious comment may betray the possibility that there could be *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* with Jewish heritage – the example of a Mischlinge given the option of becoming a *Nachrichtenhelferin* is discussed in the previous chapter – but the likelihood that Ilse made such a sophisticated connection is unlikely given her general lack of awareness. Ilse did not appear to question where it was that the Jews had gone, or who had taken them there: she and her fellow *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* lived in the present, and their motto was “look forwards, not backwards”. In her opinion the Jews were not very popular, although she does not recall this being admitted in public. Consequently, Ilse claimed, many people were not troubled by the fact that the Jews were taken away and did not return. While staying with her sister in Berlin, Ilse discovered “that the Jews were in danger, everyone knew, of course”, but their knowledge of the danger was limited to that the Jews were taken east “to work in camps”.¹³⁴

Based in the *Generalgouvernement*, a *Nachrichtenhelferin* noted in a letter home that around half of the local population were Jews, and they were “grouped together in a ghetto”. That did not prevent her from seeing plenty of the “chosen people” wearing white armbands and “decorated with the star of Zion”. However, she claimed, it was not always easy to identify them, as the white armband often appeared as a blackish rope: “she could not believe how many Jews were ragged and dirty”. The *Nachrichtenhelferin* reiterated the typical Nazi perception that Jews had been wealthy. Yet here in the *Generalgouvernement* she had seen men and women dressed in so many rags that she “could only wonder in amazement” at how the individual rags stayed on the body and also still represented one unified whole body.¹³⁵

¹³³ “viel später”, “auffallen müssen”, “schon alle weg”, interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Ilse H.* in Killius, *Frauen für die Front*, p.32.

¹³⁴ “Nach vorne schauen, nicht rückwärts leben”, “dass juden gefährdet waren, das wusste man natürlich”, “zum Arbeitseinsatz. In Lager”, *ibid.*

¹³⁵ “in einem Ghetto zusammengefaßt”, “auserwählten Volk”, “mit...dem Zionstern geschmückt”, “Du glaubst garnicht, wie zerlumpt un schmutzig viele Juden sind”, “nur staunend fragen konnte”, Seidel and Grosser, *Dienende Herzen*, p.124.

Thanks to their indoctrination before and during their service as *SS-Helferinnen*, these women were preconditioned to think of Jews in Nazi terms, to see them through the lens of racial anti-Semitism. These women were then deployed to locations which would confirm their prior knowledge: the *SS-Helferinnen* were sent to SS offices and, more significantly, concentration camps, in Germany, Austria and Poland, where they would come into close contact with Jews, and would witness them being persecuted.

Prisoners from Natzweiler-Struthof concentration camp, which was officially opened in May 1941, participated in the building of the nearby *Reichschule-SS* where the *SS-Helferinnen* were trained. Once the initial building work was finished, the prisoners continued to maintain the premises. Most *SS-Helferinnen* would therefore have come into contact with these prisoners; some *SS-Helferinnen* even witnessed the prisoners being beaten.¹³⁶

The first *SS-Helferinnen*, two phone operators and two telegraph operators, arrived in Auschwitz on August 6, 1943. They were joined on November 24, 1943 by three phone operators and two telegraph operators. More phone operators arrived throughout 1944; they had a high turnover rate, remaining in Auschwitz for less than five months on average.¹³⁷ The first female radio operator arrived in March 1944.¹³⁸ Sarah Cushman estimates that no more than 50 *SS-Helferinnen* were used in concentration camps. However, Jutta Mühlenberg believes this figure was 190 women. Given that at any one time, up to 20 of these women worked as communication auxiliaries at Birkenau, and 27 women spent time working at Auschwitz between 1943 and 1945,¹³⁹ and women worked in other concentration camps, Mühlenberg is likely to be closer to the mark.

¹³⁶ Mühlenberg, *Das SS-Helferinnenkorps*, p.189.

¹³⁷ National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), National Archives College Park (NACP), RG 242, Foreign Records Seized Collections, Microfilm Publication AA-3343, Berlin Document Centre Microfilm, Series SF, SS Women Personnel Files.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ Sarah Cushman, *The Women of Birkenau* (unpublished PhD Thesis: Clark University, Worcester, 2010), p.236.

The telegraph operators in Auschwitz transmitted messages detailing the disposition of work commandos of prisoners, death registers of the *Gestapo* and the number of people who had received “*Sonderbehandlung*” [special treatment]. When asked years later, as part of an investigation for a trial, what was meant by “*Sonderbehandlung*”, one telegraph operator, Hermine Schachtner, knew that it signified that prisoners were gassed in Birkenau. She claimed that she had never been to Birkenau but that the smell of burning bodies blew over to Auschwitz and it was frequently discussed.¹⁴⁰ Even those that did not directly witness persecution or murder would be aware that it was occurring. Sarah Cushman suggests that Schachtner became an *Aufseherin*, taking responsibility for guarding women during a death march.¹⁴¹ Certainly, there was an acceptance that *Helferinnen* would be put to work wherever they were “needed the most”.¹⁴² There was an implicit presumption that their dedication to the Nazi cause would ensure that they would be unquestioningly prepared to undertake any task which awaited them.

An undated declaration signed by the *SS-Helferin* Ruth A.* included an acknowledgement that she would be punished with death if she stole any Jewish property, in reference to the luggage which arrived at Auschwitz. This is a clear indication that a portion of the *SS-Helferinnen* were aware of some of the stages of persecution: the exploitation of the Jews and the material benefits to be gained.¹⁴³ She signed the declaration to confirm that “during the implementation of the evacuation of the Jews she had to maintain absolute secrecy, even with her comrades”.¹⁴⁴ Some *SS-Helferinnen* had to sign a “declaration on dealing with prisoners”,¹⁴⁵ which stated that private conversations with prisoners were strictly

¹⁴⁰ FBI, 4 Js 444/59, Glücksman (Schachtner), 8634. See also FBI, 4 Js 444/59, Bartsch (Schünzel), 12348; Ilse Sühling (Trautwetter), Bd. 68, 12498.

¹⁴¹ Cushman, *The Women of Birkenau*, p.238.

¹⁴² “am nötigsten gebraucht wird”, Gesamtbericht: Mutschler, Reichsschule-SS, July 15, 1944, BArch NS 19/3334.

¹⁴³ Mühlenberg, *Das SS-Helferinnenkorps*, p.327.

¹⁴⁴ “über alle während der Judenevakuierung durchzuführenden Maßnahmen habe ich unbedingte Verschwiegenheit zu bewahren, auch gegenüber meinen Kameraden”, declaration of *SS-Helferin* Ruth A., PA Ruth A., NARA, A 3343-SF-A0002-1474-1554.

¹⁴⁵ “Erklärung über Umgang mit Häftlingen”, declaration on dealing with prisoners, Helma K., April 26, 1944, BArch, NS 4 Na 32.

forbidden, gifts or other items could not be accepted from, bought from or sold to, the prisoners, and that passing on letters to or from prisoners was considered high treason.¹⁴⁶ The need for this direct prohibition of interaction implies that *SS-Helferinnen* could potentially come into contact with prisoners. It also highlights a chief concern of the SS, the problem of corruption¹⁴⁷. Just as Himmler expected his SS men to act in a manner befitting the moral standard he set for them, and he decreed that they should be above reproach,¹⁴⁸ so too were there high expectations placed on *SS-Helferinnen*, who might, after all, become the wives of SS men.

Many of the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* were determined to enjoy the opportunities presented to them, taking full advantage of their free time to explore the vicinity. The oath of confidentiality the women were required to make did not extend to their free time, as one *Nachrichtenhelferin* wrote to her father, who had asked her whether she was at liberty to reveal how she spent her spare moments. She informed him that they used their time well, and they had seen lots of Paris, including the Eiffel Tower. Another girl wrote home detailing the *Nachrichtenhelferin* plan for recreation. This included but was not limited to gymnastics, swimming, French lessons, cleaning and mending hours, first aid, and book reviews. They were so occupied that “boredom was a foreign word”.¹⁴⁹ Some found the service quite strenuous, and on occasion sought a nap during free time, which was not always granted. Darning socks and washing uniform also had to be undertaken in the allocated free time.¹⁵⁰

The women were allowed to explore Paris, and were able to stroll through the streets, admiring the cultural treasures and monuments.¹⁵¹ They were given theatre tickets, opera tickets and taken on trips to sites of interest, such as

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ See, for example, Richard Grunberger, *The 12-year Reich: a Social History of Nazi Germany, 1933-1945* (Austin, Texas: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1979), pp.90ff.

¹⁴⁸ Richard L. Rubenstein and John K. Roth, *Approaches to Auschwitz: The Holocaust and its Legacy* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 2003), p.414 fn 56.

¹⁴⁹ “Langeweile ein Fremdwort ist”, Seidel and Grosser, *Dienende Herzen*, pp.56, 74.

¹⁵⁰ Schulemann, *Als Nachrichtenhelferin*, p.16.

¹⁵¹ Interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Leni Ullmann in Maubach, *Die Stellung halten*, p.121.

Versailles.¹⁵² During her free time in Berlin, Ursula R.* went shopping; the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* had discount cards and they “took advantage of that”.¹⁵³ In Bordeaux, the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* enjoyed cinema and opera visits, and organised dance evenings and theatre productions. They went on excursions along the coast and had meals with soldiers.¹⁵⁴ Some *Helferinnen* voluntarily used their free time to assist where needed. *SS-Helferin* Rosl Bader arrived in Paris as a radio operator and helped the radio station and her boss, when there was extra work to be done. She also assisted as a telex operator in her free time.¹⁵⁵

In most locations, the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* were given a curfew at night time. In Krakow, the curfew was 10pm, which was strictly enforced.¹⁵⁶ In Kristiansand, the girls also had a curfew at 10pm, although if Ilse, the leader, attended an event with the girls, the curfew was extended to midnight.¹⁵⁷ While in the cinema in an unspecified location abroad, a group of *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* were eagerly awaiting the happy ending of the film they were watching, when they heard “a strange, yet familiar, sound”.¹⁵⁸ They looked around and saw someone holding up their arm, the luminescent watch showing that it was 9.45pm. All at once, girls from every row rose and hastily left the cinema; they had to be back by 10pm.¹⁵⁹

The *SS-Helferinnen* were also restricted by a curfew. Unless there was an earlier local curfew, the girls were required to be back in their accommodation at 10pm sharp. Extensions could be requested in writing, but extensions beyond midnight would only be granted in exceptional circumstances. Those *SS-Helferinnen* who lived with their parents or husbands while on duty were not bound by the regulations.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵² Interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Ruth A.* in Killius, *Frauen für die Front*, p.163.

¹⁵³ “haben das ausgenutzt”, interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Ursula R.* in *ibid.*, p.44.

¹⁵⁴ Interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Karola M.* in *ibid.*, p.168.

¹⁵⁵ Report written by *SS-Helferin*, Rosl Bader, October 3, 1944, BArch SF A0002.

¹⁵⁶ Interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Elfie R.* in Killius, *Frauen für die Front*, p.142.

¹⁵⁷ Interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Ilse H.* in *ibid.*, p.26.

¹⁵⁸ “ein eigenartig bekanntes Geräusch”, Seidel and Grosser, *Dienende Herzen*, p.88.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ *Der Reichsführer-SS, Vorläufige Einsatzordnung.*

The *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* enjoyed a high standard of welfare, especially given the wartime context. While in Berlin, Ursula R.*, who was naturally thin, pretended to be ill and was sent to Zakopane, to a convalescence home, to be fattened up; clearly the health of *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* was important and they were taken care of. While in Belgrade in summer 1944, Ursula was sent to “recuperate”, in the Banat region.¹⁶¹ The *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* in the *Generalgouvernement* who became ill or undernourished were sent to a guesthouse in Zakopane to recover. The girls there had a “wonderful time”, enjoying the beauty of the surroundings.¹⁶² Having been cleansed of the local Poles,¹⁶³ the Germans moved in to Zakopane: the area was “crawling with Nazis”.¹⁶⁴ A *Sicherheitspolizei-Sicherheitsdienst* academy had also been based in Zakopane, although this was relocated in July 1940,¹⁶⁵ and in addition to the convalescence home the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* were sent to, there was a German home in Zakopane for wounded SS personnel.¹⁶⁶ Zakopane, a health and sports resort, was a hub of Nazi activity.

The experience of the typical *Helferin* was therefore a combination of work and pleasure amidst the dangers of war. Most *Helferinnen* did not question the work they were tasked for, and completed it diligently. There was, however, one extreme exception: Gretel Wachtel, who used her position as a *Nachrichtenhelferin* to align herself with the resistance. Having witnessed her best friend, Lydia, suffer persecution at the hands of the Nazis, culminating in the murder of Lydia’s parents, Gretel Wachtel was determined to “undertake something against the regime, however small, at the first opportunity”. As an anti-Nazi, she was consequently distraught when she was conscripted to the *Wehrmacht*, “the lion’s den”, in April 1943. Earlier in the war, she had been actively selling items on the black market,

¹⁶¹ “Erholung”, interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Ursula R.* in Killius, *Frauen für die Front*, p.52.

¹⁶² “herrliche Zeit”, Seidel and Grosser, *Dienende Herzen*, p.126.

¹⁶³ Ruth Altbeker Cyprus, Elaine Potter, ed., *A Jump For Life* (London: Continuum, 1997), p. 218.

¹⁶⁴ Ron Balson, *Once We Were Brothers* (Chicago: Berwick Court Publishing Co., 2010), p.136.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p.142.

¹⁶⁶ Joseph Poprzeczny, *Odilo Globocnik, Hitler’s Man in the East* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 2004), p.296.

and even assisted her husband in tearing down Nazi propaganda posters. One of her friends warned her to hold her tongue in her new position as a *Nachrichtenhelferin* in Hamburg. Her mischievous nature caught the attention of an officer who suggested that they were “on the same side”. After she complained that her current work was “helping rather than hindering the war effort”, he recommended that she be trained to work on the encryption machines, as the “really valuable information [was] being coded”. Wachtel subsequently passed on to the officer the information she decoded. She later discovered that the officer was implicated in Claus von Stauffenberg’s failed assassination plot against Hitler.¹⁶⁷

This was not Wachtel’s only act of deception. She continued to buy and sell on the black market, and was able to supply a local priest with extra food for the people he was hiding in his church. Wachtel was even able to hide her former doctor, a Jew, in her own cellar for a few days, until the priest was able to find him a more secure hiding place. Following a severe bombing attack in Hamburg, Wachtel was “feeling rebellious” and so she used the telex machine to type a personal message to an officer on the Eastern Front, an act that was strictly forbidden. He replied, asking her to telephone his mother to let her know he was alive. She then passed the mother’s relieved message back to her son, and Wachtel continued communications with soldiers, pleased that there was good that could be done.¹⁶⁸

Ultimately, Wachtel was arrested by the *Gestapo*, interrogated, and transferred to a “reception camp” which she believed to be a satellite of Neuengamme concentration camp. After a few months in the camp, the prisoners were released pending the imminent arrival of Allied forces, and Wachtel was able to return home to her mother.¹⁶⁹ While initially Wachtel had been reluctant to work for the *Wehrmacht*, she was able to use her employment to assist the resistance,

¹⁶⁷ Wachtel and Strachen, *A Different Kind of Courage*, pp.51, 116, 125-126.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.159-160.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.199-201, 222.

and her salary to assist those in hiding: small acts in themselves, but nevertheless constituting acts of sabotage against the Nazis.

Wachtel's brave stance represents a rare instance of protest. For the overwhelming majority, such considerations were far from their minds. Many women embraced the chance to become *Helperinnen* simply because it afforded them the opportunity to see foreign climates, and experience new cultures. Some were spoilt with food, alcohol and gifts which they were able to send home. Many girls ended up reflecting positively on their experiences. Summarizing her time abroad as a *Nachrichtenhelferin* in Paris as full of lots of "new and beautiful things but also some ugly and difficult things", one girl wrote in a letter home that she had learnt how to survive, and that she had "joyfully and gladly served the beloved fatherland".¹⁷⁰ For another girl, knowing that she had served her country as a *Nachrichtenhelferin* gave her life new meaning, "a purpose and a direction".¹⁷¹

For some women, the experiences that they gained as *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* came about by chance. They had volunteered to be Red Cross Nurses, or had been conscripted due to a lack of volunteers and they found themselves sent abroad. Some women deliberately applied to become *Nachrichtenhelferinnen*, enticed by the glamour of a uniform or the adventure of foreign travel. Some chose to become *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* to serve their country, and do their duty.

The women who chose to become *SS-Helferinnen* were not dissimilar in their motivations. However, ideology was a stronger factor among these women. They had been immersed in Nazi propaganda from a young age and often had family members involved in the SS, some of whom inspired their applications. Many women had risen through the leadership ranks of the BDM and becoming involved in the SS was a natural progression.

¹⁷⁰ "Neues und Schönes, aber auch manch Häßliches und Schweres", "freudig und gern diene...dem geliebten Vaterland", Seidel and Grosser, *Dienende Herzen*, p.75.

¹⁷¹ "einen Zweck und eine Richtung", Schulemann, *Als Nachrichtenhelferin*, p.32.

While there were women who wanted the privilege of serving their country and doing their duty, for most this was not the major motivation in their decision to become *Helperinnen*. The work that the *Helperinnen* performed was crucial for the German war effort. Yet for most of these women, this realisation was almost an afterthought.

Part 2: Sex, Lies and Stenography

Chapter 3: Typing for the Third Reich

Working in a variety of departments, the many secretaries and female administrators of the RSHA had access to varying sources and quantities of information about the Holocaust and the crimes that their supervisors were perpetrating. Who were these women and what prompted them to work within the Nazi apparatus? Were the secretaries of the RSHA ideologically dedicated to the tasks they carried out? Were the women responsible for typing the Nazi regime's policies of persecution and extermination committed to the cause?

For many women working at the RSHA, it was impossible to deny during the war that something was happening to the Jews. There were a number of routes through which the secretaries and female employees of the RSHA became aware of the atrocities against the Jews. Although frequently unreliable, there were many rumours, both within and outside of the workplace, which provided information for female employees. Some of these women were able to corroborate the rumours through their workloads: they were the ones typing the deportation lists or registering the deaths in the concentration camps. Some women witnessed deportations; others visited holding camps and concentration camps. Some worked alongside Jews and heard of their mistreatment first-hand. This chapter will assess what the women working for the RSHA knew about the Holocaust, and how they acquired this knowledge. It will pay particular attention to administrators working for departments directly concerned with the facilitation of Nazi mass murder, giving the women an insight into the atrocities being committed.

Getting a job at the RSHA did not follow a standard procedure. The women came from a variety of backgrounds and had varying experiences prior to their employment. Many were conscripted to the RSHA, although female conscription did not begin until January 1943,¹ due to conflicting theories over the role of the

¹ Jill Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Germany* (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2001), p.55.

Nazi woman in society.² Conscription procedures were not smooth and did not follow one coherent policy. There were opportunities to avoid the call up: loopholes were frequently exploited, and conscription was not enforced whole-heartedly.³ It was therefore possible for some of the women who were sent to the RSHA to evade being drafted. However, in their post-war testimony, the majority of women emphasized a lack of choice: these women felt that they had to follow the conscription orders. Yet, many of the women were later able to leave their positions of employment voluntarily,⁴ without suffering any consequences.

Large numbers of women were conscripted to the RSHA by their local state employment offices. This was what happened to Stephanie Allmendinger and Helga Beer, who were both assigned to the *Gestapo*.⁵ Berta Rauber was conscripted to the RSHA, possibly because she had completed *Osteinsatz*, “an elitist undertaking restricted to students whose National Socialist integrity was firmly established”.⁶ Rauber had taken care of repatriates, ethnic Germans resettled in German territories. Prior to this, she had begun to train as a school teacher.⁷ As a Baltic German who came to Germany following the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, Ina Ostrogorsky was obligated to take up work, and found a job at the Ministry of Interior.⁸ Maria Winterstein was conscripted to the RSHA under legislation brought in by Goebbels in 1943 to compel unmarried young women, between the ages of 17

² Tim Mason, *Social Policy in the Third Reich: The Working Class and the National Community*, Jane Caplan, ed., translated by John Broadwin (Oxford: Berg 1995), p.329.

³ Jill Stephenson, *The Nazi Organisation of Women* (Oxford: Taylor and Francis, 1981), p.181 and see also Heinz Boberach, ed., *Meldungen aus dem Reich, Auswahl den geheimen Lageberichten des Sicherheitsdienstes der SS 1939-1944* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1968), pp.294-5, 384, 405, and Elizabeth Heineman, *What Difference Does a Husband Make? Women and Marital Status in Nazi and Postwar Germany* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, CA and London: University of California Press, 1999), p.63.

⁴ See below for specific examples of this.

⁵ Testimony of Stephanie Allmendinger, July 25, 1967, Topography of Terror Archive (LG Berlin) 3P Ks 1/71 gegen Otto Bovensiepen und andere, Bd.XXXIII, pp. 85-95, and testimony of Helga Beer, November 28, 1967, LG Berlin 3P Ks 1/71 gegen Otto Bovensiepen und andere, Bd. XXXIV, pp. 168-71.

⁶ Jacques R. Pauwels, *Women, Nazis and Universities* (London: Greenwood Press, 1984), p.122.

⁷ Testimony of Berta Rauber, January 1, 1965, Landesarchiv Berlin (LAB) B Rep 057.01 2590.

⁸ Testimony of Ina Ostrogorsky, October 14, 1966, Bundesarchiv Berlin (BArch) B 162/4558 (Ludwigsburg).

and 45, to work.⁹ Winterstein stated in her testimony that, as a childless married woman, she could “not escape being conscripted”.¹⁰

Whether out of need or ambition, financial motives drove many women to work for the RSHA. In some cases, these motives were borne out of the stringencies imposed by war itself. Gertrud Flickert had worked in her father’s restaurant, but the onset of war resulted in a decrease in revenue and her father was no longer able to maintain her. As a divorced mother of two children, she needed a job and was directed to the RSHA by the employment office.¹¹ Having trained as a nursery school teacher, Elly Seeck was unable to find a job and, in need of employment, was prompted by the employment office to take a job at the RSHA.¹² Others sought work as a result of changing personal circumstances. Following surgery shortly before the end of the war, Melida Heider was unexpectedly presented with a bill for part of the operation and care costs. In order to cover these, she took a job at the RSHA.¹³ Elisabeth Marks’ divorce and her husband’s subsequent refusal to pay child support forced her to find a job within the RSHA.¹⁴ Some women simply sought to better their situation. Ilse Oswald was unsatisfied with her salary at the *Reichspost*, so she applied for a job with the secret state police in 1937.¹⁵ Ursula Rogge took a job at the RSHA, because of the “better earning opportunities”.¹⁶ Unsatisfied with her earnings at a private firm, Margarete Hartung applied to several authorities for a higher-paid job, resulting in her employment in the police department in Berlin as a typist.¹⁷

⁹ Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Germany*, p.55.

¹⁰ “der Dienstverpflichtung nicht entziehen”, testimony of Maria Winterstein, November 26, 1968, BArch B 162/4560 (Ludwigsburg).

¹¹ Testimony of Gertrud Flickert, March 9, 1965, BArch B 162/4555 (Ludwigsburg).

¹² Testimony of Elly Seeck, March 22, 1965, BArch B 162/4173 (Ludwigsburg).

¹³ Testimony of Melida Heider, March 2, 1965, BArch B 162/4168 (Ludwigsburg).

¹⁴ Testimony of Elisabeth Marks, September 8, 1966, BArch B 162/4170 (Ludwigsburg).

¹⁵ Testimony of Ilse Oswald, July 31, 1967, BArch B 162/4558 (Ludwigsburg).

¹⁶ “besseren Verdienstmöglichkeiten”, testimony of Ursula Rogge, September 7, 1967, BArch B 162/4173 (Ludwigsburg).

¹⁷ Testimony of Margarete Hartung, November 10, 1965, LG Berlin, 3P Ks 1/71 gegen Otto Bovensiepen und andere, Bd. XII, pp. 119-124.

Family influence and contacts provided another route into the RSHA. Relations and acquaintances were sometimes able to assist in securing a job for their family members or friends. Irmgard Martin's father obtained a job for his daughter in April 1941; he was already employed at the RSHA at the time.¹⁸ Irene Erbe was given her job at the RSHA by Herr Koschate, with whom she had completed her *Pflichtjahr*, a compulsory year of service for young women.¹⁹ Lieselotte Zimmerman's mother's friends, working in the Ministry for the East, were looking for administrators in Ukraine. She signed up on their recommendations.²⁰

Many considered employment at the RSHA preferable to the alternatives. After attending commercial college, Gerda Gerner was expected to serve her *Pflichtjahr*. In order to avoid this, Gerner applied to the SS employment office, but was informed that the SS was oversubscribed with workers. Instead, she applied to the RSHA, where she ultimately worked for several different departments including counterintelligence and the Department for Polish Affairs.²¹ Erika Hesselbarth's daughter took a job at the RSHA to avoid her obligation to the *Reichsarbeitsdienst* (RAD).²² Elsa Heine was recommended a job at the RSHA by a female acquaintance; she took the position because she wished to avoid being conscripted by the employment office.²³ Helga Duchstein was keen to avoid employment in the labour service; she learned shorthand and typing and applied for several posts, including positions within the air force and the army high command. The *Gestapo* were the first to respond to her, so Duchstein took the job they offered.²⁴ Her indifference seemingly overrode any concerns over their fearsome reputation. Otilie Bläsius completed a course in speech and writing and was poised to be conscripted by the Reich Women's Leader, Gertrud Scholtz-Klink. Since the work environment did not

¹⁸ Testimony of Irmgard Martin, August 19, 1966, LG Berlin, 3P Ks 1/71 gegen Otto Bovensiepen und andere Bd. XXII, pp. 88-92.

¹⁹ Testimony of Irene Erbe, August 7, 1968, BArch B 162/4555 (Ludwigsburg).

²⁰ Author interview with Lieselotte Zimmerman, Hannover, Germany, July 27, 2011.

²¹ Testimony of Gerda Gerner, August 9, 1966, BArch B 162/4556 (Ludwigsburg).

²² Testimony of Erika Hesselbarth, April 23, 1965, BArch B 162/4556 (Ludwigsburg).

²³ Testimony of Elsa Heine, June 21, 1966, BArch B 162/4168 (Ludwigsburg).

²⁴ Testimony of Helga Duchstein, October 12, 1966, BArch B 162/4555 (Ludwigsburg).

appeal to her, Bläsius approached a friend working at the RSHA, who was able to negotiate a position for her.²⁵

Anneliese Engler's boyfriend was a soldier with the *Deutsches Afrika Korps*. Engler missed him and so applied to the Colonial School in Berlin, hoping that once she had finished her education there she would also be sent to Africa and to be close to her sweetheart. By the time she completed her training, the German army had been pushed out of Africa and the school was forced to close. The pupils were given a choice of being sent back home or being employed elsewhere. Engler did not wish to return home; as the eldest daughter, household chores awaited her. She volunteered to be employed and was sent to the Ukraine as an administrator.²⁶

The RSHA was not solely an alternative to less preferable working environments; some women actively sought employment there. Frida Paul had been working as a stenographer in the Reich Office for Wool and other Animal Hair, but wished to "expand the knowledge" that she had acquired in her career to date and so she entered employment at the *Rasse- und Siedlungshauptamt (RuSHA)*.²⁷ Emma Rückerl took a job as a secretary for an officer working at the *Lebensborn* programme, because this allowed her to keep her child with her.²⁸ In a letter written to the RuSHA supporting a job application, Ruth Ihlow, a Nazi party member who, in her spare time acted as a stenographer for her local branch, asserted that her greatest wish was to be employed as a stenographer in the occupied eastern territories.²⁹

In a letter written by Himmler in 1942, the "women, brides, mothers and sisters of SS members" were urged to report to local offices of the *NS-Frauenschaft* because the war required all "available and deployable forces in the country".³⁰

²⁵ Testimony of Ottilie Bläsius, June 26, 1966, BArch B 162/4553 (Ludwigsburg).

²⁶ Author interview with Anneliese Engler, Pforzheim, Germany, June 4, 2011.

²⁷ "erworbenen Kenntnisse zu erweitern", C.V. of Frida Paul, undated, BArch SF B0015.

²⁸ Literally 'Spring of Life', this programme provided assistance to the wives of SS men and unmarried mothers. For more information, see the introduction. C.V. of Emma Rückerl, undated, BArch SF B0024

²⁹ Letter to the RuSHA, March 31, 1941, BArch SF A0037.

³⁰ "Frauen, Bräute, Mütter und Schwestern der SS-Angehörigen", "verfügbaren und einsatzbereiten

These women were required to work in aid of the war effort. Michael Wildt estimates that approximately one-fifth of the gainfully employed wives of leading RSHA members worked as stenographers, secretaries and office employees in National Socialist state institutions, most of them directly for the *Gestapo* or at the RSHA³¹. That it was as high as one-fifth can be attributed to the fact that some women were already employed at these institutions, and had met their partner at the workplace, and others were recommended for the job by their partner.³²

Some women were required to take typing tests to prove their ability, either before starting work or during their employment. Adelheid Grau, who worked as an *Anfangs-Stenotypist*, undertook a test in the vocational school of the *Waffen-SS*, which included German shorthand, and a five-minute dictation test which tested the number of syllables per minute and accuracy.³³ Erna Groth was originally assigned to the Reich Central Office for combating Homosexuality and Abortion, before it was merged into the RSHA. Once Groth had passed the advanced typist examination, indicating that she was capable of typing 150 syllables per minute, she was transferred to the Department for Polish Affairs, and given a salary increase.³⁴ After working for her boss for one year, and passing an examination, Hildegard vom Hoff was considered to have proven herself and was entrusted with work of a confidential nature.³⁵

Large numbers of women were required to work at the RSHA and consequently even those without experience or the required skills, particularly very young women, were hired. When she started working for the RSHA in 1942, Ruth Kutzner was just 15 years old and unable to use a typewriter; she learned how on the job.³⁶ Irene Erbe was just 16 when she took up her post, but was soon

Kräfte in der Heimat", June 3, 1942, BArch NS 19/1963 and also BArch R58 259.

³¹ Michael Wildt, *An Uncompromising Generation. The Nazi Leadership of the Reich Security Main Office*, translated by Tom Lampert (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press: 2009: London), p.116.

³² For a detailed examination of those who formed a relationship with their colleagues, see chapter 5.

³³ Personnel file of Adelheid Grau, BArch SF A0027.

³⁴ Testimony of Erna Groth, August 19, 1966, BArch B 162/4556 (Ludwigsburg).

³⁵ Testimony of Hildegard vom Hoff, October 30, 1967, BArch B 162/4168 (Ludwigsburg).

³⁶ Testimony of Ruth Kutzner, September 24 1969, BArch B 162/4557 (Ludwigsburg).

reallocated within the department due to her “terrible” performance. She worked as a runner; as a result of her youth, she was chosen to make the coffee, do the shopping and run other small errands.³⁷

The girls who began employment at such a young age were often uninterested in the work of their department, and in the RSHA as a whole. Erika Lehnitz was aged only 19 or 20 and consequently her work “was practically of no interest”.³⁸ Christa Lesser felt no curiosity about the files in her department, which she attributed to her youth; she was 22 years old.³⁹ Even with “the best of intentions”, Hildegard vom Hoff was unable to say, in her testimony, in which ways the individual departments of the RSHA cooperated with each other. She affirmed that she had no appreciation of the structure of the RSHA at all, and was not interested in addressing this, as at the beginning of her employment at the RSHA, she was just 16 years old.⁴⁰

The common lack of interest in their department and their work corresponded to an alleged lack of knowledge concerning the true nature of what they were processing. Ursula Kempe claimed to be unaware of the details of her work in the Department for Polish Affairs. She attributed this to the fact that she had “little interest in the formal arrangements” and was “still quite young”; she was 19.⁴¹ Working as a young woman in a subordinate position, Gertrud Flickert, claimed to have had “absolutely no insight into the remit” of the unit in which she worked.⁴²

³⁷ “schrecklich”, testimony of Irene Erbe, August 7, 1968, BArch B 162/4555 (Ludwigsburg).

³⁸ “praktisch kein Interesse entgegen gebracht habe”, testimony of Erika Lehnitzk, September 16, 1969, BArch B 162/4557 (Ludwigsburg).

³⁹ Testimony of Christa Lesser, November 7, 1968, BArch B 162/4557 (Ludwigsburg).

⁴⁰ “besten Willen”, testimony of Hildegard vom Hoff, February 1, 1965, BArch B 162/4168 (Ludwigsburg).

⁴¹ “wenig Interesse für die damaligen Anordnungen hatte”, “noch recht jung war”, testimony of Ursula Kempe, October 29, 1968, BArch B 162/4557 (Ludwigsburg).

⁴² “überhaupt keinen Einblick in das Aufgabengebiet”, testimony of Gertrud Flickert, March 9, 1965, BArch B 162/4555 (Ludwigsburg).

During questioning by prosecutors after the war, several female administrators used their youth to justify their lack of knowledge, or their inability to recall facts. Working for the Department for Jewish Affairs for the RSHA in Łódź, Rosemarie von Godlewski heard rumours about a squad killing Jews. Although the rumours filled her with horror, she could not recall exactly when she had heard them, because, at the time she was “a young girl and had so many other things on her mind”.⁴³ Ruth Tilgner, who was 15 when she started working at the RSHA, was unable to recall if she had heard rumours that the Jews were killed in concentration camps. She thought this was because she “was still very young and had other things on her mind”. Yet, despite her youth, Tilgner was able to infer from her workload that deaths occurred in concentration camps and that this was confidential. As Tilgner herself acknowledged, this demonstrated that “even a 16-year old girl could draw some conclusions about the conditions in the concentration camps”.⁴⁴ The case of Tilgner demonstrates that youth did not inevitably result in ignorance of the true course of events.

While their youth may, indeed, have precluded an interest in their work, there is a distinction between interest and comprehension. The younger these women were, the more Nazified they would have been, having been immersed in Nazi education, culture and youth groups from a tender age. These younger women would have been eager to learn, and impressionable. Nevertheless, as Tilgner showed, youth was not an unbreachable barrier to awareness. It is highly likely that, after the war, some women used their young age as a viable excuse to explain their lack of interest in, and awareness of, the work they were involved in.

Not all of those working for the RSHA showed no interest in their work. Many women were highly committed and dedicated to their tasks, demonstrating qualities admired by the Nazis. In a report about a former RSHA employee, Ingeburg

⁴³ “ein junges Mädchen und hatte ganz andere Dinge im Kopf”, testimony of Rosemarie von Godlewski, June 12, 1967, LG Berlin, 3P Ks 1/71 gegen Otto Bovensiepen und andere, Bd. XXXIII, pp. 297-304.

⁴⁴ “war damals ja noch sehr jung und hatte eigentlich andere Dinge im Kopf”, “auch ein 16-jähriges Mädchen gewisse Rückschlüsse auf die Zustände in dem Konzentrationslagern ziehen können”, testimony of Ruth Tilgner, October 27, 1967, BArch B 162/4174 (Ludwigsburg).

Werlemann, it was noted that she was efficient, and her work was impeccable. She was considered a “quick and reliable employee, who completed her diverse work cleanly and to the complete satisfaction of her superiors”. As a result of her balanced and calm character, she was deemed “one of the most trusted employees of the department”.⁴⁵ Irmgard Hünnekens was also praised in a report about her work for the head of the court at the RuSHA. She was noted for her above average abilities to both comprehend and complete her work, which was always “free of any complaint”. She was considered reliable and conscientious, to the extent that, “these characteristics permitted her to make herself familiar with processes, which on the basis of their content, needed to be handled cautiously”. She had been able to “work smaller operations independently and accurately”, and her boss regretted her leaving their department.⁴⁶ Charlotte Neuschäffer was recommended as prudent and efficient, a perfect typist who “in every way, completed her work correctly, reliably and trustworthily”.⁴⁷

Some secretaries, indeed, were committed to National Socialism, and at times to Hitler in particular. Ruth Ihlow explicitly recalled that her membership of the Nazi party, and her dedication to the local branch, inspired her to apply for a job at the RuSHA.⁴⁸ Gertrud Spiller was a stenotypist for the *SS-Oberabschnitt* northwest division, in Hamburg, and the *Höheren SS- und Polizeiführer*, in South Russia. She had been a member of the BDM from August 1932 and became a guide for the BDM in September 1938, the same year that she joined the Nazi Party. Spiller was also a winner of the “Golden Medal of the Hitler Youth”.⁴⁹ In a report about her capabilities as a clerk for the RSHA, Ingeburg Werlemann’s NSDAP

⁴⁵ “flotte und zuverlässige Mitarbeiterin, die ihre vielseitigen Arbeiten sauber und zur vollsten Zufriedenheit ihrer Vorgesetzten erledigt”, “eine der bewährtesten Mitarbeiterinnen der hiesigen Dienststelle”, report about Ingeburg Werlemann, May 25, 1944, BArch SF B0045.

⁴⁶ “frei von jeder Beanstandung”, “Diese Eigenschaften gestatteten, sie selbst mit Vorgängen vertraut zu machen, die auf Grund ihres Sachverhaltes einer entsprechenden vorsichtigen Behandlung bedürfen”, “kleinere Vorgaenge selbstaendig und treffsicher zu erledigen”, report about Irmgard Hünnekens, January 5, 1944, BArch SF A0037.

⁴⁷ “hat in jeder Weise ihre Arbeiten korrekt, zuverlässig und vertrauenswürdig erfüllt”, report about Charlotte Neuschäffer, May 8, 1941, BArch NS 3/1125.

⁴⁸ Letter to the RuSHA, March 31, 1941, BArch SF A0037.

⁴⁹ “goldenen Ehrenzeichens der HJ” Gertrud Spiller’s C.V., July 23, 19, BArch SF B0035.

number is referenced, indicating membership of the Nazi Party.⁵⁰ In addition, she had been, as noted in a reference provided in support of her marriage application, a member of the BDM since April 1934 and a helper in the *Nationalsozialistische Volkswohlfahrt* (NSV).⁵¹ One secretary, Charlotte Heinci, was so disappointed when Hitler was not able to visit her office as scheduled, that she sent him a letter enclosing a photograph of herself.⁵² She was not the only one: according to Dagmar Herzog, “crates full of love letters” were sent to Hitler from women from all over Germany.⁵³ Yet, dedication and commitment to the Nazi cause was not a requirement for those working for the RSHA. Anneliese Engler was encouraged by her boss, *Gauleiter* Koch, to join the Nazi Party, but when she refused she did not suffer any adverse consequences.⁵⁴ Many secretaries, when asked during their post-war interrogations, denied membership of Nazi-affiliated groups, such as the BDM.

Transfers between the various offices and departments within the RSHA occurred frequently, resulting in women being sent from office to office, and even abroad. The reasons varied. Working for the State Police Office in Berlin from autumn 1939, Ingrid Kölz began her RSHA career working for six months in a central office. From early 1940 she worked as a clerk in the counterintelligence department, and from September 1941 she moved to the Department for Jewish Affairs. She left, voluntarily, in April 1942.⁵⁵ Already working for the RSHA, Susanne Surkau was transferred to the Department for Polish Affairs following an argument with her superior.⁵⁶ Otilie Bläsius attributed her enforced transfer to a new office

⁵⁰ Report about Ingeburg Werlemann, May 25, 1944, BArch SF B0045.

⁵¹ Reference for Ingeburg Werlemann, December 12, 1943, BArch SF B0045.

⁵² Letter by Charlotte Heinci, BArch NS 19/892.

⁵³ Dagmar Herzog, *Sex After Fascism. Memory and Morality in Twentieth-century Germany* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005), p.13 and see also Helmut Ulshöfer, ed., *Liebesbriefe an Adolf Hitler: Briefe in den Tod* (Frankfurt am Main: VAS, 1994), Alexander C.T. Geppert, “‘Dear Adolf!’: Locating Love in Nazi Germany” in Luisa Passerini, Lilianna Ellena and Alexander C.T. Geppert, eds., *New Dangerous Liaisons. Discourses on Europe and Love in the Twentieth Century* (New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2010) and Henrik Eberle, ed., *Letters to Hitler* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012).

⁵⁴ Author interview, June 4, 2011.

⁵⁵ Testimony of Ingrid Kölz October 27, 1967, LG Berlin, 3P Ks 1/71 gegen Otto Bovensiepen und andere, Bd. XXXIII, pp. 199-206.

⁵⁶ Testimony of Susanne Surkau, August 30, 1966, BArch B 162/4559 (Ludwigsburg).

to her decision not to join the Nazi Party.⁵⁷ Having already been transferred due to “differences” with one of her bosses, Helga Duchstein was assigned to a superior who had such a strong Bavarian dialect that Duchstein asked to be transferred after just one day.⁵⁸

Transfers and appointments were subject to the discretion of senior RSHA staff. As the course of the war obliged it to change its remit, the RuSHA was required to cooperate more closely with the Reich Chamber of Trade. The chief of the RuSHA called for Ursula Speer to be transferred back to the RuSHA from the *SS Reichsarzt*. Speer had been “thoroughly incorporated” with the necessary work areas and so it was considered “appropriate and desirable” for her to be transferred back to her previous department.⁵⁹ When two girls joined one particular department at the same time, Fritz Wöhrn was able to choose which of the two he wanted as his typist. He chose Fräulein Kunze because, according to another typist in the department, she “looked so cute”.⁶⁰

Despite their limited standing within the RSHA, some administrators were able to influence transfers. When her department was transferred en masse to another location, Elisabeth Marks decided not to move as she wished to remain in Berlin to be near her children. As a result, she was transferred to the Department for Jewish Affairs.⁶¹ When Waleska Bambowsky spent time in the Department for Polish Affairs, she found it “too cruel” and therefore requested a transfer, which was granted.⁶² When her department was transferred to Theresienstadt, Marie Knispel wanted to remain in Berlin, because she had heard that Theresienstadt “was a concentration camp, [and that]...in concentration camps people would be

⁵⁷ Testimony of Ottilie Bläsius, June 26, 1966, BArch B 162/4553 (Ludwigsburg).

⁵⁸ “differenzen”, testimony of Helga Duchstein, October 12, 1966, BArch B 162/4555 (Ludwigsburg).

⁵⁹ “gründlich eingearbeitet worden”, “zweckmässig und wünschenswert”, letter requesting Ursula Speer’s transfer back to the RuSHA, July 19, 1941, BArch SF B0035.

⁶⁰ “so niedlich aussah”, testimony of Ilse Borchert, October 13, 1967, BArch B 162/4162 (Ludwigsburg).

⁶¹ Testimony of Elisabeth Marks, September 8, 1966, BArch B 162/4170 (Ludwigsburg).

⁶² “zu grausam”, testimony of Waleska Bambowsky, March 5, 1965, BArch B 162/4553 (Ludwigsburg).

killed". She refused the move, and was instead transferred to the Department for Jewish Affairs within the RSHA.⁶³

RSHA internal transfers were not solely domestic: some women were transferred to RSHA offices in occupied Europe. Irma Stolze joined the *Gestapo* in 1936. By the start of the war she had extensive experience across a number of departments, having worked in departments responsible for emigrants, cults, Jehovah's witnesses, Poles and Jewish Affairs. She was then transferred to Paris where she worked for the passport division and for the local consulate. When American troops approached Paris, Stolze was transferred back to Berlin, working with personnel files.⁶⁴ After working in the *Reichspost* office for several years, Herta Maier was transferred to the Central Office for Jewish Emigration, in Vienna. The transfer was intended to be a temporary placement to tackle urgent paperwork. Maier was, however, retained as a typist at the central office until its dissolution, when the typists were considered superfluous and were distributed to various departments. Maier was ordered to report to the RSHA in Berlin. Maier received no salary while in Berlin; she was transferred back to Vienna after only one month as a new decree stated that siblings could not work in the same office; her sister was employed at the RSHA in Berlin.⁶⁵ After a year of working for the RSHA in Berlin, Erika Schimmelpfennig was transferred to Paris, typing for the passport office in the German embassy. She returned to the RSHA in Berlin after ten months, where she remained for a year, before being sent to the Police Attaché in the German embassy in Madrid, and later to the consulate in Barcelona. In July 1943, she returned to Berlin and remained there until the end of the war, although she continued to be transferred within the RSHA.⁶⁶ During her eight years of work at the RSHA, Ilse Freutel was seconded to France twice, once as a receptionist for Kurt Lischka, the deputy head of a small Security Police force sent to Paris with

⁶³ "ein KL sein sollte [und]...in den KL würden Menschen umgebracht", testimony of Marie Knispel, October 25, 197, BArch B 162/4169 (Ludwigsburg).

⁶⁴ Testimony of Irma Stolze, August 10, 1966, BArch B 162/4559 (Ludwigsburg).

⁶⁵ Testimony of Herta Maier, September 29, 1967, BArch B 162/4170 (Ludwigsburg).

⁶⁶ Testimony of Erika Schimmelpfennig, July 25, 1966, BArch B 162/4558 (Ludwigsburg).

responsibility for the deportations of the French Jews,⁶⁷ and once for the security services in Bordeaux and Angers.⁶⁸ Many of the women greatly enjoyed their time abroad. Ilse Warnecke, for example, stated that her time in Paris was the best year of her life,⁶⁹ and Anneliese Engler described having a fantastic experience in Ukraine.⁷⁰

Some secretaries remained with their bosses throughout their wartime careers, moving with them across departments and territories. Eva Nöthling started working for Dr. Weinmann, who was employed by the SD, as his secretary in 1939. The following year, when he was transferred to another SD office in a different area in Berlin, Nöthling accompanied him, and later she joined him as he toured around the Reich. Nöthling remained with Weinmann when he returned to Berlin and worked for the RSHA as leader of Office IVD, which was responsible for the Protectorate, *Generalgouvernement*, and Occupied Territories, and subsequently during his spell as Commander of the Security Police and Security Service in Prague.⁷¹ Lieselotte Wöhler had been employed by the *Gestapo* in 1937, and was transferred to several different departments, before she was chosen by Dr. Pifrader, the head of the subdivision of the *Gestapo* responsible for Catholics, Protestants and Jews, to be his personal typist. In the spring of 1944, Dr. Pifrader participated in the German occupation of Hungary and Wöhler accompanied him, travelling first to Vienna for 14 days and then joining Pifrader in Budapest.⁷²

Other secretaries remained within one department, working in a typing pool for whoever required their services. If the location of the department was transferred, the women in the typing pool would be transferred too, unless they had specific cause to remain. Such was the case for Elisabeth Marks, who had chosen to stay in Berlin to be with her children, when the rest of her department

⁶⁷ Yaacov Lozowick, *Hitler's Bureaucrats: The Nazi Security Police and the Banality of Evil*, translated by Haim Watzman (London; New York: Continuum, 2002) pp. 6, 179-180.

⁶⁸ Testimony of Ilse Freutel, October 14, 1966, BArch B 162/4555 (Ludwigsburg).

⁶⁹ Author interview, by email, with Ilse Dannecker, December 2010. See Chapter 5 for more information on her time in Paris.

⁷⁰ Author interview, June 2011.

⁷¹ Testimony of Eva Nöthling, September 25, 1969, BArch B 162/4557 (Ludwigsburg).

⁷² Testimony of Lieselotte Wöhler, September 12, 1969, BArch B 162/4560 (Ludwigsburg).

was relocated.⁷³ When the building that housed the Department for Polish Affairs was bombed, in August 1944, the department, along with the administrative staff, was transferred to Trebnitz.⁷⁴ The Department for Jewish Affairs was largely relocated to Prague in January 1945, and the majority of the administrators were transferred there, remaining there until the end of the war.⁷⁵

Women employed at the RSHA were asked to sign an oath at the start of their employment. This outlined the employees' obligations, confirming their duty to neither write nor speak about any secret work they would carry out, even after they had left the department. There was an undertaking to report, immediately, any violations of confidentiality that became known to the employee. The oath stated that refraining from reporting such incidents would make the employee as guilty as the perpetrators of the violation. The employees were mandated to sign a document which stated that violating secrecy would be considered treason.⁷⁶ The RuSHA required female administrators to sign a separate oath. Similar to the RSHA oath, the statement required affirmation that the women would maintain official secrets even after retiring from the RuSHA, and confirmed that a violation of the oath was akin to treason. The women also had to verbally state that they

“swear under oath that I will perform my official duties as a member of the SS Race and Settlement Main Office, will always be punctual and conscientious and maintain official secrets”.⁷⁷

The compulsion to maintain secrecy was taken very seriously. When Elisabeth Marks joined the Department for Jewish Affairs she was obliged to introduce herself to Eichmann, who “after the usual greeting”, reminded Marks of

⁷³ As mentioned above; testimony of Elisabeth Marks, September 8, 1966, BArch B 162/4170 (Ludwigsburg).

⁷⁴ Testimony of Gerda Gerner, August 9, 1966 and testimony of Erna Groth, August 19, 1966, BArch B 162/4556 (Ludwigsburg).

⁷⁵ Testimony of Marie Knispel, October 25, 1967, BArch B 162/4169 (Ludwigsburg). This is discussed further in chapter 6.

⁷⁶ See, for example, Herta Baudach's oath, July 21, 1941, BArch SF A0003.

⁷⁷ “gelobe an Eidesstatt, dass ich meine dienstlichen Obliegenheiten als Angehoerige des Rasse- und Siedlungshauptamtes-SS stets puenktlich und gewissenhaft verrichten und das Dienstgeheimnis bewahren werde”, see, for example, Leni Heyse's oath, September 25, 1944, BArch SF A0034.

the confidentiality requirements before assigning her to the registry.⁷⁸ Shortly after joining the RSHA, Ruth Tilgner reported with all other new employees to the head of the office, Müller, where they were sworn in. It was pointed out to all attendees that they were not permitted to speak about their work, either at home or with colleagues.⁷⁹ Arriving for work as a government clerk at the RSHA on April 1, 1942, Gisela Kirschke was immediately bound to secrecy with her other newly recruited colleagues.⁸⁰

Secretaries could face punishment for breaching the code of conduct or for misbehaviour. Susanne Surkau was transferred to a different department after an argument with her boss.⁸¹ Adele Krebs was “transferred for disciplinary reasons” after one year as a switchboard operator for the Jewish Department of the RSHA in Kurfürstenstraße. She was sent to Prinz-Albrecht-Straße because her personal manner when working with Adolf Eichmann and Hans Günther was not considered appropriate.⁸² Elli Benz once caught the attention of an SS colonel after greeting him with “good morning”, rather than the preferred “Heil Hitler”. As a punishment, she was compelled to report to him each morning for one week.⁸³ Eva Schmidt was ordered to Heinrich Müller, who reprimanded her for stating to the leader of the Women’s Association that the war was lost for Germany. Consequently, Müller fired Schmidt “with the threat of a procedure and a punishment”.⁸⁴

Working in the numerous departments, offices and subdivisions of the RSHA, the administrators were engaged in the full spectrum of National Socialist operations, ranging from internal personnel and ideological education, to occupation policies, foreign intelligence, and combating opponents. Anneliese Engler recalled typing dictation about agriculture, quantifying produce, such as pigs,

⁷⁸ “nach der üblichen Begrüßung”, testimony of Elisabeth Marks, September 8, 1966, BArch B 162/4170 (Ludwigsburg).

⁷⁹ Testimony of Ruth Tilgner, October 15, 1965, BArch B 162 4174 (Ludwigsburg).

⁸⁰ Testimony of Gisela Kirschke, June 21, 1966, BArch B 162/4169 (Ludwigsburg).

⁸¹ Testimony of Susanne Surkau, August 30, 1966, BArch B 162/4559 (Ludwigsburg).

⁸² “strafversetzt”, testimony of Adele Krebs, May 24, 1967, BArch B 162/4169 (Ludwigsburg).

⁸³ Testimony of Elli Benz, July 2, 1969, BArch B 162/4553 (Ludwigsburg).

⁸⁴ “mit der Androhung eines Verfahrens und einer Bestrafung”, testimony of Eva Schmidt, February 21, 1962, BArch B 162/3233 (Ludwigsburg).

milk, cheese and grain.⁸⁵ Eva Schmidt worked in the Police Attaché department, which was answerable to the Chief of Security Police, Heydrich. Schmidt completed paperwork concerning the travel arrangements of foreign police chiefs.⁸⁶ Elly Seeck's department was responsible for the detection and apprehension of foreign police functionaries. She was tasked with issuing new identification cards, and later she monitored land acquisition in restricted areas along borders, as it was undesirable for "politically unreliable people" to settle there.⁸⁷ Gerda Gerner recalled typing a booklet setting out the strict rules and regulations for Poles following the incorporation of Poland into the Reich.⁸⁸

With an office dedicated to foreign intelligence, and a subsection of the *Gestapo* devoted to occupied territories, there was a demand for women with the ability to speak, or type, other languages. Christa-Elisabeth Lenz was tasked with clipping and translating articles from English newspapers.⁸⁹ Ina Ostrogorsky worked for the Ministry of the Interior, and, when Germany invaded the USSR, she was tasked with reading captured Russian documents. Ostrogorsky was chosen for this task because of her ability to speak perfect Russian. These documents were predominantly, in Ostrogorsky's words, "about unimportant matters, mostly about agriculture".⁹⁰ Lieselotte Zimmerman was selected as the administrator to accompany a group of eight men on a tour of Ukraine because she spoke Russian.⁹¹ Tamara Weintraube, who had a German father and grew up in Russia and Ukraine, was working as a secretary in Kiev when it was taken by the Germans. She subsequently began work for the Germans as a secretary and translator.⁹²

⁸⁵ Author interview, June 2011.

⁸⁶ Testimony of Eva Schmidt, February, 21, 1962, BArch B 162/3233 (Ludwigsburg).

⁸⁷ "politisch unzuverlässige Leute", testimony of Elly Seeck, March 22, 1965, BArch B 162/4173 (Ludwigsburg).

⁸⁸ Testimony of Gerda Gerner, August 9, 1966, BArch B 162/4556 (Ludwigsburg).

⁸⁹ Testimony of Christa-Elisabeth Lenz, September 5, 1966, BArch B 162/4557 (Ludwigsburg).

⁹⁰ "um unwichtige Sachen, meist die Landwirtschaft", testimony of Ina Ostrogorsky, October 14, 1966, BArch B 162/4558 (Ludwigsburg).

⁹¹ Author interview, July 2011.

⁹² C.V. of Tamara Weintraube, February 1, 1944, BArch SF A0044.

The female administrators of the RSHA were working for those responsible for the various elements of Nazi persecution. The administrators of the RSHA were utilised at every stage of the mounting persecution. In particular, the classification and registration of people in Nazi Germany, defining who was a Jew, required a large amount of administration. Ursula Rogge processed applications from *Mischlinge* who applied to marry *Deutschbluetigen*. She claimed not to know whether the applications were approved as she had nothing to do with processing the applications, “but just had to write”.⁹³ Through her work in the Department for Jewish Affairs, Erika Albrecht was also aware that Jews were being categorized. Her boss, Ernst Moes, worked with those Jews, “who, rather than being killed, would be kept alive”,⁹⁴ because, with only one Jewish grandparent, they were considered half-Jews. Her choice of words implies that she was aware that other Jews, those who were not half-Jews, were being killed. Marianna Müller was tasked with filling out forms detailing the confiscation of Jewish property.⁹⁵ Gisela Kirschke worked, with other women, on a Jewish index. She recalled that green index cards recorded the Jews and half-Jews from the Reich, detailing their names, dates of birth and their whereabouts.⁹⁶ Ingrid Kölz wrote the minutes from interrogations of Jews, specifically concerning Jewish property.⁹⁷ Gisela Marks typed documents determining enemies of the state, the withdrawal of their German nationality and the confiscation of their property. The documents pertained to people who were “almost exclusively Jews”, who had emigrated earlier.⁹⁸ As a filing assistant, Elsa Heine was responsible for the organisation of index cards, detailing the names of Jews who had emigrated, and the addresses to which they had emigrated.⁹⁹

⁹³ “sondern lediglich zu schreiben hatte”, testimony of Ursula Rogge, September 7, 1967, BArch B 162/4173 (Ludwigsburg).

⁹⁴ “die nicht umgebracht werden, sondern am Leben bleiben sollten”, testimony of Erika Albrecht, October 24, 1967, LG Berlin, 3P Ks 1/71 gegen Otto Bovensiepen und andere, Bd. XXXVIII, pp. 127-148.

⁹⁵ Testimony of Marianna Müller, September 13, 1966, BArch B 162/4170 (Ludwigsburg).

⁹⁶ Testimony of Gisela Kirschke, June 21, 1966, BArch B 162/4169 (Ludwigsburg).

⁹⁷ Testimony of Ingrid Kölz, October 27, 1967, LG, Berlin, 3P Ks 1/71 gegen Otto Bovensiepen und andere, Bd. XXXIII, pp. 199-206.

⁹⁸ “fast ausschließlich Juden”, testimony of Gisela Kirschke, June 21, 1966, BArch B 162/4169 (Ludwigsburg).

⁹⁹ Testimony of Elsa Heine, June 21, 1966, BArch B 162/4168 (Ludwigsburg).

The involvement of administrators even extended to the meetings at the heart of the resolution of the 'Jewish problem'. Ingeburg Wagner, typing for Theodor Dannecker, who worked for Adolf Eichmann in the Department for Jewish Affairs,¹⁰⁰ wrote the notes and records for the Madagascar plan. Wagner confirmed in her testimony that she once processed protocols from a meeting in Wannsee, although she was unable to recall if she wrote the minutes from the Wannsee Conference.¹⁰¹

Once there were plans in place for the persecution of the Jews, action had to be taken to realise the plans. Many secretaries were privy to the action, and assisted with the implementation of the strategy. Maria Bek recalled that, a few days after starting work at the State Police Office in Berlin, there was a large action against the Jews, which caused "great excitement". Through conversations, it became apparent to Bek that large numbers of Jews were taken from their homes or places of work as a result of this action. She could not rule out the possibility that "we the typists were involved in this context", having prepared lists of names of Jewish residents. Bek intimated that neither she nor her colleagues were aware of the ultimate outcome for the Jews, although they believed that they would be humanely treated.¹⁰² One of Erika Scholz's tasks involved typing the "Guidelines for the technical implementation of the evacuation of Jews to the East (Izbica by Lublin)", which Eichmann dictated to her. Scholz claimed to be unaware of the true meaning of "to the East", only finding out in 1943, when she typed two secret reports for Himmler, "from which the status of the "Final Solution of the Jewish Question" with exact figures was evident".¹⁰³ Ingrid Kölz was occasionally tasked

¹⁰⁰ See, for example, David Cesarani, *Eichmann. His Life and Crimes* (London: Vintage Books, 2005), p.50, and Hans Safrian, *Eichmann's Men*, translated by Ute Stargardt (New York: Cambridge University Press, published in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial and Museum, 2010).

¹⁰¹ Testimony of Ingeburg Wagner, May 23, 1967, BArch B 162/4174 (Ludwigsburg).

¹⁰² "große Aufregung", "uns Schreibkräften in diesem Zusammenhang aufgetragen wurde", testimony of Maria Bek, May 11, 1966, LG Berlin, 3P Ks 1/71 gegen Otto Bovensiepen und andere, Bd. XXIX, pp. 146-151.

¹⁰³ "aus dem der Stand der "Endlösung der Judenfrage" mit genauen Zahlenangaben ersichtlich war", testimony of Erika Scholz, September 18, 1967, LG Berlin, 3P Ks 1/71 gegen Otto Bovensiepen und andere, Bd. XXXVII, pp. 32-35.

with writing lists detailing the names and addresses of Jews to be deported.¹⁰⁴ These lists and guidelines were all crucial for the deportation of the Jews to camps.

Administrators were integrally involved in facilitating the admission of victims of Nazi persecution to concentration camps. Hildegard vom Hoff typed documents detailing the admission of Jews to labour camps, specifically elderly Jews.¹⁰⁵ Elisabeth Marks was responsible for a register which noted the names of prisoners and the dates they arrived in concentration camps.¹⁰⁶ Ruth Tilgner's main task at the RSHA was to sort post to and from prisoners in concentration camps, the bulk of which came and went from Theresienstadt. Letters which mentioned or questioned the specific whereabouts of any people were immediately destroyed. If there was any chance that a letter was in code, Tilgner was obligated to report it.¹⁰⁷ Dictating a report about the conditions of Majdanek concentration camp to Irene Erbe, a clerk in the Department for Polish Affairs, Thomsen commented that the report was well informed. Erbe's knowledge of the camp, as a result, was greatly enhanced.¹⁰⁸

The concluding stage of persecution, as decided at the Wannsee conference, was the murder of the Jews. Secretaries registering death certificates of Jews were unable to deny that Jews were dying, even if they could claim to be unaware that they were being murdered. Luise Hering registered death reports from concentration camps, including Auschwitz. The reports contained the name of the victim, date, time and cause of death. The range of stated causes of death was relatively narrow, with gastroenteritis, pneumonia and heart failure being amongst the most common. Dealing with these death reports on a daily basis, Hering came to the conclusion that terrible events took place in concentration camps, including the killing of Jews, although she claimed no knowledge of the method of murder.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁴ Testimony of Ingrid Kölz, October 27, 1967, LG Berlin, 3P Ks 1/71 gegen Otto Bovensiepen und andere, Bd. XXXIII, pp. 199-206.

¹⁰⁵ Testimony of Hildegard vom Hoff, February 1, 1965, BArch B 162/4168 (Ludwigsburg).

¹⁰⁶ Testimony of Elisabeth Marks, September 8, 1966, BArch B 162/4170 (Ludwigsburg).

¹⁰⁷ Testimony of Ruth Tilgner, October 15, 1965, BArch B 162 4174 (Ludwigsburg).

¹⁰⁸ Testimony of Irene Erbe, August 11, 1966, BArch B 162/4555 (Ludwigsburg).

¹⁰⁹ Testimony of Luise Hering, June 7, 1967, LG Berlin, 3P Ks 1/71 gegen Otto Bovensiepen und

Similarly, Marie Knispel maintained that it was only through the death notices she processed, that she realised that her department dealt exclusively with Jewish affairs. On average, Knispel estimated that she handled ten death reports each day, from Auschwitz, Mauthausen, Dachau, Sachsenhausen and Theresienstadt, many of which stated the same causes of death, predominantly heart failure and circulatory failure.¹¹⁰ Knispel eventually became convinced that the Jews were being killed by “bad treatment”, although this does not reflect the true murderous intentions of the Nazis.¹¹¹

Holding camps, deportation sites, and the T4 killing centres¹¹² all required administrative staff. In order to facilitate the deportations of Jews from Berlin, holding camps were established in former Jewish buildings, including synagogues, at a Jewish cemetery, a Jewish old age home, Jewish schools, and the Jewish hospital. Once enough Jews were assembled for a transport, the Jews were transferred to a railway station. Johanna Heym was employed at one of these holding camps, in Große Hamburger Straße, which made use of the buildings which used to house a Jewish old age home and a Jewish school for boys.¹¹³ After each transport, a report was dictated to Heym, which was then sent to Bock, the head of the regional headquarters. Heym’s main task at the camp was to write reports of the interrogations of Jews. One purpose of these interrogations was to determine whether the interviewee was a ‘privileged’ Jew - those married to Aryans - and thus worthy of special dispensation. Heym also took the minutes of the questioning of Jews discovered in hiding. These Jews were promised passage to Theresienstadt if they provided useful information about other hidden Jews, and “this added benefit mostly led to success”. In her desk, Heym had a list of Jews under the personal protection of Göring. The list contained about 100 to 200 names, first and foremost artists. Before a deportation from the camp took place, the list of those who were

andere, Bd. XXXIII, pp. 53-58.

¹¹⁰ Testimony of Marie Knispel, November 8, 1967, BAArch B162/4169 (Ludwigsburg).

¹¹¹ “schlechte Behandlung”, testimony of Marie Knispel, April 23, 1970, LG Berlin, 3P Ks 1/71 gegen Otto Bovensiepen und andere, Bd. 80, pp. 131-135.

¹¹² See below for detailed information on the killing centres.

¹¹³ Ulrich Eckhardt, Andreas Nachama, eds., *Jüdische Orte in Berlin* (Berlin: Nicolai, 2005), pp.20-21.

protected had to be checked against the identities of those to be deported to ensure their safety.¹¹⁴

Some secretaries were offered a glimpse into the conditions inside the concentration camps when accompanying their superiors on trips. On one visit to Theresienstadt, Ernst Moes took along Ilse Borchert, an administrator in the Department for Jewish Affairs. Moes held a senior role within the Department for Jewish Affairs, responsible for exceptional cases and those in “protective custody”.¹¹⁵ Borchert was made to wait outside the camp, in the home of the camp commandant. However, she took the opportunity to approach the camp fence and was able to observe Jewish women and children inside the camp, albeit at a distance. During this visit, Borchert wrote several letters for Moes, concerning consultations he held with Jews in the camp.¹¹⁶ On another occasion, Erika Albrecht accompanied Moes to Bergen-Belsen, but, despite requesting permission to be allowed into the camp, was instructed to remain in the commandant’s building, located just outside. Moes told Albrecht that his job involved listening to complaints about the mistreatment of Jews in the camp. Albrecht stated in her questioning that, as she was not allowed into the camp, she was unaware of the treatment of the Jews inside. She was, however, aware that non-Jews were murdered at Bergen-Belsen, although she claimed this did not occur while she was visiting. She was under the impression that the Jews at the camp were given preferential treatment,¹¹⁷ perhaps a reference to a group of Greek Jews who had been sent to Bergen-Belsen, as opposed to any other camps, “through special privilege”.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ “diese zugesagte Vergünstigung führte meist zum Erfolg”, testimony of Johanna Heym, June 14, 1966, LG Berlin, 3P Ks 1/71 gegen Otto Bovensiepen und andere, Bd. XIX, pp. 125-148.

¹¹⁵ NB his name is also spelled ‘Mös’, Yaacov Lozowick, *Hitler’s Bureaucrats: The Nazi Security Police and the Banality of Evil*, translated by Haim Watzman (London; New York: Continuum, 2002) p.95, and see also Yaacov Lozowick, ‘Malice in action’, in David Cesarani, ed., *Critical Concepts in Holocaust Studies. Volume III The ‘Final Solution’* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), p.225.

¹¹⁶ Testimony of Ilse Borchert, October 11, 1967, BArch B 162/4162 (Ludwigsburg).

¹¹⁷ Testimony of Erika Albrecht, October 24, 1967, LG Berlin, 3P Ks 1/71 gegen Otto Bovensiepen und andere, Bd. XXXVIII, pp. 127-148.

¹¹⁸ In September 1945, the Board of the Jewish Community of Salonika filed a lawsuit against these 55 members of the Jewish Community, accusing them of collaborating with the Germans, ensuring they received this special treatment.

Employment could also lead to a posting at a concentration camp. Wulkow, a satellite concentration camp of Theresienstadt, utilised female administrators. When the camp was first established, Ruth Tilgner was employed as the only typist in the camp office, producing all the written work involved in the preparation for the construction of the camp.¹¹⁹ Ursula Rogge was seconded to Wulkow during the period of construction. Her tasks included typing, answering the phone, cleaning and cooking for the staff.¹²⁰

Knowledge gleaned through work was augmented by disclosures, rumours, gossip and overheard conversations. These sources were not universally reliable. Nevertheless, many female employees were convinced that there were kernels of truth in what they heard. The rumours ranged from whispers that the Jews were being deported, to assertions that the Jews were being murdered. Helga Beer was aware from hearsay that Jews were taken from their homes, without legal cause. She thought that they were taken to a work camp and would have a difficult time of it, but she claimed to have no reason to assume they would be killed.¹²¹ Margarete Hartung heard rumours about what was happening to the Jewish citizens as the Department for Jewish Affairs was on the floor below her office. Her husband confirmed these rumours, as he was, in a case of mistaken identity, arrested along with Jews.¹²² Johanna Martha Greifendorf heard Adolf Eichmann declare, loudly and clearly, that “before I fall on (my) sword, all the Jews must be put to the sword”.¹²³ Greifendorf was unaware by what means this would be achieved. Although she herself only heard this statement once, it was generally known in the Department for Jewish Affairs, where she worked, that Eichmann constantly made

<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Holocaust/Collaboration.html>.

¹¹⁹ Testimony of Ruth Tilgner, October 15, 1965, BArch B 162 4174 (Ludwigsburg).

¹²⁰ Testimony of Ursula Rogge, September 7, 1967, BArch B 162/4173 (Ludwigsburg).

¹²¹ Testimony of Helga Beer, November 28, 1967, LG Berlin 3P Ks 1/71 gegen Otto Bovensiepen und andere, Bd. XXXIV, pp. 168-71.

¹²² Testimony of Margarete Hartung, November 10, 1965, LG Berlin, 3P Ks 1/71 gegen Otto Bovensiepen und andere, Bd. XII, pp. 119-124.

¹²³ “ehe ich über die Klinge springe, müssen erst alle Juden über die Klinge springen”, testimony of Johanna Martha Greifendorf, June 7, 1967, LG Berlin, 3P Ks 1/71 gegen Otto Bovensiepen und andere, Bd. XXXII, pp. 153-159.

remarks of this nature. Indeed, this remark is in the same vein as a speech he made in 1945, the words of which he recalled later as intimating that he would “gladly and happily jump into the pit with the knowledge that also with me are five million enemies of the Reich”.¹²⁴

Conversations with colleagues supplemented the rumours. Office worker Elisabeth Marks was informed by an SS officer that he had been commanded by the RSHA to drive a gas truck. He described the suffocation by gas of Jewish men, women and children trapped in the hold of the truck. This seemingly chance encounter was the first time that Marks claimed to have been made aware of the extermination policies directed at the Jews.¹²⁵ On one occasion, a male colleague of Marks, Martin, appeared in the registry and imparted a story about a rented excavator, a machine used to remove soil from the ground, which had been returned to its supplier without being properly cleaned. The supplier had complained that the excavator contained “human body parts (flesh and hair residue)”. Marks gained the impression that Martin, while displeased that the excavator had not been cleaned, was most outraged by the fact that through this, information about mass killings had been leaked. Marks assumed, because she was working in the Department for Jewish Affairs, that the story referred to the fate of the Jews, and her nerves were “completely shattered”.¹²⁶ Hildegard Jürgensonn, who worked in the Jewish department within the Foreign Office, travelled to Sielce [sic] to see her brother who had been severely wounded on the eastern front. While there, she was told by a German officer that there was a Jewish ghetto in Sielce [sic] and that “whenever it was overcrowded”, up to 500 Jews would “simply be shot, in order to make room”.¹²⁷

¹²⁴ Cited in David Cesarani, *Eichmann. His Life and Crimes* (London: Vintage Books, 2005), p.197.

¹²⁵ Testimony of Elisabeth Marks, January 25, 1971 and September 3, 1970, LG Berlin, 3P Ks 1/71 gegen Otto Bovensiepen und andere, Sonderband II, pp. 64-71g.

¹²⁶ “menschliche Körperteile (Fleisch- und Haarreste)”, “völlig zerrüttet”, testimony of Elisabeth Marks, September 8, 1966, BArch B 162/4170 (Ludwigsburg).

¹²⁷ “jedemal, wenn dieses überfüllt sei”, “einfach erschossen, um Platz zu schaffen”, testimony of Hildegard Jürgensonn, September 4, 1967, BArch B 162/4168 (Ludwigsburg); perhaps she meant Siedlce, or even Kielce, both of which had ghettos and were in the Generalgouvernement region.

Sources of information were not restricted to the workplace. Catholic friends informed Hildegard Jürgensonn of the arrests, mistreatment and deaths in concentration camps of members of the Catholic clergy.¹²⁸ Ilse Bochert first heard about the conditions inside concentration camps from a friend who lived in the neighbourhood of Oranienburg and had heard screaming and crying from the nearby concentration camp. Over time, Bochert heard from acquaintances that Jews were being beaten, tortured, and were made to work in concentration camps until they died. She even heard rumours that gas was being used to murder the inmates. She was aware that she heard “only a fraction of what was generally spoken”. Her knowledge was increased through *Greuelpropaganda*, a term literally translating as “atrocious propaganda” and used to refer to Allied propaganda, implying that she listened to the BBC illegally.¹²⁹

The widespread rumours and conversations were supplemented by newspaper articles and speeches printed in the press. Indeed, Jeffrey Herf concludes that it was practically impossible to deny knowledge or feign ignorance of the “murderous intentions and assertions of making good on such threats”, as, between 1941 and 1943, the newspapers, radio broadcasts and Nazi wall newspapers regularly informed the public of Nazi intentions to exterminate European Jews, and the news that this was being implemented. The words *Vernichtung* and *Ausrottung* were employed by Hitler and Goebbels, and Herf believes that the general public were under no doubt that these referred to a policy of mass murder.¹³⁰ The women who worked for the RSHA could hardly have been surprised when their work and their colleagues corroborated this information.

Rumours of internment and murder in concentration camps were “repeatedly heard”, thereby convincing Marie Knispel of their truth. In the

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ “nur ein Bruchteil ... was allgemein gesprochen wurde”, testimony of Ilse Borchert, October 11, 1967, BArch B 162/4162 (Ludwigsburg).

¹³⁰ Jeffrey Herf, *The Jewish Enemy. Nazi Propaganda During World War II and the Holocaust* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 2006), p.267 and see also, Robert Gellately, *Backing Hitler. Consent and Coercion in Nazi Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

newspapers, she read speeches which had been delivered by Hitler and high ranking SS officials, announcing the intention to exterminate the Jews.¹³¹ Hildegard vom Hoff affirmed in her testimony that, “everyone else at the time knew” that the Jews were being deported and would die, because it was the “declared intention of the Nazi leadership to destroy the Jews”. She stated that the course of the war showed that this intention had to be taken seriously.¹³² Adele Krebs claimed in her testimony that while her position as a switchboard operator and telephonist did not make her privy to confidential information, she did know “like everyone else at the time” that the Jews were being evacuated.¹³³ The printed media was corroborated by visual evidence: Jews were disappearing. Even before she started working for the Jewish Affairs department, Margaret Russin was aware that the Jews were being deported from Berlin. She had attempted to get in contact with her former Jewish colleagues from the garment industry but they “gradually disappeared”. As there were repeated assertions in the press that the Jews were “the destroyers of the national body and must be removed from it”, Russin assumed that the Jews had been taken to concentration camps. She recalled in her testimony that she had also read that the Jews should be “wiped out”, but claimed to not understand the exact meaning of this.¹³⁴

Certain secretaries were unknowingly contributing towards this outcome; code words were employed to hide the real meaning and nature of the work. Post-war prosecution teams, who were collecting evidence for the prosecution of men who had held decision-making roles at the RSHA, questioned their secretaries, and often asked whether they knew the meaning of these code words. Some admitted awareness, others professed ignorance; some were able to guess, and others asked their superiors.

¹³¹ “immer wieder hörte”, testimony of Marie Knispel, October 25, 1967, BArch B 162/4169 (Ludwigsburg).

¹³² “erklärte Absicht der NS-Führung, die Juden zu vernichten”, testimony of Hildegard vom Hoff, October 30, 1967, BArch B 162/4168 (Ludwigsburg).

¹³³ “wie jeder andere damals auch”, testimony of Adele Krebs, May 24, 1967, BArch B 162/4169 (Ludwigsburg).

¹³⁴ “nach und nach verschwanden”, “die Zerstörer des Volkskörpers seien und aus diesem entfernt werden müssen”, “ausgerottet”, testimony of Margaret Russin, November 6, 1968, BArch B 162/4173 (Ludwigsburg).

One prominent phrase used was “*Sonderbehandlung*”, which literally translates as special treatment, but in actuality represented a death sentence. For Ilse Oswald, there was never any doubt about the meaning of the term “*Sonderbehandlung*”. She explained in her testimony that it was “a euphemism for the liquidating of a person”.¹³⁵ Grete Fecher likewise described “*Sonderbehandlung*” as a euphemism for executions.¹³⁶ Erika Schimmelpfennig, taking shorthand for Ferdinand Betz in the Department for Polish Affairs, knew that “*Sonderbehandlung*” involved the execution of Poles who had sexual relations with Germans.¹³⁷ Marie Schmeidl understood “*Sonderbehandlung*” to mean “death by hanging”.¹³⁸ For Ilse Borchert, who handled documents labelled “*Sonderbehandlung*”, “it was completely clear and known to all those involved in the matter what it entailed and so explicit words were no longer needed”. These documents were referred to in open conversation by document number only, in case the “walls had ears”. There was no doubt in Borchert’s mind, however, that the term meant the liquidation of the Jews.¹³⁹

Sometimes, whole departments were given codenames. For example, Office IIB, headed by Viktor Brack and primarily concerned with the ‘euthanasia’ of mentally and physically ill children, was euphemistically known as *Reichsausschuß zur Erfassung von erb-anlagenbedingte Leiden*. *Aktion T4* was the codename for the Nazi programme of euthanasia for those with mental and physical disabilities. The location of the office, *Tiergartenstrasse 4*, gave the programme its name.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁵ “die Umschreibung für das Liquidieren eines Menschen”, testimony of Ilse Oswald, December 10, 1968, BACh B 162/4558 (Ludwigsburg).

¹³⁶ Testimony of Grete Fecher, January 4, 1967, BACh B 162/4555 (Ludwigsburg).

¹³⁷ Testimony of Erika Schimmelpfennig, July 25, 1966 and December 13, 1968, BACh B 162/4558 (Ludwigsburg).

¹³⁸ “Tod durch den Strang”, testimony of Marie Schmeidl, June 18, 1968, BACh B 162/4558 (Ludwigsburg).

¹³⁹ “allen Beteiligten aus der Sache heraus völlig klar und bekannt, worum es ging und es bedurfte keiner ausdrücklichen worte mehr”, “Wände Ohren hätten”, testimony of Ilse Borchert, October 11, 1967, BACh B 162/4162 (Ludwigsburg).

¹⁴⁰ Michael Burleigh, *Death and Deliverance: ‘Euthanasia’ in Germany c.1900-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

Women administering for Office IIB and for the T4 programme were given an insight into the Nazi agenda of murder, although the extent of their knowledge about the finer details of the programme varied. Gertrud Kallmeyer, one of Brack's secretaries in office IIB, believed that the euthanasia programme was "an action to provide salvation to the incurably mentally ill",¹⁴¹ in contrast to the official justification of saving money for the state.¹⁴² Irmgard Schroeder, a secretary in the same department, was also aware of the euthanasia project. She was unable to recall whether her work was related directly to the euthanasia programme, although she admitted that, "of course, it was possible".¹⁴³ Erika Seeger, a secretary working for the *Reichsausschuß zur Erfassung von erb-anlagenbedingte Leiden* had heard of the adult euthanasia project but claimed to have had no dealings with it, as a separate office managed the project.¹⁴⁴ Irmgard Raabe, a fellow secretary working in office IIB, confirmed this in her testimony. Raabe, who was Brack's secretary for a year, assumed that the euthanasia was carried out individually and using injections, but like the other women working for Brack in Office IIB, claimed in her testimony to be unaware of how the mentally ill were killed, or by whom.¹⁴⁵

The truth was not hidden from all secretaries working for the T4 programme. A stenographer in the *Gemeinnützige Stiftung für Anstaltspflege*, Gertraud Friedle worked in various subdivisions of this department from November 1940 until April 1943. During this time, Friedle worked in the Grafeneck, Hadamar and Bernburg centres, as well as the T4 headquarters in Berlin. On the journey to her first secondment, Friedle was informed that the insane were gassed there. Friedle felt uneasy but she was reassured that she would have nothing to do with the gassing. Her primary task was the establishment and maintenance of a book recording those who died, the cause and date of their death.¹⁴⁶ As a stenotypist at the Hadamar centre, she wrote *Trostbriefe*, death certificates and notifications to

¹⁴¹ "eine Aktion zur Erlösung unheilbar Geisteskranker lief", testimony of Gertrud Kallmeyer, February 27, 1961, BArch B 162/4339 (Ludwigsburg).

¹⁴² Burleigh, *Death and Deliverance*, pp.47, 186.

¹⁴³ "Selbstverständlich ist möglich", testimony of Irmgard Schroeder, February 27, 1961, BArch B 162/4339 (Ludwigsburg).

¹⁴⁴ Testimony of Erika Seeger, March 1, 1961, BArch B 162/4339 (Ludwigsburg).

¹⁴⁵ Testimony of Irmgard Raabe, March 1, 1961, BArch B 162/4339 (Ludwigsburg).

¹⁴⁶ Testimony of Gertraud Friedle, June 23, 1960, BArch B 162/1602 (Ludwigsburg).

the registrars in the places of birth of those who died. The *Trostbriefe* stated that the patient had been transferred to Hadamar and became ill there, dying of a specified disease, despite medical efforts to save the patient's life. The family were given the opportunity to request the patient's ashes, and if they did not take up the offer, the ashes were buried in the prison cemetery at Hadamar. At each of the institutions, Grafeneck, Bernburg and Hadamar, Friedle was aware that the patients were killed in a mock shower by gas. She testified that "she was not very comfortable in her own skin", as she "could not endorse this approach to the mentally ill". She claimed not to have witnessed any of the murders.¹⁴⁷

Women working in the Department for Polish Affairs, Office IVD2 of the *Gestapo*, handled paperwork which made clear to them the nature of the work their department carried out. Considering the cases of Poles who had transgressed Nazi rules and regulations, those who were investigated included Poles who had sexual relations with German women, those involved in espionage, sabotage, and Polish underground organisations. Following the shooting of two German soldiers in Warsaw, 20 Poles were arrested as hostages and their names were sent with photographs to the department. According to Brunhilde Schreck, an administrator processing the paperwork, Himmler ordered that 18 of the men should be shot, and two men should be transferred to Auschwitz for "Germanisation", the assimilation of racially suitable candidates into the German Reich. Schreck affirmed that Himmler chose the two who "looked the best",¹⁴⁸ or those who looked the most German.¹⁴⁹

The punishment for Polish men engaging in sexual relationships with German women was execution. The female administrators working in the Department for Polish Affairs wrote the execution orders, which stated that:

¹⁴⁷ "mir persönlich war nicht ganz wohl in meiner Haut", "das Vorgehen gegenüber den Geisteskranken nicht billigen konnte", *ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ "nach am besten aussahen", testimony of Brunhilde Schreck, July 29, 1966, BArch B 162/4559 (Ludwigsburg).

¹⁴⁹ Testimony of Waleska Bambowsky, March 5, 1955, BArch B 162/4553 (Ludwigsburg).

“The leader of the SS and German Police has ordered that ... is to be executed because of sexual intercourse with ... The execution is to take place by hanging”.¹⁵⁰

Erna Groth, an administrator in the department, had seen the relevant files; indeed, virtually all the office staff had seen these files. She asserted that every woman in her office was aware of the execution of Poles who had a physical relationship with a German woman.¹⁵¹ Susanne Surkau was informed of the executions by a male colleague, Thomsen, who indicated that those who had been executed at concentration camps would be burned, with the dead women placed on the outside, “because they would burn better”.¹⁵² When Anneliese Schneider asked her boss, Steffen, what would happen to the Poles, he told her that they would either be sent to concentration camps, or hung, regardless “of whose fault the intimate acts were”.¹⁵³

Irrefutable evidence of the punishments was provided by photographs of hanged Poles enclosed within the files. Administrators accessing these images would consequently be aware that the majority of the executions took place in concentration camps, and that camp inmates were led past the hanged men. Ingeborg Döring “had the files, which concerned the executions, in my hands”. The files contained interviews, reports prepared to assess eligibility for Germanisation, and photographs of executed Poles.¹⁵⁴ Irene Erbe saw pictures in which the hanged Poles were surrounded by a circle of their compatriots.¹⁵⁵ Waleska Bambowsky recalled that the whole process was photographed: the announcement of the death

¹⁵⁰ “Der Reichsführer der SS und Deutschen Polizei hat befohlen, daß ... wegen des Geschlechtsverkehrs mit zu exekutieren ist. Die Exekution ist durch Erhängen zu vollziehen”, testimony of Brunhilde Schreck, July 3, 1968, BArch B 162/4559 (Ludwigsburg).

¹⁵¹ “Praktische alle Kanzleikräfte haben die Akten auch eingesehen”, testimony of Erna Groth, August 19, 1966, BArch B 162/4556 (Ludwigsburg).

¹⁵² “weil diese besser brennen würden”, testimony of Susanne Surkau, August 30, 1966, BArch B 162/4559 (Ludwigsburg).

¹⁵³ “aus wessen Verschulden es zu den intimen Handlungen gekommen sei”, testimony of Anneliese Schneider, June 11, 1969, BArch B 162/4558 (Ludwigsburg).

¹⁵⁴ “habe auch Vorgänge, die Exekutionen betrafen in die Hand bekommen”, testimony of Ingeborg Döring, March 9, 1967, BArch B 162/4555 (Ludwigsburg).

¹⁵⁵ Testimony of Irene Erbe, August 7, 1968, BArch B 162/4555 (Ludwigsburg).

sentence, the Poles hung on the scaffolding, and the Poles in wooden crate coffins.¹⁵⁶

Germanisation offered an opportunity for salvation from execution. The decision depended upon a racial assessment, which was known by “virtually all the women in the office, from the files”.¹⁵⁷ An SS man, either a doctor or an employee of the RuSHA, would inspect the condemned Polish man to determine if Germanisation was viable. Erika Schimmelpfennig recalled that her boss, Betz, would examine photographs of Poles in her presence, and would occasionally comment that one of them “looks very German and Nordic, and would be suitable for Germanisation”.¹⁵⁸ However, Waleska Bambowsky asserted in her testimony that, while she worked in the department, it was rare for Poles accused of sexual intercourse with a German to escape the gallows in this manner. She was not able to recall a single case where Germanisation played a role, and she stated that these cases “as measured by the number of executions, were negligible”.¹⁵⁹

The women working in these departments were aware of German women who had sexual relations with Poles, and the punishments which they received as deterrents to other women: their hair was cut and they were driven through their home village to shame them. According to RSHA employees Ingeborg Döring and Brunhilde Schreck, some were also sent to Ravensbrück concentration camp.¹⁶⁰ If the woman was pregnant, an abortion was ordered, unless the Pole was selected for Germanisation, in which case the couple might be given permission to marry.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁶ Testimony of Waleska Bambowsky, March 5, 1965, BArch B 162/4553 (Ludwigsburg).

¹⁵⁷ “praktisch auch alle Damen in der Kanzlei aus den Akten”, testimony of Erna Groth, August 19, 1966, BArch B 162/4556 (Ludwigsburg).

¹⁵⁸ “sieht ja ganz deutsch und nordisch aus, und wäre zur Eindeutschung geeignet”, testimony of Erika Schimmelpfennig, October 13, 1968, BArch B 162/4558 (Ludwigsburg).

¹⁵⁹ “gemessen an der Zahl der Exekutionen verschwindend gering”, testimony of Waleska Bambowsky, November 14, 1968, BArch B 162/4553 (Ludwigsburg).

¹⁶⁰ Testimony of Ingeborg Döring, June 27, 1968, BArch B 162/4555 (Ludwigsburg), and testimony of Brunhilde Schreck, July 3, 1968, BArch B 162/4559 (Ludwigsburg).

¹⁶¹ Testimony of Irene Erbe, August 7, 1968, BArch B 162/4555 (Ludwigsburg).

Female administrators in a variety of RSHA departments witnessed the preparations for execution and torture. Elisabeth Kehrein recalled the execution of five or six male foreign workers in the Koblenz State Police Station condemned for relations with German women. Kehrein, an administrator for the station, observed the execution squad leaving the department with portable gallows, en route to the execution site.¹⁶² A male colleague of Dorothea Fibrantz, in the department Fibrantz referred to as “the so-called Ukrainian Affairs department”, told her that he had “hammered a nail into the wall”. If a Ukrainian man who had been brought in for questioning did not speak, he would be hung from the nail.¹⁶³ Working for a *Sonderkommando* in Paris, Waleska Bambowsky sat in the anteroom and “was not an eyewitness but rather an ear-witness to the terrible abuses which took place in the interrogation room”. On one occasion she was a witness; she saw a female Russian doctor, who had been suspected of espionage, cowering, and tied to the heating pipes, where she had to remain all day. In a different department whilst still in Paris, Bambowsky recalled the detention, beating and execution of a British parachutist who had fallen behind enemy lines.¹⁶⁴

In preparation for deportation, Jews were gathered in ghettos and holding camps and subjected to inhumane conditions. Occasionally, secretaries saw these conditions for themselves. One morning shortly before *Kristallnacht*, Hildegard Topel arrived at the office where she was employed as a government clerk, to see a large number of Jews herded into the entrance hall. The Jews were being pushed about by SS men with guns; they were forced to bow and were harassed.¹⁶⁵ Taking the tram to work, Godlewski passed by the ghetto in Łódź on a daily basis and saw the crowded conditions inside.¹⁶⁶ Returning Eichmann’s keys to him during a

¹⁶² Testimony of Elisabeth Kehrein, December 6, 1967, BArch B 162/4557 (Ludwigsburg).

¹⁶³ “die sogenannten Ukrainer-Angelegenheiten”, “einen Nagel in die Wand eingeschlagen”, testimony of Dorothea Fibrantz, July 24, 1969, BArch B 162/4555 (Ludwigsburg).

¹⁶⁴ “wurde zwar nicht Augen - doch Ohrenzeuge der furchtbaren Misshandlungen, die im Vernehmungszimmer erfolgten”, testimony of Waleska Bambowsky, March 5, 1965, BArch B 162/4553 (Ludwigsburg).

¹⁶⁵ Testimony of Hildegard Topel, October 17, 1967, BArch B 162/4174 (Ludwigsburg).

¹⁶⁶ Testimony of Rosemarie von Godlewski, June 12, 1967, LG Berlin, 3P Ks 1/71 gegen Otto Bovensiepen und andere, Bd. XXXIII, pp. 297-304.

deportation, Elisabeth Marks was moved to tears as she witnessed Jewish men, women and children, “being herded like cattle into trucks” and taken away.¹⁶⁷

Johanna Heym’s place of work provided her with the opportunity to observe the full extent of the conditions inside a holding camp. The Jews slept on the bare ground if they had not brought their own blankets. During the so-called ‘factory-actions’ of February 1943, codenamed by the *Gestapo* as the ‘Final Roundup of the Jews’, the remaining Jews of Berlin, most of whom were either in forced labour in armaments factories, or were married to non-Jews, were arrested,¹⁶⁸ and the rooms at the holding camp became overfilled. There were always four or five policemen on duty at the entrance to the camp, and the ground floor windows were barred. Heym witnessed the transportations of the Jews on several occasions. She saw how Jews were closely packed into moving vans and then driven to the pickup station, where the trains were ready and waiting. From time to time, her boss, Dobberke, would watch the loading of the transport, and on one such occasion Heym joined him, observing that Jews were crammed into the goods wagon in such a way that they could only stand. If the transport was destined for Theresienstadt, a conventional train was used; however, a goods train was used if the destination was Auschwitz. The majority of transports departing from Schul Straße were destined for Auschwitz. Heym believed that Schul Straße was used less frequently than Groß Hamburger Straße and consequently the prisoners remained for extended periods in the camp as there was a longer gap between transports; the transports went to Auschwitz approximately every two months and typically included no more than 50 Jews.¹⁶⁹

Many secretaries heard that their supervisors physically hit Jews; some witnessed this for themselves. Margarete Schindler was taken to a holding camp in

¹⁶⁷ “die unter Gebrüll wie Vieh auf Lastwagen gepfercht wurden”, testimony of Elisabeth Marks, January 25, 1971 and September 3, 1970, LG Berlin, 3P Ks 1/71 gegen Otto Bovensiepen und andere, Sonderband II, pp. 64-71g. It is not possible to determine from the source why the keys were important to Eichmann.

¹⁶⁸ Nathan Stoltzfus, *Resistance of the Heart. Inter-marriage and the Rosenstrasse Protest in Nazi Germany* (New York and London: Norton, 1996), pp.xv-xvii.

¹⁶⁹ Testimony of Johanna Heym, June 14, 1966, LG Berlin, 3P Ks 1/71 gegen Otto Bovensiepen und andere, Bd. XIX, pp. 125-148.

Berlin, with one of her bosses, Schwöbel, to record an interrogation. Schwöbel possessed a reputation for brutal treatment of Jewish prisoners. While in the camp, Schindler watched as her boss beat a Jewish girl until she lost consciousness.¹⁷⁰ Heym was aware that in both the Groß Hamburger Straße and the Schul Straße holding camps imprisoned Jews were beaten on occasion. She was an eyewitness to this once, when Dobberke hit a Jewish woman in her face, in Schul Straße. The Jewess, a young girl, had insulted Dobberke; Heym believed that she called him an SS pig. As a consequence, she was sent to Ravensbrück concentration camp, although Heym doubted that this was at Dobberke's instigation. He "cursed and raged, but left it at that".¹⁷¹

The incidents the female secretaries witnessed were not isolated; Jews working alongside the female administrators informed them of the abuse they suffered. The technical director of the RSHA in-house Jewish work detail, Pinkus, complained repeatedly to Elisabeth Marks, about her boss, Otto Hunsche. The head of IV B 4b, a sub-section of Eichmann's department, Hunsche oversaw Fritz Wöhrn, Ernst Moes, and Richard Gutwasser, taking responsibility for Jewish Affairs: matters concerning the Jews but not their deportation.¹⁷² Pinkus told Marks that Hunsche was feared and despised because he so often harassed the work detail, frequently yelling at and beating Jewish workers. Marks had no doubts about the credibility of Pinkus's accusations, having personally witnessed Hunsche hit a Jew.¹⁷³ Although Heym was not aware of a specific agenda to mistreat the Jews within the holding camp, many of them "complained vehemently" to Heym that they had been beaten by Schwöbel,¹⁷⁴ and Heym knew that it was commonplace for the Jews to be insulted with terms such as "Jewish pig". Heym was mindful of the feelings among the Jews imprisoned at the holding camp. Theresienstadt was known amongst

¹⁷⁰ Testimony of Margarete Schindler, June 8, 1967, LG Berlin, 3P Ks 1/71 gegen Otto Bovensiepen und andere, Bd. XXXII, pp.45-49.

¹⁷¹ "schimpfte und tobte zwar, liess es aber dabei bewenden", testimony of Johanna Heym, June 14, 1966, LG Berlin, 3P Ks 1/71 gegen Otto Bovensiepen und andere, Bd. XIX, pp. 125-148.

¹⁷² Lozowick, *Hitler's Bureaucrats*, pp. 94-96.

¹⁷³ Testimony of Elisabeth Marks, January 25, 1971 and September 3, 1970, LG Berlin, 3P Ks 1/71 gegen Otto Bovensiepen und andere, Sonderband II, pp. 64-71g.

¹⁷⁴ "darüber beschwerte", testimony of Johanna Heym, June 14, 1966, LG Berlin, 3P Ks 1/71 gegen Otto Bovensiepen und andere, Bd. XIX, pp. 125-148.

prisoners as “the good camp”, albeit relatively, while everyone was afraid of being deported to Auschwitz, believing it to be purely a labour camp, where they would be worked inhumanely. She conversed with Jewish prisoners, such as Kurt Naumann, a prisoner who ran errands for her and Dobberke, and from these conversations she gathered that the prisoners did not comprehend the fate awaiting them in Auschwitz.¹⁷⁵

The workforce at Wulkow consisted of approximately 250 German Jews, including 20 Jewish women sent from Theresienstadt. According to Ruth Tilgner, an administrator at the camp, Wulkow was very popular with the prisoners because “they were treated relatively well there”.¹⁷⁶ Although it was forbidden for Tilgner to speak to any of the Jews, Ursula Rogge, working as a *Mädchen für alles* in Wulkow camp was assigned a Jewish woman, Liesel, as an auxiliary. Liesel confirmed that the Jews at Wulkow “were happy to report there”, because of the conditions at Theresienstadt: many thousands of Jews were housed there, “hideous conditions prevailed” and there had been epidemics in which many people had died.¹⁷⁷

Some administrators worked alongside Jews whose perceived usefulness granted them a temporary reprieve from persecution. These women were aware that a bad fate awaited the Jews once they became ‘worthless’. Margaret Russin recalled that a Jewish woman, Stella Kübler, worked for Dobberke, in the Department for Jewish Affairs, tracking down Jews in hiding. Kübler was “a beautiful person”, who “did not wear a Jewish star”.¹⁷⁸ Another Jew, Neumann, who acted as an errand boy for the department, also did not wear the star.¹⁷⁹ In Russin’s opinion, Neumann was not deported because he made himself useful to the department and procured items which were not readily available. On one

¹⁷⁵ “gutes Lager”, *ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ “sie es verhältnismäßig gut dort hatten”, testimony of Ruth Tilgner, October 15, 1965, BArch B 162 4174 (Ludwigsburg).

¹⁷⁷ “sich gerne dorthin gemeldet”, “scheußliche Zustände herrschten”, testimony of Ursula Rogge on September 7, 1967, BArch B 162/4173 (Ludwigsburg).

¹⁷⁸ “eine hübsch Person”, “keinen Judenstern trug”, testimony of Margaret Russin, November 6, 1968, BArch B 162/4173 (Ludwigsburg). For more information on Stella Kübler, and her wartime activities, see Peter Wyden, *Stella* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992).

¹⁷⁹ N.B. This is probably the same man Heym refers to as ‘Kurt Naumann’.

occasion, he even managed to acquire a doll for Russin's daughter's birthday.¹⁸⁰ In Ukraine, Anneliese Engler and her colleagues lived in a communal house and had a Jewish housekeeper who served them, and a shoemaker who made shoes for the workers. The shoemaker was permitted to remain, despite being Jewish, because "they needed him and consequently they let him live: [there was] no other shoemaker". When men came to the house seeking to take the Jews away, Engler claims that she hid the housekeeper, who remained in hiding for approximately two years before she was able to flee.¹⁸¹

Certain secretaries were afforded a more active role in the process of persecution. On four occasions, each time in the evening and lasting well into the night, Ingrid Kölz assisted in a synagogue with preparations for deportations. Her role was to ensure that the female Jews listed for deportation were present. As those Jews were stripped of their valuables and as female detectives randomly searched them, Kölz stood by, observing. She heard that the Jews were being transported to a camp near Riga, and to Theresienstadt. When she later worked at the *Gestapo*, she was officially informed that the elderly Jews were taken to Theresienstadt while the others would be taken to Poland, Latvia and Russia where they would be put to work.¹⁸²

Most of the women administrating for the RSHA were tasked with typing, dictating and answering telephones. The many women came from a variety of backgrounds, and were equipped with varying degrees of skills, abilities, and interest in their work. However, it is clear that most of the female administrators at the RSHA knew to some degree of the persecution of the Jews and other minorities. Even those who were young when their employment started and perhaps had a lack of interest in their work could not ignore what was in front of them. In some cases, the evidence was all too obvious: the women processed paperwork

¹⁸⁰ Testimony of Margaret Russin, November 6, 1968, BArch B 162/4173 (Ludwigsburg).

¹⁸¹ "Das haben wir gebracht und das haben wir leben lassen: Keine andere schuhmacher", author interview, June 2011.

¹⁸² Testimony of Ingrid Kölz, October 27, 1967, LG Berlin, 3P Ks 1/71 gegen Otto Bovensiepen und andere, Bd. XXXIII, pp. 199-206.

authorizing executions; they saw the execution squad with their gallows; they saw photographs of the executions. The women working at the RSHA could not deny that the Nazis were active in their policies of persecution, and these women were part of the perpetrator apparatus. The International Military Tribunal for the Trial of German Major War Criminals issued their judgment in 1946 that the RSHA “played a leading part in the ‘final solution’ of the Jewish question by the extermination of the Jews”.¹⁸³ The administrators employed by the RSHA typed deportation lists, registered death notices, and took the minutes of interrogations of Jews: their contribution to the RSHA’s role is undeniable.

Once they were aware of the true nature of their work, each female administrator faced an uncomfortable choice. They could continue with their work, ignoring what they knew. They could attempt to find out more, to confirm that which they had seen, read or heard. A more dangerous course was to take action, to speak out, or to leave their job. The next chapter will assess the options available to the women, the courses of action which they decided to take, and the ensuing repercussions.

¹⁸³ International Military Tribunal, *Trial of the Major War Criminals Before the International Military Tribunal: Nuremberg, 14 November 1945 – 1 October 1946, Volume XVII* (Nuremberg, 1948).

Chapter 4: Secretaries, Secrets and Genocide

While the secretaries of the RSHA were not generally able to quantify the victims, or confirm the existence of all the concentration camps, their post-war testimony shows that many of them had some knowledge of the atrocities committed against Jews and other groups. Once they were armed with this information, each secretary had an uncomfortable choice to make: to continue with their job and accept, or ignore, what was taking place; or to take action, however limited. For some, action may have been restricted to simply questioning their bosses, or the recruitment office. A number of secretaries did everything they could to leave their jobs, once they were aware of the full and true nature of the work they were involved in. Other secretaries felt unable to question their managers, for fear of the consequences.

Although disturbed by the rumours they had heard and the incidents they had seen, many secretaries were reluctant to take action lest they suffer the consequences. Johanna Martha Greifendorf, working in the Department for Jewish Affairs, harboured apprehensions about the fate of the Jews, and suspected that some of her colleagues felt the same, but she did not discuss her feelings, or the remarks she heard, with anybody for fear of the repercussions.¹ While working for the *Umwandererzentralstelle* in Łódź, Rosemarie von Godlewski had heard rumours of large numbers of Jews being murdered but was unable to gain concrete facts through her colleagues, “because you risked possibly your head and your neck”.²

Secretaries who recalled such apprehension expressed particular anxiety about the possibility of being sent to a concentration camp as punishment. Elisabeth Marks, who worked in the Department for Jewish Affairs, did not divulge what she knew about the suffocation of Jews in gas trucks with anyone outside of

¹ Testimony of Johanna Martha Greifendorf, June 7, 1967, Topography of Terrors Archive (LG Berlin), 3P Ks 1/71 gegen Otto Bovensiepen und andere, Bd. XXXII, pp. 153-159.

² “weil man möglicherweise selbst Kopf und Kragen riskierte”, testimony of Rosemarie von Godlewski, June 12, 1967, LG Berlin, 3P Ks 1/71 gegen Otto Bovensiepen und andere, Bd. XXXIII pp. 297-304.

her workplace, not even to her fiancé, a soldier in the Wehrmacht, because she feared the consequences, “such as concentration camps and the like”.³ Brunhilde Schreck, an administrator in the Department for Polish Affairs, felt that “no employee of the RSHA could refuse to do the work assigned to them”. During her time working for the RSHA, circulars were passed around to every staff member stating that in the case of insubordination or arbitrary work stoppage, there was the threat of detention in a concentration camp.⁴ Marie Knispel, who processed death certificates in the Department for Jewish Affairs, did not dare to talk about what she knew; she had been told by her superiors that she would end up in a concentration camp if she did not remain silent.⁵ Eva Nöthling, who worked as a secretary in a variety of departments in the RSHA, recalled in her testimony an incident in which a clerk of Himmler’s made a suggestion which did not accord with Himmler’s views. This “caused considerable excitement” as colleagues discussed, and feared, that the person responsible could be significantly disadvantaged, and “there was even talk of an introduction to a concentration camp”. This was averted, however, when Heydrich arrived and took responsibility for the clerk.⁶

The women of the RSHA legitimately feared punishment. The threat of the concentration camp reverberated throughout those working for the Nazis: concentration camp guards were themselves warned that they would be interned if they did not adhere to the rules. Anna Fest, who became a guard at Ravensbrück women’s concentration camp, was warned not to complain about the treatment of the prisoners, unless she wanted “to be on the inside too”,⁷ and she was informed that many others had rebelled and had been made prisoners themselves.⁸ While

³ “wie KZ und dergleichen”, testimony of Elisabeth Marks, January 25, 1971 and September 3, 1970, LG Berlin, 3P Ks 1/71 gegen Otto Bovensiepen und andere, Sonderband II, pp. 64-71g.

⁴ “kein Angehöriger des RSHA sich weigern konnte, die ihm aufgetragenen Arbeiten zu erledigen”, testimony of Brunhilde Schreck, July 3, 1968, Bundesarchiv (BArch) B 162/4559 (Ludwigsburg).

⁵ Testimony of Marie Knispel, November 3, 1967, BArch B 162/4169 (Ludwigsburg).

⁶ “herrschte erhebliche Aufregung”, “es wurde sogar von der Einweisung in ein KL gesprochen”, testimony of Eva Nöthling, September 25, 1969, BArch B 162/4557 (Ludwigsburg).

⁷ Interview with the author, Alison Owings, *Frauen German. Women Recall the Third Reich* (New Brunswick, New Jersey, Rutgers University Press, 1994), pp.317-318.

⁸ For an example of a guard who was put inside a camp, see Rudolf Höss, *Death Dealer: the Memoirs of the SS Kommandant at Auschwitz*, Steven Paskuly, ed., translated by Andrew Pollinger (New York: Da Capo Press, 1996), p.149.

the women at the RSHA may not have been able to determine whether their warnings were empty threats, concentration camps featured in the German press,⁹ serving as a further deterrent to anyone who might consider taking action against the state.

Some women reluctant to work for the RSHA attempted, unsuccessfully, to decline their conscription orders. Conscripted in early 1943, Johanna Heym was sent to the holding camp in Berlin as an office worker. Until that point, she was unaware that such a camp existed. The idea of working there “caused me discomfort” – suggesting some prior knowledge of what a holding camp might entail – and so she refused to go. Her objection was to no avail.¹⁰ When Johanna Quandt was conscripted to the Department for Jewish Affairs in the summer of 1940, she knew that Jews were being persecuted and found the idea of working in this department “sinister”. She reported her concerns to the employment office but was informed that she had to go where she was conscripted.¹¹ Neither woman was punished for their attempt to avoid their assignment to a particular job.

Discomfort with the work of their department prompted a number of secretaries to request transfers elsewhere. When her department relocated from Berlin to Theresienstadt,¹² Marie Knispel did not want to go, because she had learnt, both “privately and through work” that Theresienstadt was a Jewish ghetto and the Jews there endured extremely poor conditions. She requested a transfer to a different department within the RSHA, in Berlin.¹³ Finding her work in the Department for Polish Affairs “too cruel”, Waleska Bambowsky requested, and was granted, a transfer. She was sent to work for a *Sonderkommando* in Paris, in autumn 1943, where she heard “terrible abuses taking place in the interrogation

⁹ Robert Gellately, *Backing Hitler. Consent and Coercion in Nazi Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), chapter 3, “Concentration Camps and Media Reports”.

¹⁰ “bereitete mir Unbehagen”, testimony of Johanna Heym, June 14, 1966, LG Berlin, 3P Ks 1/71 gegen Otto Bovensiepen und andere, Bd. XIX, pp.125-148.

¹¹ “unheimlich”, testimony of Johanna Quandt, January 4, 1968, LG Berlin, 3P Ks 1/71 gegen Otto Bovensiepen und andere, Bd. XXXIV, pp.227-235.

¹² For more information on the relocation of this, and other RSHA departments, see chapter 6.

¹³ “privat und dienstlich”, testimony of Marie Knispel, April 23, 1970, LG Berlin, 3P Ks 1/71 gegen Otto Bovensiepen und andere, Bd. 80, pp.131-135.

room”.¹⁴ After nine months she could not endure it any longer and requested a transfer back to Berlin. As such requests could have been perceived as *Dienstverweigerung*, there was an element of risk for Bambowsky. She was transferred to another office, in Paris. Neither Bambowsky nor Knispel suffered any repercussions for their applications to move departments.

Transfer requests were not always readily accepted. Gertrude Krohn felt “burdened” by her work in the RSHA and so she requested a transfer, yet this was denied.¹⁵ When Erika Scholz became aware that Jews were being murdered, she tried repeatedly to leave her job in the Department for Jewish Affairs. Despite several attempts, she was unsuccessful but was eventually transferred to a different department.¹⁶ Once she had witnessed her boss physically attacking a Jew, Margarete Schindler chose to no longer work for him, and suffered no repercussions as a result of her decision. She remained in the same department but instead worked for other men.¹⁷

Despite the climate of fear, some women risked conversations with female colleagues, providing an opportunity to express concern and share information about the nature of their assignments. Erna Groth and her fellow stenotypists occasionally discussed the execution of Poles found guilty of intimate relations with German women. Specifically, they questioned “why would a man be so severely punished for consensual sexual intercourse”.¹⁸ A clerk in the Protective Custody Affairs Department, Hildegard Hartke reflected with trusted colleagues that it was not correct to place Jews in concentration camps, “just because they were Jews”, and leave them to die there. They knew that these sentiments should not be stated

¹⁴ “zu grausam”, “furchtbaren Misshandlungen, die im Vernehmungszimmer erfolgten”, testimony of Waleska Bambowsky, March 5, 1965, BArch B 162/4553 (Ludwigsburg).

¹⁵ “belastet”, testimony of Gertrude Krohn, November 1, 1967, BArch B 162/4169 (Ludwigsburg).

¹⁶ Testimony of Erika Scholz, September 19, 1967, LG Berlin, 3P Ks 1/71 gegen Otto Bovensiepen und andere, Bd. XXXVII, pp.32-35.

¹⁷ Testimony of Margarete Schindler, September 13, 1967, LG Berlin, 3P Ks 1/71 gegen Otto Bovensiepen und andere, Bd. XXXII, pp. 50-60.

¹⁸ “weshalb ein Mann wegen einverständlichen Geschlechtsverkehr so hart bestraft würde”, testimony of Erna Groth, November 11, 1968, BArch B 162/4556 (Ludwigsburg).

aloud, and so they swore each other to secrecy.¹⁹ Hildegard Topel, a government clerk, saw reports which noted that large quantities of people, mostly Jews, had “been liquidated through shooting”. Topel occasionally discussed these reports with her colleague Gertrude Krohn, with whom she shared a room. She did not speak about the reports with other colleagues because they were younger and she had little contact with them.²⁰ These women were taking a calculated risk by discussing their work. They only chose trusted colleagues to confide in, and perhaps by voicing their concerns they felt a sense of relief, that they were, in some small way, challenging the authorities.

Some secretaries turned to male colleagues to establish whether there was any truth in the rumours they had heard. On one occasion, Herta Maier saw that an old woman was listed to join a Jewish transport to Poland. This prompted her to ask a worker in her office about the prospective fate of the Jews being transported. Maier was informed that they were being taken to Poland in order to work there and that their removal was necessary, “so as not to undermine military strength in the Reich”.²¹

Despite the fear of consequences, some secretaries did attempt to probe their bosses for more information. Ilse Borchert, working in the Department for Jewish Affairs, had heard rumours of screaming coming from a concentration camp. Finding these hard to believe, she took the unusual step of asking her male boss, Rolf Günther, to quell her doubts. Rolf Günther, as Adolf Eichmann’s deputy in the RSHA Department for Jewish Affairs, was well placed to answer Borchert’s questions. Günther had attended a meeting in Prague on October 10, 1941, in which Heydrich had discussed the problems associated with the proposed deportations of the remaining 88,000 Jews in the Protectorate region. In January

¹⁹ “nur weil sie Juden waren”, testimony of Hildegard Hartke, June 21, 1968, BAArch B 162/4556 (Ludwigsburg).

²⁰ “durch erschießen liquidiert hatte”, testimony of Hildegard Topel, October 17, 1967, BAArch B 162/4174 (Ludwigsburg).

²¹ “damit im Reichsgebiet die Wehrkraft nicht zersetzt werde”, testimony of Herta Maier, September 29, 1967, BAArch B 162/4170 (Ludwigsburg).

1943, he was sent to Greece to oversee the deportations of the Jews in Salonika.²² He was surprisingly frank in his response to Borchert, informing her that the conditions in concentration camps were hard: the Jews had little to eat, were worked excessively, and collapsed frequently. This admission was accompanied by an admonition: he told her not to think about such things and not to ask so much, warning her that it would be better for her if she knew as little as possible. This confirmed for her that Jews were dying in the concentration camps as a result of the conditions.²³

Seemingly unperturbed by the warning, Borchert proceeded to question another of her bosses, Ernst Moes, about the fate of the Jews in the concentration camps. He explained to Borchert that for the Jews it was “hell on earth”. Frequently checking the age of Jews in protective custody, Moes gave Borchert the impression that he preferred to send older Jews to concentration camps, as they would not have to endure the horrors for as long.²⁴

Elsa Heine, a filing assistant, stated to her boss, Wilhelm Kube, that “Jews are human beings too”. Kube, the head of the sub-section of the Department for Jewish Affairs responsible for regulating the citizenship laws,²⁵ informed Heine that she did not understand, as she had a “feminine viewpoint”. He advised her to not feel sorry for the Jews and that any assets recovered from them were deserved.²⁶ Kube, ironically, seems to have been a little outspoken himself at times. On November 1, 1942, he sent a letter to Hinrich Lohse, who was responsible for the Reichskommissariat Ostland, complaining about the methods used by some SS units: “To bury the mortally wounded alive is an obscenity of the first order”.²⁷

²² Hans Safrian, *Eichmann's Men*, translated by Ute Stargardt (New York: Cambridge University Press, in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2010), pp.57, 61, 89, 154.

²³ Testimony of Ilse Borchert, October 11, 1967, BArch B 162/4162 (Ludwigsburg).

²⁴ “Hölle auf Erden”, testimony of Ilse Borchert, October 11, 1967, BArch B 162/4162 (Ludwigsburg).

²⁵ Yaacov Lozowick, *Hitler's Bureaucrats: The Nazi Security Police and the Banality of Evil*, translated by Haim Watzman (London; New York: Continuum, 2002), p. 97.

²⁶ “Juden doch auch Menschen sein”, “fraulichen Standpunkt”, testimony of Elsa Heine, June 21, 1966, BArch B 162/4168 (Ludwigsburg).

²⁷ Internationaler Militärgerichtshof *Der Prozeß gegen die Hauptkriegsverbrecher vor dem Internationalen Militärgerichtshof* (Nuremberg: Internationaler Militärgerichtshof, 1947-1949) 27, 2-3 cited in Safrian, *Eichmann's Men*, p.103.

Later, when he was the Reich Kommissar of White Ruthenia, Kube refused to issue the order for the murder of certain German Jews, including World War 1 veterans; while he did not object to the Final Solution in principle, he did differentiate between German Jews and Russian Jews.²⁸ Whatever his sentiments, Kube was fully aware of the acts of persecution taking place, as he was able to inform Lohse that “10,000 Jews had been liquidated” as part of a murder action at the end of July 1942, and that “in the previous ten weeks about 55,000 Jews had been liquidated”.²⁹ There is an interesting parallel in the conduct of Kube and Heine: both offered objections to the treatment of Jews, yet both continued to carry out the tasks required of them.

Liesbeth Baesecke asked her boss, Fritz Wöhrn, to justify the quantity of Jews being sent to concentration camps, speculating that the camps would surely soon be full. Her questioning was prompted by the fact that she felt it was “funny, that the Jews should be taken into protective custody, when their crimes were not so big”. Wöhrn replied that there was plenty of room.³⁰ As she continued to work at the RSHA, her curiosity did not appear to cause her any significant problems.

Over time, Johanna Heym’s relationship with her boss, Dobberke, improved, primarily when his flat was bombed and he stayed in Heym’s parents’ apartment for a few months. Their connection facilitated a fluidity of conversation between them; Heym was able to pose questions to Dobberke, and he volunteered information to her. In this way, Heym was able to find out more about the true nature of Auschwitz, without adverse consequences. On one occasion, Dobberke informed Heym that between ten and twelve Jews had been mistakenly taken to

²⁸ YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, New York, Occ E 3-36, letter of Generalkommissar of Belorussia, Minsk, December 16 1941, to Reichkommissar Hinrich Lohse, signed by Wilhelm Kube, cited in Safrian, *Eichmann’s Men*, pp.106-7.

²⁹ YIVO Occ E 3-41, fol.3 and Nuremberg Doc. 3428-PS, IMT 32, 280-281, report from Generalkommissar Weißruthenien to Reichskommissar Ostland, July 31, 1942, regarding Combatting Partisans and Aktionen against Jews in the General District White Ruthenia, signed by Kube, cited in Safrian, *Eichmann’s Men*, p.127.

³⁰ “komisch vorgekommen, dass die Juden in Schutzhaft genommen werden sollten, wo doch ihr Vergehen gar nicht so gross war”, testimony of Liesbeth Baesecke, June 20, 1967, LG Berlin, 3P Ks 1/71 gegen Otto Bovensiepen und andere, Bd. XXXIII, pp. 10-15.

Auschwitz despite not meeting the necessary requirements. These Jews were sent back from Auschwitz to Berlin. To Heym's surprise, they were not immediately released, nor were they brought back to the camp in Groß Hamburger Straße; instead they were taken to the work camp in Wulheide. Following a conversation with Dobberke, Heym deduced that this was because the Jews had seen Auschwitz, and they had to be prevented from reporting what they had witnessed. Heym herself did not know what they had seen but assumed that the situation for Jews in Auschwitz was unpleasant. She claimed to have never had any idea that there were gas chambers in Auschwitz.³¹

Surreptitious investigation of confidential documentation provided another possible source of answers. Hildegard Topel had access to a number of confidential reports sent by the Security Police in Poland. She recalled in her testimony that her hair stood on end when she read these reports, but "back then you could not do anything and had to keep your mouth shut about such things". Topel heard rumours that Jews were taken away and killed, and that they were being gassed. As she had read reports about Jews being liquidated, and because "there was war and terrible things happened on both sides", she asserts that she took what she heard seriously, although there is no evidence in her testimony that she took any action.³²

Having witnessed a deportation, Elisabeth Marks was curious, and determined, to find out if it was just a one-off occurrence. She exploited any opportunity she could find to browse through files, including highly confidential documentation. On one occasion, she waited until a particular colleague, Martin, was absent and asked another colleague to act as a lookout. However, Martin had been conscientious, locking his safe containing the files on secret operations.

³¹ Testimony of Johanna Heym, June 14, 1966, LG Berlin, 3P Ks 1/71 gegen Otto Bovensiepen und andere, Bd. XIX, pp. 125-148.

³² "man konnta ja damals nichts unternehmen und mußte über solche Dinge den Mund halten", "es war ja Krieg und es passierten auf beiden Seiten schreckliche Dinge", testimony of Hildegard Topel, October 17, 1967, BArch B 162/4174 (Ludwigsburg).

Despite Marks “sniffing and snooping”, she was unable to uncover any of the secret documents.³³

Code words were used to conceal the true meaning of the work of certain RSHA departments. Some secretaries, realising that code words were being employed, endeavoured to determine their true meaning. Working in the Department for Jewish Affairs, Marie Knispel was aware of predecessors who spoke of “*Liquidierungen*”, “*Sonderbehandlung*” and “*Schutzhaft*”. She had no specific idea of the meaning of these terms, although she assumed it gave those who were labelled as such “serious disadvantages”.³⁴ She looked inside some of the records in her department to determine the actual meaning of the terms, eventually connecting the labels with the death of Jews. Knispel thought that the Jews were treated especially brutally, which “in most cases lead to their death.”³⁵ Knispel resisted delving for further information, as it was “bad enough”, that she dealt with death notices on a daily basis.³⁶ Ursula Fischer required “an intensive interrogation” before she was able to determine the meaning of the term “*Sonderbehandlung*”. She took an opportunity to “secretly glimpse at the secret operations”, which detailed the executions of Polish agricultural workers who had been intimate with German women. This confirmed for Fischer that “*Sonderbehandlung*” meant execution without court order.³⁷

Although Johanna Heym was not directly involved with protective custody matters, she was aware of the term “*Schutzhaft*”. Similarly, although she did not have to process any work concerned with the “*Sonderbehandlung*” operations, she gained knowledge of the term through her work in the holding camp in Groß Hamburger Straße, in Berlin. She initially thought that the term meant that

³³“schnüffeln und zu schmökern”, testimony of Elisabeth Marks, January 25, 1971 and September 3, 1970, LG Berlin, 3P Ks 1/71 gegen Otto Bovensiepen und andere, Sonderband II, pp. 64-71g.

³⁴“schweren Nachteilen”, testimony of Marie Knispel, April 23, 1970, LG Berlin, 3P Ks 1/71 gegen Otto Bovensiepen und andere, Bd. 80, pp. 131-135.

³⁵“in den meisten Fällen zu seinem Tode führte”, testimony of Marie Knispel, November 8, 1967, BArch B162/4169 (Ludwigsburg).

³⁶“schlimm genug”, testimony of Marie Knispel, November 8, 1967, BArch B162/4169 (Ludwigsburg).

³⁷“verschärfter Vernehmung”, “heimlich Einblick zu nehmen in geheime Vorgänge”, testimony of Ursula Fischer, September 27, 1966, BArch B 162/4555 (Ludwigsburg).

someone would receive benefits and remarked to her boss, Dobberke, that it was nice that when the Jews were sick they would be treated better. Dobberke laughed at her in response and explained that in reality it meant a death sentence. In one particular instance, when Dobberke told Heym that someone would be treated specially, it was clear to Heym that they “had been executed in Sachsenhausen”.³⁸

Having frequently read the term “*Sonderbehandlung*” without understanding its meaning, Erika Albrecht eventually queried the matter with her boss, Ernst Moes. Forbidden from answering her directly, Moes told Albrecht that she would understand the term by the phrase “he who is no longer alive, can no longer harm us”. Despite confusion as to the difference between “*Sonderbehandlungsanordnungen*” and “*Schutzhaft von Juden*”, due to the multiplicity of interviews by the prosecutor and the investigating judge, Albrecht was, at one such interview, able to clearly distinguish between the two. Both were punishments for, in Albrecht’s words, “mostly mere trifles”: “*Schutzhaft*” meant admission to a concentration camp, while “*Sonderbehandlung*” meant immediate death.³⁹

The imprisonment of Gemma LaGuardia Gluck, sister of Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia of New York, sparked curiosity in one employee. Hildegard Jürgenson was determined to find out what fate had befallen Gluck, who had been brought into the Department for Jewish Affairs with a young woman and infant.⁴⁰ Jürgenson knew that Gluck had been deported and she attempted to find out where she was sent and what happened to her, but this was “very difficult and lengthy”. Jürgenson believed that Gluck had been sent to Theresienstadt, but that she was put in quarantine. This was to give the impression that she had been sent to the East, where a far worse fate was likely to await her, while at the same time

³⁸ “in Sachsenhausen hingerichtet worden war”, testimony of Johanna Heym, June 14, 1966, LG Berlin, 3P Ks 1/71 gegen Otto Bovensiepen und andere, Bd. XIX, pp. 125-148.

³⁹ “wer nicht mehr lebt, kann uns nicht mehr schaden”, “meist reine Lappalien”, testimony of Erika Albrecht, October 24, 1967, LG Berlin, 3P Ks 1/71 gegen Otto Bovensiepen und andere, Bd. XXXVIII, pp. 127-148.

⁴⁰ Testimony of Elisabeth Marks, September 8, 1966, BArch B 162/4170 (Ludwigsburg).

she had been kept alive for a potential hostage exchange.⁴¹ Jürgenson was largely correct in her observations and assumptions. Initially, in June 1944, Gluck had been arrested, on Eichmann's orders, with her husband, in their home in Budapest.⁴² She was taken to Mauthausen concentration camp, and then onto Ravensbrück concentration camp, where she taught clandestine English classes. As the sister of the Mayor of New York, Gluck was, as Jürgenson suspected, considered for a hostage exchange and so in 1945, as Soviet soldiers approached Ravensbrück, she was brought to Berlin. Given that Eichmann had originally ordered Gluck's arrest, it is likely that she would have been brought to his workplace in the Department for Jewish Affairs, where Jürgenson was employed. Gluck was able to escape in the confusion at the end of the war, and after two difficult years was able to return to her family in America.⁴³

The gruesome detail of their workloads caused some secretaries to fall ill. Several women used this to their advantage, obtaining doctors' letters testifying that they were no longer fit for service. Dealing with death reports on a daily basis, Luise Hering came to the conclusion that terrible events took place in concentration camps, including the killing of Jews. The nature of her job and the knowledge she obtained were the reason that she took more sick leave and "the cause of my white hair".⁴⁴ After nine months in a third department proved no less palatable than her previous two roles, which had been "cruel" and "terrible", Waleska Bambowsky succeeded in securing the services of an SS doctor. He certified her as not being healthy enough to work and she was able to return to Berlin.⁴⁵ Johanna Quandt was successful in her attempts to ascertain the truth: she came to realise that the Jews would not leave the concentration camps and ghettos alive. When this realisation

⁴¹ "sehr schwierig und langwierig", testimony of Hildegard Jürgenson, September 4, 1967, BArch B 162/4168 (Ludwigsburg).

⁴² Gemma La Guardia Gluck, *My Story*, S. L. Shneiderman, ed. (New York: David McKay, 1961), pp.x-xi

⁴³ *Ibid.*, and Rochelle G. Sidel, *Fiorello's Sister: Gemma La Guardia Gluck's Story* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2007), pp.24-103, and Rochelle G. Sidel, *The Jewish Women of Ravensbrück* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), pp.109-120.

⁴⁴ "die Ursache meiner weißen Haare", testimony of Luise Hering, June 7, 1967, LG Berlin, 3P Ks 1/71 gegen Otto Bovensiepen und andere, Bd. XXXIII, pp. 53-58.

⁴⁵ "grausam", "furchtbar", testimony of Waleska Bambowsky, March 5, 1965, BArch B 162/4553 (Ludwigsburg).

set in, Quandt was heavily burdened and suffered a mental breakdown. She testified that she did everything in her means to leave the department. A prior medical condition, a weak heart, combined with her nervous breakdown, was enough to convince a doctor to sign her permanently off work.⁴⁶ Gertraud Friedle, working in one of the T4 killing centres, witnessed a transport of older women arriving. She was aware that these women would be killed and it made her think that her own mother could have easily been among them. This impacted on her health and she took a vacation back to Stuttgart to recover.⁴⁷ Whether the women imparted the true reasons for their ill-health to the doctors is not clear; it is unlikely that they would have wanted to put the doctors – or themselves – at possible risk.

Defiance could be shown through small acts of resistance. Having been informed of the mistreatment of members of the Catholic clergy, Hildegard Jürgensonn, a convinced Catholic herself, helped to distribute illegal leaflets; this was her method of opposing the Nazi regime.⁴⁸ Elisabeth Marks refused clothing she and her children were entitled to under Nazi distribution policies, following Allied bombing. Her investigations led her to determine that the Jews were being exterminated and she realised the clothing she was offered belonged to murdered Jews.⁴⁹ As Jürgensonn was not caught, and Marks did not impart the true reason she was refusing clothing, it is likely that their actions went unnoticed. Irrespective, both the women would have felt that they were taking a stand against National Socialism, albeit in a small manner.

An attempt was made by one employee at the RSHA to sabotage her own work. Erika Albrecht regularly saw correspondence which indicated that certain Jews sent to concentration camps should not be killed, and she questioned whether this was adhered to. Her frequent requests for explanations prompted Moes, her

⁴⁶ Testimony of Johanna Quandt, January 4, 1968, LG Berlin, 3P Ks 1/71 gegen Otto Bovensiepen und andere, Bd. XXXIV, pp. 227-235.

⁴⁷ Testimony of Gertraud Friedle, June 23, 1960, BArch B 162/1602 (Ludwigsburg).

⁴⁸ Testimony of Hildegard Jürgensonn, September 4, 1967, BArch B 162/4168 (Ludwigsburg).

⁴⁹ Testimony of Elisabeth Marks, January 25, 1971 and September 3, 1970, LG Berlin, 3P Ks 1/71 gegen Otto Bovensiepen und andere, Sonderband II, pp. 64-71g.

boss, to brusquely instruct her to stop asking him questions,⁵⁰ but Albrecht was not punished. Once she became aware that her work concerned the extermination of the Jews, she was reluctant to continue. She was asked by a half-Jewish friend, Günter Heilbrunn, to remain as long as possible in the department in his interest; he was hopeful that she would be in a position to help him or his fellow Jews. For his sake, she remained at her job but often came to work late and deliberately did not perform to the best of her ability. Heilbrunn had contacts within the tobacco industry and was able to obtain tobacco products. He supplied these to Albrecht to bribe Moes and keep him in a good mood. She was thereby able to appease Moes when he was annoyed with her critical attitude and her carelessness with her work.⁵¹

Other outspoken secretaries encountered severe threats, but invariably avoided serious punishment. Maria Bek was threatened by a colleague, Gahr, with “an introduction to a work camp”. Gahr had made a comment to Bek about belief in Jesus; she retorted that someone should tell Hitler that Jesus was a Jew. Luckily for Bek, her colleagues prevented Gahr from reporting her and the incident was not taken further.⁵² Johanna Heym was disciplined because of her “friendliness to Jews”; remarkably, she was merely demoted and transferred. She was allocated to a department which sent foreigners who refused to perform labour for the Reich to a work camp in Wulheide, and remained there until the end of the war.⁵³ Johanna Quandt once witnessed a woman ask an SS man in her office to call a doctor for her lodger, who was terminally ill. The SS man asked the woman if the tenant was a Jew. The woman said yes, to which the SS man replied “let him die”. Once the woman had gone, Quandt turned to the SS man in outrage, asking how he could say such a thing; the tenant was a human. The SS man turned to Quandt and said “Frau

⁵⁰ Testimony of Erika Miethling (married name Albrecht), June 20, 1967, LG Berlin, 3P Ks 1/71 gegen Otto Bovensiepen und andere, Bd. XXXII, pp. 204-211.

⁵¹ Testimony of Erika Albrecht, October 24, 1967 LG Berlin, 3P Ks 1/71 gegen Otto Bovensiepen und andere, Bd. XXXVIII, pp. 127-148.

⁵² “einer Einweisung in ein Arbeitslager”, testimony of Maria Bek, May 24, 1967, LG Berlin, 3P Ks 1/71 gegen Otto Bovensiepen und andere, Bd. XXIX, pp. 146-151.

⁵³ “Judenfreundlichkeit”, testimony of Johanna Heym, June 14, 1966, LG Berlin, 3P Ks 1/71 gegen Otto Bovensiepen und andere, Bd. XIX, pp. 125-148. Heym does not specify why she was considered guilty of friendliness to Jews.

Quandt, I am warning you". She was warned at least three times during her career at the RSHA, but suffered no further repercussions.⁵⁴

The women working at the RSHA were confronted with choices. Some chose to take no action; they chose not to speak up and continued with their work. Other women chose to take action against the Nazis, challenging their bosses, searching for answers, distributing illegal leaflets, or deliberately arriving to work late. There was a third option: to take action in support of the Nazis. For any woman who wanted to get ahead in these times, to take advantage of the situation to further her own career, the best course of action was to show support for the authorities.

Friederike Wieking is perhaps the most prominent example of a female Nazi careerist in the RSHA. She worked for the Female Criminal Police in the Reich Criminal Police Office and became the sole female section head within the RSHA. Wieking began working for the police in 1919, aged 29. In 1927 she became a member of the Reich civil service and in 1933 she joined the National Socialist Civil Servants Association. She only became a member of the NSDAP in 1941. It was on Wieking's initiative that Himmler gave the Female Criminal Police its own agency, which Wieking led. Wieking was also responsible for two Youth Protective Camps, for male and female adolescents.⁵⁵ Wieking claimed after the war that these camps successfully prevented delinquent adolescents from being sent to concentration camps, yet these youth camps were on a par with concentration camps, subjecting their inmates to serious abuse.⁵⁶ The estimates of those who were murdered at the female youth camp, Uckermark, a satellite of Ravensbrück concentration camp, vary from 1,000 to 5,000 young girls. Very little is known about this camp even today, as almost all those who were sent to it did not survive, and the camp itself

⁵⁴ "Frau Quandt, ich warne Sie", testimony of Johanna Quandt, January 4, 1968, LG Berlin, 3P Ks 1/71 gegen Otto Bovensiepen und andere, Bd.XXXIV, pp. 227-235.

⁵⁵ Michael Wildt, *An Uncompromising Generation. The Nazi Leadership of the Reich Security Main Office* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009), pp. 177-178.

⁵⁶ Ursula Nienhaus "Himmlers willige Komplizinnen – Weibliche Polizei im Nationalsozialismus 1937-1945," in Michael Gruettner, Ruediger Hachtmann, and Heinz-Gerhard Haupt, eds., *Geschichte und Emazipation: Festschrift fuer Reinhard Ruerup* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 1999), pp. 527-533.

was shut down in March 1945.⁵⁷ After the war Wieking was held in Soviet Custody for seven years.⁵⁸

Although Gertrud Slottke claimed in her testimony to be just another administrator, she was able to develop her status, enabling her to obtain independent decision-making powers. An experienced secretary, and a member of the Danzig Nazi Party, Slottke, was conscripted to the RSHA in Berlin in April 1941. Once her boss had arranged a German passport for her, in August 1941, she was sent to a security office in The Hague, as she had expressed an interest in working abroad.⁵⁹ She was employed exclusively as a stenographer, writing from dictation until February 1942, when she was transferred to the Jewish section of the Commander of Security Police, which she refers to as the “Eichmann-department”. She remained there until the end of the war, writing reports about the deportation of the Jews.⁶⁰

Wilhelm Zoepf was Slottke’s immediate boss. Following employment in the SS sanatorium in Hohenlychen, he was hired by the Department of Emigrants at the RSHA in June 1940. Zoepf was initially sent to The Hague in June 1941, although he did not maintain a regular presence there until January 1942. Zoepf met with Eichmann, and his contemporaries in other European countries, to discuss the Final Solution, and on June 11, 1942, was told that 40,000 Jews were to be deported from the Netherlands.⁶¹ Zoepf was responsible for the preparations and the

⁵⁷ For some (limited) information on Uckermark, see for example A.Ebbinghaus, *Opfer und Täterinnen, Frauenbiographien des Nationalsozialismus*(Nördlingen: F. Greno, 1987), and Rochelle G. Saidel, *The Jewish Women of Ravensbrück Concentration Camp* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006).

⁵⁸ Wildt, *An Uncompromising Generation*, pp. 177-178.

⁵⁹ Elisabeth Kohlhaas, “Gertrud Slottke – Angestellte im niederländischen Judenreferat der Sicherheitspolizei” in Klaus-Michael Mallmann and Gerhard Paul, eds., *Karrieren der Gewalt, Nationalsozialistische Täterbiographien* (Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft: 2004, Darmstadt), p.207.

⁶⁰ Testimony of Gertrud Slottke, October 3, 1968, BArch B 162/4173 (Ludwigsburg).

⁶¹ Dto.v.15.6.1942, Recueil (Anm.17), Bd.3, RF-1217, cited in Claudia Steur, “Eichmanns Emissäre: Die ‘Judenberater’ in Hitlers Europe”, in Gerhard Paul and Klaus-Michael Mallmann, eds., *Die Gestapo im Zweiten Weltkrieg. 'Heimatfront' und besetztes Europa* (Darmstadt: Primus Verlag, 2000), p.414.

execution of the deportations. By the end of 1944, more than 100,000 people had been deported, which embodied 96 per cent of the Jews living in the Netherlands.⁶²

Answering to Zoepf, Slottké was given a variety of responsibilities, and ultimately the decisions which she made were the difference between life and death for those affected. She decided whether those in Westerbork transit camp, in the north east of the Netherlands, would be sent to Theresienstadt, where they had a higher chance of survival, or to Auschwitz or Sobibor, where they would very likely be murdered on arrival. Though she had to act within prescribed regulations, Slottké was still able to make and influence decisions, despite her fervent denials under interrogation after the war. She was able to make recommendations to Zoepf, and was sometimes present during raids in Amsterdam, determining who would be transported. The work that Slottké performed was so extensive that she was even given her own administrators; two Dutch women typed for her.⁶³ This also demonstrated her high status in the organisation.

Additionally, Slottké was responsible for Jews with Turkish citizenship. She was sent the papers of Jews who claimed to be Turks, and forwarded the papers to the Turkish Consulate General in Hamburg, who verified whether the Jews in question were actually Turkish. Although she subsequently claimed otherwise, Slottké herself ordered the deportation of those who were not recognised as legitimate Turks, and on occasion signed the relevant documentation. Handling cases of Jews with *Gefälligkeitspässen*, Slottké recalled that passports destined for Dutch Jews were intercepted, and that in these cases the Jews would be deported to the East on the next transport. Although she was put in charge of the deportation of Jewish armament workers, she alleged in her testimony that she had no power and did not select who was to be deported, claiming that the decisions were left to her superiors. Slottké explained that if the Jewish armament workers

⁶² Gerhard Schoenberger, *The Yellow Star. the Persecution of the Jews in Europe, 1933-1945* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), p.130.

⁶³ Kohlhaas, "Gertrud Slottké" in Mallmann and Paul, eds., *Karrieren der Gewalt*, pp.211-212.

were no longer needed, they went to Westerbork transit camp and were deported from there on the next transportation.⁶⁴

The unusual decision-making position in which Slottke found herself was partially due to her supervisor, Zoepf. He testified that he had allowed Slottke to work unsupervised. As she was competent, he gave her “more generous signing capabilities than other clerks”. She was subsequently able to make her own judgments, and she only brought decisions to him in cases of doubt.⁶⁵ Slottke demonstrated her competence and energy to Zoepf, who was often absent, providing a void which Slottke was able to fill. Slottke was considered diligent, and “always ready to fulfil to the best of her abilities the orders or wishes of Herr Zoepf”.⁶⁶

Slottke’s request to work abroad was typical of those received by the RSHA from single (and often, young) women at a time when Nazi aggression provided an opportunity for them to “pursue their interest in the world”.⁶⁷ However, Gertrud Slottke and Friederike Wieking were exceptions; women who played active roles in decision-making, rather than merely administering orders which had been decided on by someone else.

The secretaries who were employed at the RSHA were privy to knowledge of the Holocaust, gained through their workload, rumours heard, both within the workplace and within their personal sphere, and through incidents witnessed. While the obfuscating nature of the code words the RSHA leadership employed successfully concealed from some of the secretaries the true nature of the orders they were typing, others were prompted to question the true meaning of the

⁶⁴ Testimony of Gertrud Slottke, October 4, 1968, BArch B 162/4173 (Ludwigsburg).

⁶⁵ “grosszügiger unterschrieben als bei anderen Sachbearbeitern” Wilhelm Zoepf’s testimony February 23, 1966, cited in Kohlhaas, “Gertrud Slottke” in Mallmann and Paul, eds., *Karrieren der Gewalt*, p.213.

⁶⁶ “stets bemueht, die Anordnungen oder Wuensche von Herrn Zoepf bestmoeglich zu erfuellen”, testimony of former colleagues, cited in *ibid.*, p.212.

⁶⁷ “Interesse an der Welt nachzugehen”, Kohlhaas, “Gertrud Slottke” in Mallmann and Paul, eds., *Karrieren der Gewalt*, p.209.

words. Fearing the consequences, and armed with limited information, many of these women chose not to discuss what they knew, and took no action.

Ultimately, some degree of the truth about the persecution of the Jews and other minority groups was clearly available for the secretaries and female administrators working for the RSHA to see. Each woman could choose whether to immerse herself deeper into her work, fully aware of the contents, or blindly copy documents and take dictation without really understanding the context. The evidence suggests that the women had every opportunity to discover the truth, if they wanted to. A few women did strive to find out more, questioning their bosses and searching for secret files. In the most extreme cases, some women left their jobs – or attempted to – because they did not wish to be cogs in the machinery of Nazi persecution. Their questioning, delving for more information and attempts at leaving their jobs did not, however, impact on that machine; with 50,000 members of staff, there were always others who could type the orders and the majority of secretaries at the RSHA did so willingly. It is clear from their collective post-war testimony that these secretaries had some awareness of the Holocaust and most chose to do nothing.

Chapter 5: Make Love And War

Secretaries worked in very close proximity to their bosses; it was an inevitable consequence of their work. In the National Socialist era, this proximity led numerous secretaries to close personal relationships with their bosses, and potentially awakened them to a greater awareness of the details of the work these men were involved in. This chapter will examine these secretaries, assessing the consequences of the relationships, both for their work and their families. These relationships took different forms: some secretaries ultimately married their bosses; others remained their mistresses; some became the mothers of their children. Were these relationships partnerships of equals, or of convenience? Case studies spanning each of these scenarios will be used to determine the status of women in the National Socialist era. A study of these romances will illuminate the work the secretaries performed during this time, and will shed light on both the nature of relationships between men and women and the knowledge and complicity of these women.

While the war did not stop people falling in love, and embarking on personal relationships, the governing regime took steps to change who it was possible to fall in love with, and marry. On December 31, 1931 and January 1, 1932, Heinrich Himmler promulgated marriage regulations specific to members of the SS. Himmler, the *Reichsführer* of the SS, held prime responsibility for the security of the Nazi empire. Initially formed as a paramilitary unit to guard Hitler, membership to the SS, which was granted in accordance with Nazi ideology, rose dramatically once Himmler became its leader in 1929: from 280¹ to 30,000 members in 1932.² By January 1, 1939, the SS had 238,159 members, of whom 93,093 were married.³ At the end of that year, there were 265,300 members; 115,650 married.⁴ Chosen because of their superior racial qualities, it was the SS who led the implementation of the Final Solution, and other genocidal programmes, in an attempt to eradicate

¹ Heinz Höhne, *Der Orden unter dem Totenkopf* (Munich: Bertelsmann, 1976), p.30.

² Gerald Reitlinger, *The SS, Alibi of a Nation* (Melbourne: Heinemann, 1957), p.26.

³ Marriage files kept by the RuSHA, undated BArch NS 19/577.

⁴ *Ibid.*

those deemed inferior. Himmler wanted to maintain, by Nazi definition, the high standard of blood among the SS men.⁵ In pursuit of this goal, he established the *Rasse- und Siedlungshauptamt* (RuSHA) in 1931, solely for the purpose of approving the fiancées of SS men. SS men were chosen strictly on the basis of their ancestral background, and had to declare their loyalty to the SS, and the *Führer*: their future wives, particularly as potential mothers, were subjected to the same stringent application procedures to ensure their racial purity.

Anybody who had any connection to the SS had to abide by the strict marriage laws, submit an application to the RuSHA for permission to marry, and be approved, before they could marry.⁶ This included members of the general SS, members of the Waffen-SS, SS officers in the army and air force, and women who worked for the SS.⁷ The marriage application was a long and detailed form. All submissions had to include the bride and bridegroom's handwritten curricula vitae, medical histories, photographs, references from two SS men acquainted with the bride, and both applicants had to supply a certificate of health from an approved SS doctor. To prove a high standard of 'German blood', family trees dating back six generations were required. In order to supplement this, both bride and bridegroom had to produce 62 birth or baptismal certificates, and 31 marriage certificates, belonging to their parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, great-great-grandparents and great-great-great-grandparents; a total of 186 documents.⁸

Himmler added to the marriage law several times between 1931 and 1937. From August 1935 onwards, for example, a certificate of the bride's participation in a mother's course was insisted upon as an additional document to be included in the application.⁹ The first school offering these courses to future SS brides opened in November 1936. Prior to the opening of the school, the mother's courses were taught by the *NS-Frauenschaft*, the women's organisation of the Nazi party.

⁵ Roger Manvell and Heinrich Fraenkel, *Heinrich Himmler* (London: Greenhill Books, 2007), p.22.

⁶ Marriage files, letter, September 15, 1943, and monthly message March 1944, BArch NS 47/69.

⁷ Marriage files, BArch NS 2/238.

⁸ Gudrun Schwarz, *Eine Frau an seine Seite* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1997), p.45.

⁹ Gertrud Scholtz-Klink, *Die Frau im Dritten Reich* (Tübingen: Grabert Verlag, 1978), p.96.

Intended to ensure that each woman would be in a position to become the ideal wife of an SS man, these schools taught the Nazi philosophy, politics, and racial politics, alongside the hygiene of childbirth, home economics and child-rearing.¹⁰ There were also courses for married women wanting to develop themselves, the aim of which was to toughen up these women for their work within their household.¹¹ Himmler wanted to guarantee that the applicants for the position of SS wife were suitable, and that they remained so once married.

Himmler would sift through the completed marriage applications to determine if a couple could marry. Doris Mähner, one of Himmler's secretaries, "often watched him studying the photographs of prospective SS brides before making a decision as to their suitability for his men".¹² If anything was missing from the application, or additional information was required, the applicant would receive a letter detailing what more they needed to provide.¹³ In certain scenarios the bridegroom would receive a letter informing him that his choice of bride was inappropriate. If the bride, or someone in her lineage, had a Jewish-sounding surname, for example, the groom had to sign a declaration that he was prepared to marry her at his own risk, and that he would withdraw from the SS if it later transpired that she had Jewish ancestry.¹⁴ When it came to health, particularly the woman's, the Nazis did not take any chances. A second medical examination might be requested, especially if a future bride declared multiple miscarriages on her medical application form.¹⁵ Blood tests could be demanded, often when an applicant previously had a sexually transmitted disease. Permission for the marriage could be postponed; for example, applicants could be made to wait two years after the end of a successful cure for syphilis before being granted permission to marry.¹⁶

¹⁰ Manvell and Fraenkel, *Himmler*, p.23.

¹¹ Marriage files, BArch NS 47/69.

¹² Manvell and Fraenkel, *Himmler*, p.267.

¹³ See, for example marriage files, BArch NS 2/245; the applicant is asked to provide more information about his paternal grandfather's fatal accident.

¹⁴ See, for example, BArch NS 47/69 which includes declarations from two men whose fiancée's families included members with the names "Herzberg", June 13, 1942, and "Lilienthal" May 21, 1943 respectively; both men signed the declaration to say that they still wished to marry and therefore took responsibility for their marriages.

¹⁵ Marriage applications, BArch NS 2/238.

¹⁶ See, for example, the application of Anni Hoffman, who was asked to postpone her engagement

SS men were discouraged from marrying both women significantly older than themselves, and those women considered too old to bear children. SS-*Oberscharführer* Kurt Möbius applied for permission to marry a woman, who at 34, was 10 years older than him. He received a standard reply stating that in most cases such marriages sooner or later lead to a divorce; if he still wished to marry his fiancée, then he had to petition the Reichsführer-SS personally.¹⁷ SS-*Schützen* Jakob Kötting received a similar letter, yet as his intended was 42 years old, and 16 years older than him, he was warned that it would not be right for him to have a childless marriage and therefore he should rethink his planned matrimony.¹⁸

The time-consuming application and the stringent requirements did not deter applicants: the former Berlin Documentation Centre held approximately 238,600 records belonging to the RuSHA, principally engagement and marriage applications and correspondence concerning the applications.¹⁹ These records, together with 79,000 files concerning women employed by the SS, led Gudrun Schwarz to estimate that between 1931 and 1945 approximately 240,000 women married an SS man.²⁰ An average of 693 SS men applied to marry each month in the second half of 1941; this increased to an average of 932 SS men each month in the first half of 1942.²¹ While this is a significantly lower pro-rata average than Schwarz's estimate, it is likely that there would have been fewer applications during the war. As most eligible men would have been fighting, it would have been difficult to meet someone, woo and marry them. Even relationships which had begun prior to the war would have been hard to sustain, as contact between the couple would have been limited. Men working for the Nazi cause without actively fighting would not have had that difficulty.

for this reason, *ibid.*

¹⁷ Kurt Möbius' marriage application and correspondence, BArch NS 2/238.

¹⁸ Jakob Kötting's marriage application and correspondence, BArch NS 2/238.

¹⁹ David G. Marwell, "Das Berlin Documentation Centre (BDC)" in Werner Röhr, ed., *Faschismus und Rassismus* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag GmbH, 1992), p.418.

²⁰ Schwarz, *Eine Frau*, p.11.

²¹ Marriage files, undated, BArch NS 19/3482.

Applications for secretaries to marry their male colleagues were sent from all over the Third Reich. Hedwig Eberl, an employee of the SS and Police, applied for permission to marry her colleague, Benno Bildat, a police assistant in the same office in Aussig, Czechoslovakia.²² Johann Bürger and Anneliese Kaiser, both working in the *Kommandeur der Ordnungspolizei* in Riga, Latvia, applied for permission to marry. She was three months pregnant at the time.²³ Philipp Sponberg and Gertrud Krause also applied for permission to marry. Krause worked for the *Gestapo* in Dresden as a member of staff in the business office and Sponberg was a translator.²⁴ Traudl Humps, one of Hitler's secretaries, fell in love with and married a colleague she met at work: Hans Hermann Junge, one of Hitler's orderlies.²⁵ Robert Scholz, who was considered the most important art critic in Nazi Germany, married his secretary, Johanna Grossman in 1944.²⁶ Women undertaking secretarial work in Nazi offices continued to fall in love with and marry their colleagues, whichever office and whichever country they found themselves based in.

Their marriage applications, preserved in archives,²⁷ are a revealing source when examining SS men who married their secretaries. The detailed, intrusive application provides an insight into the most intimate aspects of the future couple's lives, even disclosing whether the bride was fond of children, reliable or flighty.²⁸ The applications are easily comparable, as the form did not change over time. This, however, is also a limitation of this source, in that there is little room for personalisation. Sometimes supplementary letters, submitted with the form, or as correspondence pertaining to the response to the application, are appended. These letters allow an insight into the bride's perspective. Other sources, such as diaries,

²² SS female personnel file of Hedwig Eberl, November 25, 1944 – December 27, 1944, BArch SF A0016.

²³ SS female personnel file of Anneliese Kaiser, undated, BArch SF A0040.

²⁴ SS female personnel file of Gertrud Krause, undated, BArch SF A0046.

²⁵ Gertraud Junge, *Bis zur letzten Stunde* (Munich: Claassen Verlag, 2002), p.48. In this thesis, she is later referred to as Traudl Junge.

²⁶ Jonathan Petropoulos, *The Faustian Bargain* (London: Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 2000), pp.7, 133-134.

²⁷ The archives of the former Berlin Documentation Centre are now held in the Bundesarchiv, Berlin.

²⁸ Questions asked in the reference about the bride.

interviews and post-war testimony given by secretaries,²⁹ can also illuminate their personal thoughts and perhaps show why they fell in love with these men, and how the subsequent relationships changed their lives.

That so many women fell in love with SS men may be partially attributed to Nazi propaganda. Posters often displayed muscular men at work, encouraging men to fulfil their part in the war effort and reinforcing the stereotype of strong, handsome German men. The election campaigns in 1933 endorsed the idea that the Nazis were superior to the Communists or Socialists; this was 'proven' when they came to power. The "smartly tailored black" Nazi uniform,³⁰ produced by Hugo Boss,³¹ made those who wore it elegant, smart and, perhaps, more attractive. Aldous Huxley suggested that wearing a uniform boosts one's sex appeal;³² and it has also been suggested that "when the uniform is the black shirt of fascism this can only be more so".³³ In several post-war testimonies, former secretaries distinguish between their bosses who wore uniform and those who did not, indicating those who took pride in their SS membership and in their appearance.³⁴ Younger secretaries, who had been members of the BDM, would have been taught the importance of racial purity and so would have looked up to SS men as the ideal husband. The lure of an SS man in uniform, who was also a boss, and therefore in a position of power, might be too hard to resist.

²⁹ See introduction for a more detailed analysis of post-war testimony.

³⁰ Steven Heller, *Iron Fists: Branding the 20th-century Totalitarian State* (London: Phaidon Press, 2008), p.45.

³¹ Catherine C. Fraser and Dierk O. Hoffmann, *Pop Culture Germany! Media, Arts and Lifestyle* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2006), p.146.

³² Aldous Huxley, "Notes on the Way", *Time and Tide* 15 (March 3, 1934), reproduced as "The Prospects of Fascism in England" in David Bradshaw, ed., *The Hidden Huxley* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002).

³³ Julie V. Gottlieb and Thomas P. Linehan, *The Culture of Fascism: Visions of the Far Right in Britain* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2003), p.114.

³⁴ See, for example post-war questioning of Irma Z. (name has been changed to protect identity) January 29, 1962 and November 14, 1967, Landesarchiv Berlin (LAB), B Rep. 057-01 1414, or post-war questioning of Eva Schmidt: "He was in full uniform" (Er war in voller Uniform), November 8, 1966, LAB B Rep. 057-01 2781, or post-war questioning of Ingeburg Wagner: "These two SS-leaders were the only ones who wore a uniform in the last few days" (Diese beiden SS-Führer waren die einzigen, die in den letzten Tagen SS-Uniformen trugen), May 21, 1962, LAB B Rep. 057-01 3182.

It was not considered inappropriate for a high-ranking SS man to choose to marry their secretary. While he was expected to ensure his future bride met the necessary requirements of an SS bride, her choice of career was almost irrelevant, as it was anticipated that she would relinquish her job once she became pregnant. Julius Streicher, as *Gauleiter* for Franconia, held a very powerful position within the Third Reich. He was a devoted Nazi, and highly respected in Nazi circles, having founded *Der Stürmer*, an anti-Semitic newspaper that was “one of the most popular Nazi publications”.³⁵ Known also for his promiscuity, and numerous affairs,³⁶ Streicher married his secretary, Adele Tappe, on March 30, 1945.³⁷ Tappe had worked for one year at *Der Stürmer*, before becoming Streicher’s secretary and housekeeper in 1940.³⁸ As his secretary, Tappe’s main duty was to write letters to Streicher’s family.³⁹ Having married because they wanted to die together,⁴⁰ their marriage was short-lived as Streicher was identified and captured by the Americans just a few months later.⁴¹

Ilse Warnecke had been a member of the BDM and the Nazi women’s organisation and was therefore considered suitable to type for SS-*Obersturmbannführer* Dr. Helmut Knochen. Born in Berlin in 1918, Warnecke completed a secretarial course there following the completion of her secondary education. As she was fluent in English and French, Warnecke had been recommended to work as a secretary for the Reich public service by her *Reichsarbeitsdienst* supervisor. After several jobs in Berlin, including reporting on part of the 1936 Olympics for the German Sports Press Organisation, Warnecke was sent with two other young girls to Paris, where they worked for the German foreign ministry. Warnecke’s work, as one of four clerks in a typing pool, involved general

³⁵ Randall L. Bytwerk, *Julius Streicher* (New York: Stein and Day, 1983), p.57.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.39.

³⁷ Kurt Pätzold, “Julius Streicher “...he was a good person” ” in Kurt Pätzold, Manfred Weißbecker, eds., *Stufen zum Galgen* (Leipzig: Militzke Verlag, 1999), p.293.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Testimony of Adele Streicher, the Avalon Project, Nuremberg Trial Proceedings Volume 12, One Hundred and Sixteenth Day, April 29, 1946.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Bytwerk, *Julius Streicher*, p.42.

office work and typing.⁴² It was while working in Paris that Warnecke fell in love with one of Knochen's subordinates, Theodor Dannecker, who worked in a neighbouring office. Warnecke and Dannecker saw each other often and they spent their free time together exploring Paris.⁴³ Ilse remembered her time in Paris as the best year of her life.⁴⁴ After a year Warnecke became pregnant and they applied for permission to marry. They had become engaged four months earlier but "a large work overload", and the inability to take a holiday, meant a delay in their application. Dannecker was finally granted a 14 day leave in order to get married, and so they applied for permission. Knochen provided confirmation that, as their boss, and head of the department, he had no objections to their marriage. The couple had no health issues, there were no concerns about their hereditary health, and as Warnecke was pregnant, there was no question about their ability to conceive. Permission to marry was granted, although they had to supply additional documents, to supplement their family trees, and to demonstrate that Warnecke had participated in a mother's course.⁴⁵

Shortly after their marriage Warnecke returned to Berlin in order to attend the compulsory mother's course. Once their son was born, Warnecke remained in Berlin and Dannecker made every effort to see his family as often as possible, but his visits were rare.⁴⁶ He left the Paris office in August 1942 and was able to spend time with his family until December 1942, when he was told that he would be sent to Bulgaria, as a consultant on the deportation of the Bulgarian Jews. He requested permission for his wife, now pregnant again, and son to join him, and they followed a month after him, in February 1943. The Danneckers lived a luxurious lifestyle in Sofia, in a formerly Jewish-owned house, with a maid and a language teacher.⁴⁷

⁴² Ilse Warnecke in correspondence with the author, December 2010.

⁴³ Claudia Steur, *Theodor Dannecker, Ein Funktionär der "Endlösung"* (Essen: Klartext Verlag, 1997), p.92.

⁴⁴ Warnecke in correspondence with the author, December 2010.

⁴⁵ "grosse Arbeitsüberlastung", personnel file of Theodor Dannecker, marriage application of Dannecker and Warnecke, Yad Vashem Archives O.68 884.

⁴⁶ Warnecke in a letter exchange with Steur, *Dannecker*, p.92.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* p.99.

Anneliese Hüttemann, a secretary for Richard Glücks in the SS-*Wirtschaftsverwaltungshauptamt*, also fell for her boss's assistant, SS-*Obersturmbannführer* Arthur Liebehenschel. Liebehenschel had been appointed the Chief of the Central Economic Administrative Office following the incorporation of the Inspectorate of Concentration Camps within the SS-*Wirtschaftsverwaltungshauptamt*. Working in Glücks' outer office, Hüttemann saw Liebehenschel on a daily basis. By the time Liebehenschel's wife gave birth to their fourth child in February 1943, the couple were sleeping in separate beds, because Liebehenschel's "heart already belonged" to Hüttemann. When Liebehenschel attempted a secret rendezvous with Hüttemann, his wife followed him, having been warned that he had been seeing "the pretty secretary",⁴⁸ who was fifteen years his junior. When she saw for herself that the rumours were true, the couple separated.

Liebehenschel's illicit love affair and his divorce were frowned upon and considered inappropriate behaviour for an SS officer. Consequently, he was transferred to Auschwitz concentration camp as a punishment, and appointed commandant of Auschwitz I, the main camp.⁴⁹ Having given up her job, Hüttemann, who idolized Liebehenschel, came to live with him shortly afterwards. She was "completely taken in by this handsome, imposing figure of a man who held a high position", particularly admiring his eloquence.⁵⁰ Although a natural bond had developed between them because they had worked closely together,⁵¹ many of their former colleagues were unaware of the affair until his transfer.⁵²

Liebehenschel and Hüttemann's subsequent application to marry was repeatedly denied by Oswald Pohl, chief of the SS-*Wirtschaftsverwaltungshauptamt*, because it was discovered that eight years earlier Hüttemann had had a relationship with Kurt Stern, a Jew. Pohl decided to

⁴⁸ Barbara Cherish, *The Auschwitz Kommandant* (Gloucestershire: The History Press, 2009), pp.30, 33, 35-37, 42.

⁴⁹ Rudolf Höss, *Death Dealer* Steven Paskuly, ed. (New York: Prometheus Books, 1992), p.298.

⁵⁰ Anneliese Hüttemann in an interview with Cherish, in Cherish, *The Auschwitz Kommandant*, p.90.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.90.

⁵² SS personnel file of Arthur Liebehenschel, BArch SS 260A, and also reproduced in Henry Friedlander and Sybil Milton, eds., *Archives of the Holocaust, Volume 11, Berlin Documentation Center Part 2* (New York: Garland, 1992), p.71.

transfer Liebehenschel to Lublin, in an effort both to help him get over his disappointment, and to punish him again. Pohl asked *SS-Sturmbannführer* Richard Baer to deliver the news personally to Liebehenschel and Baer was appointed Liebehenschel's successor as Auschwitz I commandant. On June 6, 1944, Pohl made *SS-Standartenführer* Rudolf Brandt, a member of Himmler's personal staff, aware of the situation, warning him that Hüttemann would attempt anything to marry Liebehenschel, as she was expecting his child.⁵³

Pohl's speculation was accurate: Hüttemann had written a personal letter to Himmler, on May 13, 1944, pleading with him to permit their marriage. She explained that despite spending three weeks in protective custody she was not guilty of having a relationship with a Jew. At the time she signed a declaration of guilt, which she now attributed to her inexperience (she was then aged 18), and a desire not to spend any more time in custody. She appealed both to Himmler's emotional side and his patriotic, dutiful nature by stating:

"I want nothing more than to give the child I carry under my heart its father's name, and to give this man lots more children, because, I know, like every German woman knows, this is the main task of women in the support of victory".⁵⁴

She ended by begging Himmler to let her give the German people many children by the man she loved.

Unfortunately for Hüttemann, she was not the only person who wrote to Himmler to discuss the merits of her marriage application to Liebehenschel. Baer wrote to Himmler on July 3, 1944, giving an account of his trip to Auschwitz to break the news to Liebehenschel. He also expressed his view that it was impossible for an SS man to have sexual intercourse with someone who had had a relationship

⁵³ Letter, June 6, 1944, BArch SS 260A.

⁵⁴ "ich will weiter nichts, als dem Kinde, dass ich unter dem Herzen trage, den Namen des Vaters geben und diesem Mann noch viele Kinder schenken, weil so wie ich, jede deutsche Frau weiß, dass dies die Hauptaufgabe der deutschen Frauen überhaupt ist zur Stützung des Sieges", letter May, 13, 1944, *ibid.*

with a Jew, let alone marry them.⁵⁵ Despite being told to relinquish his relationship with Hüttemann, Liebehenschel persisted. Liebehenschel's divorce had come through in December 1943, and the couple married in a secret civil ceremony in Auschwitz in January 1944.⁵⁶ After further correspondence, they succeeded in gaining Himmler's consent, regardless, also, of the sizable age difference between them. On October 13, 1944, because they were expecting a child, Himmler finally gave the couple permission to marry, on the condition that Liebehenschel took responsibility for the marriage. It was on this day that their son was born. Once permission had been granted, the couple did not delay, and were officially married three days later by the registrar in Auschwitz.⁵⁷ While Himmler himself did not deem it vital for children to be born legitimately, he recognized that many did hold this view. He therefore granted them permission to marry solely because of the expected child. He also wanted to avoid a scandal that would disgrace the entire SS.⁵⁸

Liebehenschel was the commandant of Lublin concentration camp until its evacuation in July 1944, when he was transferred to Trieste, under the command of the senior commander of the SS and Police, Odilo Globocnik. Hüttemann and their son moved to Italy to be with Liebehenschel. After the war, Liebehenschel was tried in Cracow, with other members of the SS garrison of Auschwitz-Birkenau.⁵⁹

Liebehenschel, Streicher and Dannecker all held important positions within the Nazi infrastructure, and succeeded in their applications to marry secretaries they met through that infrastructure. For both Streicher and Dannecker, it was a relatively simple process. In Dannecker's case, it was his future wife's expectant state that guaranteed their success. Similarly for Liebehenschel, it was Hüttemann's pregnancy that proved the decisive factor in their application, despite her alleged

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Cherish, *The Auschwitz Kommandant*, p.76.

⁵⁷ Marriage certificate of Liebehenschel and Hüttemann, October 16, 1944, BArch SS 260A.

⁵⁸ Cherish, *The Auschwitz Kommandant*, p.92.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

previous relationship with a Jew. A high value was placed on children born in wedlock, and so permission to marry was granted.

Applications were often far from straightforward, but the process was not black and white: failure to meet requirements did not necessarily preclude success. Like Liebehenschel, *SS-Obersturmbannführer* Friedrich Knolle was also married when he fell in love with a secretary, who worked in the RSHA with him. Knolle, who worked for the *Gestapo*, applied for a divorce from his first wife on the grounds of her hip defect, and he claimed that the SS marriage laws should have prevented the marriage in the first place. Once the divorce was granted, he was able to apply to marry his mistress, by whom he already had a child, the widow of a former SS colleague, and a secretary. The future bride had slight eye problems (low-grade eye refraction errors) but as she and Knolle were in perfect health apart from this, and were evidently able to produce children, the marriage was granted permission.⁶⁰ Lieselotte Knolle worked in Internal Security, in the department responsible for Race and Public Health. She was a trained doctor, but decided after the birth of her daughter not to return to a hospital job, so as to be able to spend time with her child.⁶¹ After her first husband died, she had to seek paid employment, so she took a job as an assistant clerk at the RSHA, where she collected reports concerning public health across the whole of occupied Europe. Despite her medical qualifications, there was no chance of promotion for her, “as a female employee”. Lieselotte worked at the RSHA from October 1940, but she broke off all contacts with the RSHA after her second marriage.⁶²

Walburga Köppen, born in 1910, and her future husband, Karl-Heinz Loechelt, born in 1909, also both worked for the RSHA,⁶³ and in order to gain permission to marry, they had to sign a declaration that they were mutually responsible for their marriage. The caveat to the approval was health-related. Loechelt had an uncle with a nervous condition, he himself had a refractive error in

⁶⁰ Marriage application of Friedrich Knolle, September 3, 1943, BArch RS D0008.

⁶¹ Post-war questioning of Lieselotte Knolle, January 13, 1965, LAB B Rep. 057-01 1820.

⁶² “als weibliche Angestellte”, *ibid.*

⁶³ Post-war questioning of Walburga Loechelt, LAB B Rep. 057-01 1980.

his left eye, and Köppen was short-sighted. These difficulties aside, Köppen was considered a very suitable wife, described in one of her references as having “no bad characteristics”. There was a delay to granting them permission, due to “war-related reasons”, but permission was granted in May 1944 and the couple married within weeks.⁶⁴

Ilse Baumert and Fritz Seibold also met in the offices of the RSHA, where they both worked. Baumert started working for the *Gestapo* in 1936. Three years later, the *Gestapo* merged with the SD and the Criminal Investigation Police to form the RSHA.⁶⁵ Baumert was never a member of the NSDAP. At the RSHA, Baumert worked for the man who was to become her second husband, Seibold. Her work involved answering the telephone, filing documents and occasionally writing letters or completing forms. She wanted to leave her job in the spring of 1942 because she was expecting their child, but she was transferred to the Jewish department in the month preceding her maternity leave to cover someone’s holiday leave. After the war, Baumert was asked if she knew about the extermination of Soviet prisoners, as orders for this had originated from the office she worked in. She denied any knowledge of these events, claiming that even her husband, who by virtue of his rank and position was much closer to the innermost workings of their department, did not tell her anything.⁶⁶

When their marriage application was made, Baumert was nine months pregnant. On initial review, the application appeared doomed to failure. The documentation was incomplete. The medical history of the families was weak: between them Baumert and her future husband had one aunt in a sanatorium, an uncle who had committed suicide and a half-sister with Down’s syndrome. Seibold

⁶⁴ “keine schlechte Eigenschaften”, “kriegs-bedingten Gründen”, marriage application of Karl Heinz Loechelt , January 1, 1944 and May 4, 1944, BArch RS D5128.

⁶⁵ Reinhard Rurup, ed., *Topography of Terror: A Documentation*, translated by Werner T. Angress (Berlin: Verlag Willmuth Arenhovel, 1989), p.93 and George C. Browder, *Foundations of the Nazi Police State, The Formation of Sipo and SD* (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1990), p.241.

⁶⁶ Post-war questioning of Ilse Seibold, June 6, 1967, LAB B Rep. 057-01 3182.

also had an eye condition. Despite these deficiencies, the marriage application was rushed through, because Baumert was expecting a child imminently.⁶⁷

The marriage, however, was not granted unconditionally. The couple were not allowed to have their marriage recorded in the *SS-Sippen* book.⁶⁸ The couple, who also had to take responsibility for their marriage, were required to send in the remaining documents missing from their original application, which included Baumert's certificate of participation in the required mother's course. As it transpired, the working relationship between Baumert and Seibold was short, as Seibold left the RSHA at the end of 1941.⁶⁹

The applications of Knolle, Knöppen and Baumert were riddled with health issues. Yet each application was approved. The successful grant of these marriages demonstrates that the stringent requirements Himmler had set down were not always adhered to. More specifically, as long as the applicants met certain basic requirements and were considered worthy members of society, the Nazi leadership was willing to balance the more stringent requirements against the production of Nazi children and holding together the Nazi family.

Other secretaries who have left traces in the archive of their relationship with their Nazi bosses worked for the T4 programme. Many employees working at T4 clinics and at the head office fell in love with their colleagues and applied for permission to marry. Edith Fischer, a secretary for the 'Euthanasia-Doctor' at the Brandenburg 'clinic', became engaged to, and later married, *SS-Unterscharführer* Dubois, who was employed as a driver and 'disinfector' there.⁷⁰ Fischer, born in 1920, accepted the job in October 1940, because she thought that she would earn more money than she earned typing for the Reich Women's Leadership. After

⁶⁷ Marriage application of Fritz Seibold, July 23, 1942, BArch RS F5242.

⁶⁸ Once permission to marry had been granted, and a marriage certificate was produced, the RuSHA recorded all 'worthy' marriages in the *Sippen* book, Manvell and Fraenkel, *Himmler*, p.22, and Höhne, *Der Orden*, p.146.

⁶⁹ Marriage application of Fritz Seibold, July 23, 1942, BArch RS F5242, and post-war questioning of Ilse Seibold, June 6, 1967, LAB B Rep. 057-01 3182.

⁷⁰ The disinfector's job was to burn the bodies after they had been gassed; post-war questioning of Edith Appel (nee Fischer) October 13, 1961, BArch B162/4428.

accepting the job, Fischer was sworn to secrecy, and was then informed that she would be working at a killing centre. Despite it being forbidden, Fischer told her parents, and consequently her mother, also a skilled typist, decided to accompany her.⁷¹ As well as working as a typist for one of the doctors, Fischer had to write *Trostbriefe* to the families of the murdered patients. Fischer and Dubois married on April 7, 1941, and shortly afterwards, both left the clinic. Dubois went to Berlin, where he worked as a driver for the T4 office, and then went to Poland, to work at the extermination camps. Fischer went to Bernburg, another clinic, and then to the T4 office in Berlin, working at both locations as a typist. In the course of questioning by war crimes investigators in October 1961, Fischer faintly remembered typing transportation lists in the T4 office. Despite working in the same field, the couple did not discuss their work with each other: when Fischer was asked why she did not know about her husband's involvement in the extermination camps, she explained that, knowing her "negative attitude" towards the T4 murders, Dubois chose not to tell her about other murders. The couple divorced shortly after the war, when Dubois began a relationship with another woman.⁷² The recurrent phenomenon of those who met at their place of work during the war, fell in love, and separated after the war, will be discussed later in the chapter.

Elfriede Rosenow, born in 1917, took a job in the T4 office as a typist in 1941 after the art gallery she had been working in was forced to close. After a short time working in the main office, where she became aware of the function of the killing centres, she was transferred to the Brandenburg clinic. Her main task was to write *Trostbriefe* to the families of those mentally disabled patients who were gassed. While Rosenow did not know how many patients were killed, she herself wrote between 10-20 letters every day, a task that took up all her time. While at Brandenburg, Rosenow met and fell in love with Josef Oberhauser, who was a 'disinfecter'. As far as she knew, he did not play an active role in the gassing. The couple married in January 1942 and shortly afterwards they both left their jobs. She

⁷¹ Fischer does not specify, in her post-war testimony, why her mother wished to accompany her.

⁷² "ablehnende Einstellung", post-war questioning of Edith Appel (nee Fischer) October 13, 1961, BArch B162/4428.

had never felt comfortable with her task, so when she fell pregnant soon after her marriage, Rosenow was pleased to be able to have an excuse to leave her job. Oberhauser, whose job was also not to his satisfaction, applied twice to join the army. His applications were unsuccessful and he was transferred to Poland to work at the extermination camps. The couple divorced shortly after the war.

Josefa Pütz, a secretary at the Sonnenstein T4 clinic, met and fell in love with the SS doctor working there, Horst Schumann.⁷³ Pütz's task was to write *Trostbriefe*; Schumann was involved in the actual murders. Before becoming a director at the Sonnenstein clinic, he was a leading figure at the Grafeneck clinic.⁷⁴ He was also a member of a doctor's commission which transferred sick or injured inmates of concentration camps, considered by the SS to be incapable of work, to these clinics, in order to kill them. He went to Auschwitz for the first time on July 28, 1941, where he selected 573 prisoners who were then deported to Sonnenstein and murdered.⁷⁵ He returned to Auschwitz in 1942 to perform brutal sterilisation experiments on prisoners,⁷⁶ which he also carried out in Ravensbrück concentration camp.⁷⁷ Upon her own arrival at Sonnenstein, Pütz, as with all new employees, was made to watch the arrival of a transport of patients, so that they had "a true understanding of the events that took place here".⁷⁸ She would thus have been fully aware of the nature of Schumann's work. This knowledge clearly did not deter her from marrying him.⁷⁹

Fräulein Schwab took a job as a secretary in the T4 head office, as she was "desperate to do something more useful for her country". She was not fully aware

⁷³ Schwarz, *Eine Frau*, p.180.

⁷⁴ Robert Jay Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), p.278.

⁷⁵ Danuta Czech, *Kalendarium der Ereignisse im Konzentrationslager Auschwitz-Birkenau 1939-1945* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt Verlag, 1989), p.105.

⁷⁶ He did not always perform the operations and experiments himself, but he was also responsible for instructing other doctors to conduct them. Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors*, pp.172, 247-8 and also Czech, *Kalendarium*, p.331.

⁷⁷ Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors*, p.283.

⁷⁸ "das richtige Verständnis für diese sich dort abspielenden Dinge bekämen", witness statement from a colleague of Pütz's, who arrived at the clinic at the same time, February 8, 1966, BArch B162/18124.

⁷⁹ Schwarz, *Eine Frau*, p.182.

of the nature of the work until she started, but she soon discovered that gas chambers were used. She completed a six week secondment at one of the clinics and while there she watched the killing process through the peephole of the door of the chamber.⁸⁰ At the T4 head office she was the secretary of Dieter Allers, who was responsible for the daily administration of the T4 programme,⁸¹ including the co-ordination, selection and appointment of personnel, from summer 1940.⁸² The couple later married⁸³ and both continued working for the T4 programme.⁸⁴

The T4 clinics and head office, although murderous institutions, were the setting for many liaisons, not just between secretaries and bosses, but also between nurses and male workers. It became a widespread phenomenon to the extent that the “numerous love affairs affected the clinic’s operating climate”.⁸⁵ It is possible that many couples were drawn together through their intense mutual experiences in T4, rather than familiarity and affection developed over time. Fischer and Rosenow, whose experiences parallel one another, were both entrusted with typing the letters of consolation to families of murdered patients, and both fell in love with the men responsible for burning the bodies of those patients. However, neither marriage lasted longer than five years: once their mutual experiences in T4 ended, so did their marriages. Seemingly, there was a connection between war-time romances among those working in the same offices and departments, and post-war divorce. The bond between each couple, based on their common working environment, had broken, and their marriage was not strong enough to continue without that bond.

⁸⁰ Schwab in an interview with Gitta Sereny, Gitta Sereny, *Into that Darkness* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), pp.80, 83.

⁸¹ Burleigh, *Death*, p.236.

⁸² Henry Friedlander, *The Origins of Nazi Genocide* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

⁸³ Post-war questioning of Erich Bauer, October 10, 1961, BArch B162/4428.

⁸⁴ Sereny, *Darkness*, p.80.

⁸⁵ “zahlreiche Liebschaften...beeinträchtigen das Betriebsklima”, Ernst Klee, “Die Ermordung der Unproduktiven: Euthanasie im Dritten Reich und ihre Aufarbeitung um Nachkriegsdeutschland” in Hans-Erich Volkmann, ed., *Ende des Dritten Reiches - Ende des Zweiten Weltkrieges* (Munich: Piper, 1995), p.351.

Secretarial work in the Nazi era was office-based, so few of these secretaries would have directly witnessed murders, despite marrying men who may have been more actively involved in facilitating mass death. The secretaries working at the T4 clinics were an exception to this, as they were shown murders to ensure that they were aware of the true nature of their work. Gertrude Segel, who married SS-*Hauptscharführer* Felix Landau, was another exception for a different reason. Landau was active in National Socialist activities from an early age. In 1925 he joined the National Socialist youth, and was expelled from his school for recruiting fellow students. He joined the NSDAP in 1931, and shortly afterwards joined both the SA and the SS. He worked as a police assistant for the *Gestapo*, in Vienna. In 1940 he was transferred to work for the SD, in Radom, Poland. Segel worked as a typist for the *Gestapo* in Vienna from August 1938 until January 1941, when she voluntarily transferred to work for the SD in Radom. Landau and Segel fell in love although both were already in committed relationships. Segel would not break off her engagement, so Landau ended their relationship. He volunteered to join an *Einsatzkommando*, was transferred to Drohobycz⁸⁶ and became involved in mass shootings. However, he missed Segel and began to write a diary and letters to her, detailing his involvement in the murder of the Jews and Poles and interspersing his entries with comments about how much he missed his “liebes Trudchen” [lovely little Trude].⁸⁷ He noted his determination to “make every effort” to have her transferred to Drohobycz⁸⁸ and by autumn 1941 the two were living together.⁸⁹ In July 1942 Landau was divorced from his first wife, not due to his involvement with Segel, but because he had had an earlier adulterous affair with an office colleague while working in Vienna. In early 1943, Segel and Landau applied for permission to marry. Landau requested a speedy response to their application so that they could marry on Hitler’s birthday, April 20. Permission arrived too late, and they married instead on May 5, 1943.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Currently in Western Ukraine.

⁸⁷ Diary entry, July 6, 1941, see also entry July 5, 1941, for example, in T. Friedman, ed., *Bericht des SS- und Polizeiführers über die Vernichtung der Juden Galiziens, Tagebuch des SS-Hauptscharf. F Landau über seine Tätigkeit in Drohobycz, 1941-1944* (Ramat Gan: Stadtverwaltung, 1963).

⁸⁸ “alles in Bewegung setzen”, July 6, 1941, *ibid.*

⁸⁹ Schwarz, *Eine Frau*, pp.202-3.

⁹⁰ Marriage application of Felix Landau, July 1, 1942, BArch RS D490.

Landau was in charge of a group of Jewish workers, who he could observe from his villa. This put the former secretary Segel in the unusual position of being able to overlook the Jewish workers herself.⁹¹ One afternoon in June 1942, Landau shot one of these workers from their balcony, with Segel looking on. There are conflicting views as to Segel's involvement in the shooting, but several witnesses acknowledged her presence. According to one witness, Landau wanted to show Segel that the fate of the Jewish workers was in his hands. As they sat watching the workers from their balcony, Segel aimed a hunting rifle at them. Landau took the gun from her hand and shot one of the Jews. The couple then went into their room, laughing loudly.⁹² Another witness stated that the couple were shooting birds from their balcony and the noise frightened the workers who, thinking they were being shot at, stopped working. When Landau saw them being idle, he flew into a rage, then shot one of the workers, and "his girlfriend assisted with the shooting". A week later, Landau told another Jew that he had shot the worker to make an example of him. At this meeting, "the girlfriend of the accused was present, and did not contradict him".⁹³

In a separate incident, Landau accused a Jew of stealing a gold necklace belonging to Segel. The necklace had belonged to a Jewish family, and Landau had taken it during one of the 'Jewish actions'. The man denied the accusation and was interrupted by Segel screaming at him: "Don't act so stupid, you Jewish swine, you've taken the chain". Landau flew into a rage and, as Segel watched, beat the man so badly he could not move for two days.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Ernst Klee, Willi Dreßen, and Volker Rieß, eds., >>Schöne Zeiten<< *Judenmord aus der Sicht der Täter und Gaffer* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1988), p.262.

⁹² Witness Statement from Marjan Nadel, August 18, 1959, in T. Friedmann, ed., *Die Tätigkeit der Schutzpolizei, Gestapo und Ukrainische Miliz in Drohobycz 1941-1944* (Haifa: Institute of Documentation in Israel, 1995), unpaginated.

⁹³ "seiner Freundin beim Schiessen beistand", "war die Freundin des Angeklagten zugegen, ohne zu widersprechen", Irene Sagel-Grande, H.H. Fuchs, and C.F. Rüter, eds., *Justiz und NS-Verbrechen. Sammlung deutscher Strafurteile wegen nationalsozialistischer Tötungsverbrechen 1945-1966* (Amsterdam: University Press Amsterdam, 1978), Bd. XVIII, pp. 364-5.

⁹⁴ "Stell dich nicht so blöd, du Saujud, du hast die Kette genommen!", witness statement by Jakob Goldsztein, the accused, July 5, 1959, published in Friedman, *Die Tätigkeit*.

Segel may not have personally harmed any Jewish workers, yet as the wife of an SS man and a secretary for the Gestapo, she demonstrated her support for National Socialist policies. She was all too aware that her husband had been murdering Jews, as he meticulously noted the details in the diary he wrote for her.⁹⁵ The shooting of a Jew “amused her”,⁹⁶ and she stood by and watched as another Jew was viciously beaten. It was her love for Landau that gave her the opportunity to witness, and possibly, be involved in, the murder of a Jewish worker. Most secretaries, even those working for the Gestapo, would not see such atrocities, even if they were aware of them.⁹⁷

The concept of a *zweitfrau*, while seemingly in direct contrast to the marriage laws, had a similar end goal of producing German children.⁹⁸ Many notable SS men took a *zweitfrau*, an illegitimate second wife; a higher form of mistress. This phenomenon had several roots. The deaths of so many young men in the First World War resulted in around three to four million eligible women being left without a spouse.⁹⁹ Becoming a *zweitfrau* was perhaps preferable to having no husband, and ensured that, despite the lack of men, many of these women were given the opportunity to bear children. At this time, polygamy was, to a certain extent, permitted, and even encouraged: Hitler announced in 1942 that “through the illegitimate child, a nation is able to return to its height”.¹⁰⁰ Himmler, believing that he and his SS men had the right to a second marriage, legitimized *zweitfrauen* by referring to the *Friedel-Ehe*: a form of ‘lover-marriage’, a well-known concept in Germany, where it may have existed during the Early Middle Ages.¹⁰¹ He said that “children from a second, or *Friedel*-marriage could enter the well-bred, free Germans”.¹⁰² Himmler felt that taking a second wife could be a privilege reserved

⁹⁵ Friedman, *Bericht*.

⁹⁶ “hat sie amüsiert”, Schwarz, *Eine Frau*, p.206.

⁹⁷ For a discussion of whether secretaries were aware of the atrocities the Nazis committed, see chapter 3.

⁹⁸ Literally translates as second woman.

⁹⁹ Schwarz, *Eine Frau*, p.90.

¹⁰⁰ “das illegitime Kind ist eine Nation wieder in die Höhe gekommen”, Henry Picker, *Hitlers Tischgespräche im Führerhauptquartier 1941-1942* (Bonn: Athenäum Verlag, 1951), p.324.

¹⁰¹ For more information on the concept see Herbert Meyer, *Friedelehe und Mutterrecht* (Weimar: Böhlau, 1927).

¹⁰² “Kinder aus einer zweiten oder Friedel-Ehe, die der gutrassige, freie Germane eingehen konnte”,

for war heroes. Allowing this would ensure that their good genes would be passed on, and “that they would have children with the best qualities in the world”.¹⁰³ He also thought it unreasonable that a man should be expected to remain with only one woman for his whole life.¹⁰⁴

Himmler’s advocacy for the legitimacy of *zweitfrauen* was heavily influenced by his own experiences. Himmler’s secretary from January 1937 until early 1941, Hedwig Potthast, became his *zweitfrau* soon after she started working for him.¹⁰⁵ Her work involved supervising his private chancellery, and was, according to her, in no way concerned with Himmler’s SS activities.¹⁰⁶ He did not ever discuss these activities or politics with her,¹⁰⁷ and Peter Longerich asserts that it cannot be assumed that Himmler shared official secrets with Potthast because she was his private secretary.¹⁰⁸ It was in the course of their work that an attachment developed between the two of them, and they began an affair, which significantly changed their working relationship. In 1941, Potthast left her job to lead the life of a loyal and devoted mistress. Her love for Himmler was returned: another one of his secretaries, Doris Mähner, noticed he kept her photograph hidden in his desk and often looked at it while he was working.¹⁰⁹

Potthast gave birth to two of Himmler’s children but she was more than just the mother of his children, she was “the only confidante with whom he could speak about everything, at any hour of the day, whenever he felt the need”.¹¹⁰ Himmler did not divorce his wife to marry Potthast because he was concerned for his wife’s

Himmler wrote these words in a letter on August 17, 1944, see Helmuth Heiber, *Reichführer! Briefe an und von Himmler* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlag, 1968), pp.281-2. See also, Peter Longerich, *Heinrich Himmler: A life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), p.376.

¹⁰³ “daß sie Kinder mit besten Qualitäten in die Welt setzen würden”, Felix Kersten, *Totenkopf und Treue* (Hamburg: R. Mölich, 1952), p.223.

¹⁰⁴ Katrin Himmler, *Die Brüder Himmler* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag GmbH, 2005), p.236.

¹⁰⁵ Longerich, *Heinrich Himmler*, pp.329, 334-335, 375, 466-467.

¹⁰⁶ Donovan Nuremberg Trial Collection, Volume XCIX, “Hedwig Potthast, Reichsfuehrer Himmler's Mistress” / SECRET / Seventh Army Interrogation Centre / APO 758 / U.S. Army.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Longerich, *Heinrich Himmler*, p.467.

¹⁰⁹ Manvell and Fraenkel, *Himmler*, p.267.

¹¹⁰ “die einzige Vertraute, mit der er - wenn die Sorgen besonders drückten - über alles und zu jeder Stunde hatte reden können”, Peter Ferdinand Koch, *Himmlers Graue Eminenz. Oswald Pohl und das Wirtschafts-Verwaltungshauptamt der SS* (Hamburg: Facta Oblita, 1988), p.177.

fragile health. His niece remembers her father urging Himmler to clarify which of the women, his wife Marga or his *zweitfrau* Hedwig, he wished to be with.¹¹¹ Potthast was 11 years younger than Himmler, very pretty and “soft, maybe too soft”, according to Himmler’s brother.¹¹² Marga was aware of the relationship and was furious about it, but she put up with it for her daughter’s sake.¹¹³

At first, only their colleagues and Potthast’s siblings knew of the relationship. Lina Heydrich, Eleonore Pohl, and Gerda Bormann, the wives of SS men Reinhard Heydrich, Oswald Pohl and Martin Bormann, were aware of Potthast’s situation and still befriended her; clearly her relationship with Himmler and their illegitimate offspring was nothing to be ashamed of. Reinhard Heydrich even said of Potthast, that “one could warm their hands and feet on her”; she made one feel at home.¹¹⁴ Potthast, however, was anxious about her parents’ reaction. Despite the prominence of their daughter’s choice of partner, they would have preferred her to be married rather than be a mistress.¹¹⁵ They protested that as a married man he was unable to offer her a traditional home, and that Himmler’s relationship with her was a betrayal of his wife.

Despite speaking openly about the advantages of *zweitfrauen*, Himmler wanted to keep his own relationship with Potthast secret. As a result, he was unable to visit Potthast and his children often. He was nevertheless proud of his children, and enjoyed the little time he did spend with them. When he had the opportunity to spend time with his second family, “he didn’t accept any telephone calls ... [and he] devoted himself quite comfortably to his family”.¹¹⁶ Potthast was well supported by Himmler, but the price she paid for her comfortable life was solitude. It was ironic that Himmler felt the need to hide his *zweitfrau*, having publicly declared his support for the concept; indeed, it was his relationship with

¹¹¹ Himmler, *Die Brüder Himmler*, p.234.

¹¹² “weich, vielleicht zu weich”, *ibid.*

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p.241.

¹¹⁴ “dass man sich an ihr die Hände und Füße wärmen könnte”, Lina Heydrich, *Leben mit einem Kriebsverbrecher* (Pfaffenhofen: Verlag W. Ludwig, 1976), p.130.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.240.

¹¹⁶ Letter from Martin Bormann to Gerda Bormann, October 4, 1944, in H.R. Trevor-Roper, ed., *The Bormann Letters* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1954), p.131.

Potthast and the two children they produced which inspired and encouraged him to publically support the concept of illegitimate children.¹¹⁷ Perhaps in practice he felt the need to remain loyal to traditional Nazi values. That she had given him two children, albeit illegitimate, was highly valued, even above her job. Having given up her job for him and temporarily alienated her family, Potthast remained loyal and devoted to Himmler.

Himmler was not the only senior SS man who took his secretary to be his *zweitfrau*. The head of the Central Office of Economic Policy, Oswald Pohl, took his secretary, Rosemarie Fauler, as his *zweitfrau* and she bore him a child in 1942.¹¹⁸ Pohl's two secretaries were sisters: the unmarried Hildegard Hausböck (the lover of Pohl's aide, Richard Baer), and the married Fauler. Having been married twice, by 1944 Pohl was a father to eight legitimate, illegitimate and step-children. He suffered from extreme mood swings which his friends attributed to his various relationships.¹¹⁹

SS-Obergruppenführer Fritz Schießmann, the deputy *Gauleiter* of Essen, despite being married, also wanted a *zweitfrau*. He once asked Himmler if he could find a loving woman for him, who would be willing to give the German people his children.¹²⁰ In January 1945, Schießmann wrote a letter to Himmler informing him that he had found just such a loving woman, and that she would give him a child. She was his secretary, Isolde G., and she was three months pregnant.¹²¹ Schießmann asked Himmler for permission to take her to a *Lebensborn* home, as there she would be "treated according to our opinions".¹²² Schießmann also asked Himmler for his advice on what would happen after the birth. Himmler replied to the letter to recommend which particular home Isolde should go to, and to say that after the birth "satisfactory arrangements can easily be found", as long as the

¹¹⁷ Longerich, *Heinrich Himmler*, pp.375, 466.

¹¹⁸ Koch, *Himmlers Graue Eminenz*, p.96.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Heiber, *Reichsführer*, p.304.

¹²¹ Letter from Fritz Schießmann to Himmler, January 30, 1945, *ibid.*

¹²² "entsprechend unserer Auffassung behandelt", *ibid.*, p.305.

matter was “kept secret from all others of course”.¹²³ As with Himmler’s *zweitfrau*, Schießmann had to keep his relationship secret, even though she was giving birth to his child. To secure their status as *zweitfrauen*, these women had to produce offspring, even if subsequently they were kept hidden. Giving birth to children promoted them from being merely mistresses.

Nevertheless, for secretaries who had liaisons with SS men, becoming and remaining a mistress was a viable alternative to marriage or becoming a *zweitfrau*. Barbara Hellmuth was one of Heinrich Müller’s secretaries from early on in his career, and remained his secretary as he rose through the ranks.¹²⁴ As time went on, she also became his mistress.¹²⁵ Müller joined the SS in 1934 and by 1936 was the Chief of Operations for the *Gestapo*. He became head of the *Gestapo* in September 1939, and was known as “Gestapo-Müller” to distinguish him from other SS men with the same name.¹²⁶ As his secretary, Barbara Hellmuth was also his *Geheimnisträgerin*,¹²⁷ and she had to swear an oath of confidentiality.¹²⁸ While she wrote about many “secretive matters”, she claimed Müller only shared with her the minimum information that was required in order for her to do her job.¹²⁹ Together with his other secretary, Eva Schmidt, Hellmuth worked on top secret reports and correspondence for Müller. Through these reports she became aware that Jews were imprisoned in concentration camps, and that there were crematoria there.¹³⁰ Hellmuth’s workload was mostly clerical, such as the recording and transcribing of Müller’s shorthand notes, and organizing his personal arrangements. One of Hellmuth’s main tasks was the writing of quarterly reports, submitted directly to Himmler. The reports contained information from the individual offices in the *Gestapo* detailing the activities of each office. Müller collected the reports

¹²³ “zufriedenstellende Regelung leicht finden”, “geheimhaltung gegenüber allen anderen ist selbstverständlich”, letter from Himmler to Schießmann, February 12, 1945, Heiber, *Reichsführer*, p.305.

¹²⁴ Post-war questioning of Barbara Hellmuth, August 21, 1968, BArch B162/4556 and October 9, 1968, BArch B162/20577.

¹²⁵ Post-war questioning of Barbara Hellmuth, December 12, 1960, BArch B162/3233.

¹²⁶ Joachim Bornschein, *Gestapo Heinrich Müller* (Leipzig: Militzke Verlag e.K, 2004).

¹²⁷ Post-war questioning of Barbara Hellmuth, December 12, 1960, BArch B162/3233.

¹²⁸ Post-war questioning of Barbara Hellmuth, March 24, 1965, LAB B Rep. 057-01 1311.

¹²⁹ Post-war questioning of Barbara Hellmuth, October 9, 1968, BArch B162/20577.

¹³⁰ Post-war questioning of Barbara Hellmuth, December 12, 1960, BArch B162/3233.

from the offices and assembled them himself, using shorthand, before passing them onto Hellmuth to type. In their department there were 30-40 female typists; Hellmuth and Schmidt, as Müller's personal secretaries, were considered the most important.¹³¹

Hellmuth's relationship with Müller began after he became estranged from his wife Sophie. Their daughter had been born with Down's syndrome which caused considerable friction between them, and resulted in their separation.¹³² Hellmuth is not clear about when her affair with Müller started, but is certain that it ended in August 1939, when he began another affair. Despite this, she continued to work for him.¹³³ Müller's wife was perfectly aware of both his affairs, but did not demand a divorce, whether out of devotion to his children or fear of his authority.

Hellmuth and Müller continued to work together until April 1945, when he disappeared. Prior to this, Müller had offered Hellmuth, along with many members of their office, a fake passport which she had refused.¹³⁴ After the war various authorities suspected that he would try to get in touch with either or both of his two former mistresses and so placed them under surveillance.¹³⁵ During questioning it became apparent that neither Sophie Müller, Schmidt, nor Hellmuth, his devoted secretary, knew - or at least, they claimed not to know - where or how he had gone.¹³⁶

The hierarchy of wife, mistress and *zweitfrau* was not always clearly defined, and some women felt threatened when their status was challenged by others. In November 1943, Himmler received a distraught letter from Ruth Heinrich on the subject of her marriage to *SS-Untersturmführer* Dr. Alfred Heinrich, which had taken place in December 1934. In the four years that followed she bore him three

¹³¹ Post-war questioning of Barbara Hellmuth, August 21, 1968, BArch B162/4556.

¹³² Gregory Douglas, *Gestapo Chief* (California: R. James Bender Publishing, 1995), p.10.

¹³³ Testimony of Barbara Hellmuth, December 12, 1960, BArch B162/3233 (Ludwigsburg).

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ *Ibid.* and also post-war questioning of Barbara Hellmuth, March 24, 1965, LAB B Rep. 057-01 1311.

¹³⁶ Post-war questioning of Barbara Hellmuth, December 12, 1960, BArch B162/3233.

surviving children. He received several promotions and transfers, and was transferred to work for the SD. His wife and children dutifully moved with him. In April 1941, by which time he was an *SS-Sturmbannführer*, he was assigned to the SD office in Sarajevo, where he got to know Ella Barth, his Sarajevo-born secretary and translator there. In the summer of 1941 Barth gave birth to his son, in a *Lebensborn* home.¹³⁷

Despite the ostensible purpose of *Lebensborn* homes - to offer support to, and to encourage, women to produce German heirs – Heinrich's wife was unsatisfied with the situation. In her letter to Himmler she outlined the subsequent events: after Barth returned to work, the Sarajevo office was dissolved and Barth and Heinrich were sent to different locations. Heinrich was called up to the *Waffen-SS*, and when he was later released, he found a job and moved in with Barth. Shortly after this, word reached Ruth Heinrich that Barth was expecting Heinrich's second child, and that he was now demanding a divorce from her. She asked Himmler whether "as a German woman and mother of three children", she could be forced into a divorce.¹³⁸ She considered herself to be innocent and fighting for herself, and her children's rights. She received a reply from one of Himmler's staff that, while it would be difficult to intervene in the personal relationship between two people, they would try to assist her. In a report, sent to Himmler from the *Lebensborn* home, it was acknowledged that Heinrich wanted to divorce his wife and marry Barth in both the best interests of his illegitimate children, and the best interests of Barth. Taking his name would offer better security, and being divorced would not cause his wife or legitimate children any problems. The home noted that Heinrich was generous towards Barth and the child, and that he acknowledged paternity. Barth received a glowing report from the home, as she racially and ideologically fulfilled the SS principles required of her. Heinrich's wife, despite being the mother of three German children, believed that she was not treated with the dignity she felt she deserved, and she was usurped by a Yugoslavian woman, Barth, whose affiliation to German culture only arose through the German occupation of

¹³⁷ Document produced by *lebensborn* home, December 28, 1942, BArch NS 19/3031 .

¹³⁸ "als deutsche Frau und Mutter von drei Kinder", *ibid*.

Yugoslavia.¹³⁹ Despite the humiliation Ruth Heinrich felt, the end result was one that was good in the eyes of the Reich: more children had been born for Germany, even if they were born out of wedlock. Her case further demonstrates the tension between traditional family values and SS values.

At one time, the Nazis placed a significant emphasis on the importance of marriage and child-bearing within marriage. Hitler himself, although he only married his partner Eva Braun the day before they committed suicide, had said that “marriage was a sacred act”,¹⁴⁰ and, for some, “marriage is a duty”.¹⁴¹ Marriage itself was rewarded. Loans were given to newly-weds, and on the birth of each child, a quarter of the loan was considered a gift. Mothers of three or more children were given ‘honour cards’, allowing them to jump queues in shops. Women were also rewarded, on mother’s day, depending on the number of children they had produced. There were also punishments for those who tried to prevent childbirth: the penalty for carrying out an abortion on an Aryan woman increased throughout the Nazi regime.¹⁴² By the time war broke out, the penalty had risen from arrest to death.¹⁴³ The production of children became so essential that divorce was permitted if one partner refused or was unable to conceive children.¹⁴⁴ The church encouraged the attitude that children should be born in wedlock and most Germans at the time supported this view. However, such conventions clashed with the Nazi view that children must be produced for the Fatherland, at all costs, whether through mistresses, *zweitfrau*, or even taking unwanted illegitimate children and giving them to an SS family to bring up as their own. It was preferable to produce legitimate children, and many marriage applications were granted, in spite of other circumstances which would normally negate an application, because the woman was pregnant. However, the ultimate goal was to produce children and it was not strictly necessary to be married to achieve this end. Dr. Gregor Ebner, the

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ “Hochzeit ist ein heiliger Akt”, Adolf Hitler, *Monologue im Führerhauptquartier, 1941-1944. Die Aufzeichnung Heinrich Heims* (Hamburg: Werner Jochman, 1980), p.338.

¹⁴¹ “Hochzeit sei Dienst”, Claus Graf Stauffenberg, text from Stauffenberg Erinnerungsstätte, Stuttgart

¹⁴² Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland* (London: Methuen, 1988), pp.185-186.

¹⁴³ Catrine Clay and Michael Leapman, *Master Race. The Lebensborn Experiment in Nazi Germany* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1995), p.55.

¹⁴⁴ Koonz, *Mothers*, p.192.

first chief medical officer for the *Lebensborn* homes, was fully aware that the homes went against the “usual liberal bourgeois and church dogma”; the organisation was accused of “undermining the institution of marriage - the underpinning of the National Socialist State”.¹⁴⁵ Dr. Ebner himself considered it irrelevant if the child’s parents were married or not.¹⁴⁶ He was aware that not everyone was able to marry and wanted to treat all mothers in the same way.

Ultimately, this meant that secretaries who began an affair with their bosses may not have felt the need to marry them. A subsection of Nazi society viewed it as acceptable to have a relationship and produce children whilst remaining unmarried. As long as the parents were ‘racially valuable’, the mother and child could even obtain financial support from a *Lebensborn* home. The status of women in the Third Reich was inter-connected with their ability to produce children. Whether they were producing these children as a wife or a mistress did not have a significant bearing on their status. Even so, many secretaries did choose to marry the man that they were having an affair with, often at the expense of an earlier marriage, and frequently because the secretary was pregnant with his child. Marriage offered greater security for the relationship, and financial benefits.

Secretaries working for the National Socialists across the Third Reich fell in love with their male colleagues and bosses. What they had in common was an established close working relationship; they saw their colleagues every working day. For some secretaries, relationships with their male bosses or colleagues irrevocably altered their lives. Many secretaries gave up their jobs after beginning such relationships, either because they were pregnant and wanted to look after their child, or because they wanted to devote themselves to their lovers. A number of secretaries even found their pregnancies a useful legitimate excuse to leave their jobs. That women were encouraged to leave their jobs when pregnant, and not necessarily return to them, indicates that it was more important for women to be mothers than workers: the secretaries had a higher value as mothers. Women could

¹⁴⁵ Clay and Leapman, *Master Race*, p.57.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.61-62.

work, and indeed it was necessary for some of them to work to support the war effort, or themselves, but motherhood was preferable.

Women's work as secretaries was fundamental to the administration of all aspects of Nazi policy. Most secretaries were not in a position to take an active role in atrocities, although some, such as those typing for the T4 clinics, witnessed them. Generally, secretaries, particularly those involved, even passively, in murder and abuse, did not talk about the details of their work. Nevertheless, they sometimes chose partners involved in similar work, finding comfort in their shared experiences. Despite the close personal relationships they shared with their bosses, secretaries were not necessarily privy to their confidential work, nor were they given extra responsibilities. Romantic liaisons with their masters did not elevate the status of secretaries to the extent that they gained a deeper insight into the work of their bosses: these women were still treated as secretaries.

Part 3: Chaos, Confusion and Consequences

Chapter 6: The End of the War

As the war turned against Germany, and the Reich shrank and then disintegrated, the fate of all those women working in administrative roles for the National Socialists changed. As early as 1943, several departments of the RSHA began to evacuate to locations considered safer from Allied bombing attacks, and many secretaries were transferred with their departments. Towards the end of the war, as departments began to prepare for the imminent Allied assault, secretaries were encouraged to disappear, or to leave Germany. The secretaries each faced their own challenges as they made their way home, which in some cases took years. Conversely, at the same time as the secretaries were being transported out of Germany, the *Helperinnen* were being evacuated from occupied Europe back into Germany. They had difficult journeys, facing limited transport options, and possible capture by the approaching Allies. Although the impact differed between groups of female administrators, all were affected by the chaos which the end of the war brought with it.

From March 1942, the British Bomber Command began mounting devastating raids on German cities. They were joined by the American 6th Army Air Force in 1943. One by one, German cities were wrecked. Berlin was a key target for Allied bombing attacks, and there were repeated heavy raids in 1943-45.¹ Bombing rendered normal working life at the RSHA almost impossible. The bombing attacks in Berlin made it difficult for the RSHA to maintain communications between its various regional offices. Handing increased power to the regional offices reduced the need for communications. However, the safety of the staff working in the Berlin offices was constantly at risk. Similarly, documents located in these offices would potentially be irretrievably lost if a bombing attack occurred.²

¹ Martin Middlebrook, *The Berlin Raids: RAF Bomber Command Winter 1943-44* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990).

² Michael Wildt, *An Uncompromising Generation. The Nazi Leadership of the Reich Security Main Office* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009), p. 349.

The British raids on Hamburg in July 1943 and subsequent fire-storm caused such intense destruction that Heinrich Himmler ordered the relocation of the RSHA.³ On July 31, 1943, he sent a telegram to the heads of all the SS main offices instructing them to move important documents to secure locations, specifically outside of Berlin.⁴ Himmler ordered the head of the office responsible for Organisation, Administration and Law to move to a safer location “so that irreplaceable files are no longer endangered”.⁵ Yet the safety of the staff was still a problem: Ilse Oswald stated that bomb attacks meant she and her colleagues in the Department for Polish Affairs found themselves “more in the basement than in our workplace”.⁶ Relocation was considered advisable not just for safety, but also to maintain staff productivity.

Destinations were identified both in Germany and abroad. Locations such as Wulkow and Trebnitz were picked for both their proximity to Berlin, which eased relocation, and their distance from the capital, which rendered them safer. Both were situated in rural areas of Germany, which were not considered a target for the Allied bombers. The Communism and Marxism department of the *Gestapo* was shifted to a reserve depot, near Wulkow, west of Berlin.⁷ Ruth Tilgner, who was employed as a typist in Wulkow camp, noted in her testimony that the prisoners at Wulkow built barracks to be used by those offices which had been bombed.⁸

³ For more information on the bombing attack on Hamburg see, for example, Martin Middlebrook, *The Battle of Hamburg. Allied Bomber Forces Against a German City in 1943* (London: Allen Lane, 1980), and Keith Lowe, *Inferno. The Devastation of Hamburg, 1943* (London: Viking, The Penguin Group, 2007).

⁴ Fernschreiben, gez. Brandt, to alle Hauptamtchefs, July 31, 1943, BArch DH, ZM 1469 A 5, cited in Michael Wildt, “Götzendämmerung. Das Reichssicherheitshauptamt im letzten Kriegsjahr” in *Sozialwissenschaftliche Information*, 24, 1995, p.101.

⁵ Himmler to Pohl, March 12, 1944, Bundesarchiv Berlin (BArch) DH, ZM 1469 A5, cited in Wildt, *An Uncompromising Generation*, p.349.

⁶ “Mehr im Keller als in unserem Arbeitsplatz”, testimony of Ilse Oswald, July 31, 1969 and December 10, 1968, Bundesarchiv BArch B 162/4558 (Ludwigsburg).

⁷ Testimony of Ursula Fischer, September 27, 1966, BArch B 162/4555 (Ludwigsburg), and also testimony of Herta Thurann, October 12, 1966, BArch B162/4560 (Ludwigsburg).

⁸ Testimony of Ruth Tilgner, October 15, 1965, BArch B 162/4174 (Ludwigsburg).

Prague was also considered “relatively bombproof”,⁹ according to one female administrator. The Law and Property Affairs department was moved there in summer 1943,¹⁰ and some of the staff remained in the city until the end of the war.¹¹ When the building housing the Department for Polish Affairs was bombed, in August 1944, the department, together with its administrative staff, was sent to Trebnitz.¹² The sub-section of the *Gestapo* tasked with ‘Foreign Enemies of State’ was removed to a depot near Trebnitz in late summer or autumn 1944.¹³ In February 1945, the main RSHA building in Hermann-Göring-Straße in Berlin was destroyed in an Allied attack. The departments which had been based in this building were re-sited to Pankow, in North Berlin.¹⁴

Members of the same department were not all transferred concurrently. Ingeborg Westphal, a stenotypist in the department for Jewish Affairs, recalled being relocated in February 1945, “about three to four weeks later than others”.¹⁵ Similarly, Ursula Fischer of the *Gestapo* Department for Communism and Marxism was sent elsewhere on July, 20 1944,¹⁶ while Herta Thurann, a stenotypist in the same department, was not transferred until the autumn.¹⁷ The partial, staged relocation of staff may have been designed to ensure that the department never stopped functioning; while some of the staff were en route, others would still be working. It may also have been a strategy to protect valuable workers so that, even if one group came under attack, the remaining staff members would be safe.

⁹ “relative bombensichere Prag”, testimony of Hildegard Topel, October 17, 1967, BArch B 162/4174 (Ludwigsburg).

¹⁰ Yaacov Lozowick, *Hitler’s Bureaucrats* (London and New York: Continuum, 2000), p.97 and testimony of Elsa Heine, June 21, 1966, BArch B 162/4168 (Ludwigsburg).

¹¹ Testimony of Marianna Müller, September 13, 1966, BArch B 162/4170 (Ludwigsburg).

¹² Testimony of Gerda Gerner, August 9, 1966, and testimony of Erna Groth, August 19, 66, BArch B 162/4556 (Ludwigsburg).

¹³ Testimony of Erika Schönfeld, July 1, 1969, BArch B 162/4558 (Ludwigsburg), and testimony of Ingeborg Flaig, July 3, 1969, BArch B 162/4555 (Ludwigsburg).

¹⁴ Testimony of Anneliese Thürmer, October 27, 1965, Landesarchiv Berlin (LAB) B Rep 057-01 3074, and see also Reinhard Rurup, ed., *Topography of Terror: A Documentation*, translated by Werner T. Angress (Berlin: Verlag Willmuth Arenhovel, 1989), pp.369, 371.

¹⁵ “nach etwa drei bis vier Wochen nach anderen”, testimony of Ingeborg Westphal, August 16, 1967, BArch B 162/4174 (Ludwigsburg).

¹⁶ Testimony of Ursula Fischer, September 27, 1966, BArch B 162/4555 (Ludwigsburg).

¹⁷ Testimony of Herta Thurann, October 12, 1966, BArch B162/4560 (Ludwigsburg).

The women's personal lives or needs counted for nothing as the RSHA entered this period of constant emergency and improvisation. They found themselves treated even more abruptly and arbitrarily. When Ursula Rogge went on holiday, in July 1944, she was required to leave her contact details as the transferral to Prague of the Department for Jewish Affairs, where she was employed, was imminent. A few days before the end of her trip, Rogge received a message that the transfer was to take place immediately, and she was recalled to Berlin.¹⁸

Relocation was not presented to the administrative staff as optional. However, female administrators did, on occasion, request assignment to a safer place. Margarethe Reichert asked to be moved to Prague because the constant air-raids were damaging her health.¹⁹ As her home had been bombed in November 1943, Hildegard Topel wished to leave Berlin and asked to be dismissed from the RSHA. Her request was turned down but she was transferred to the RSHA's Jewish department in Prague.²⁰ In late January 1945, Adolf Eichmann called to his office in Kurfürstenstraße all the remaining secretaries in the Department for Jewish Affairs, and told them they would be evacuated to Prague. He specified that if any of them did not want to go to there, they could go straight to a concentration camp, which Ruth Tilgner identified as Sachsenhausen. The implication was clear: they had little choice in the matter.²¹ This threat was not followed through though: Elisabeth Marks was able to avoid the move by arguing that she had to remain in Berlin because she was a single mother and needed to stay to look after her children.²²

Some departments were displaced multiple times. On occasion, personnel were recalled to Germany, even if that meant staff returning to unsafe locations. Elfriede Rudolph, working for the *Gestapo*, was transferred to Prague with her colleagues in December 1943, where they remained until September 1944. They

¹⁸ Testimony of Ursula Rogge, September 7, 1967, BArch B 162/4173 (Ludwigsburg).

¹⁹ Testimony of Margarethe Reichert, date is illegible, but possibly is May 27, 1962, LAB B Rep. 057-01 2422.

²⁰ Testimony of Hildegard Topel, October 17, 1967, BArch B 162/4174 (Ludwigsburg).

²¹ Testimony of Ruth Tilgner, October 15, 1965, BArch B 162/4174 (Ludwigsburg).

²² Testimony of Elisabeth Marks, September 8, 1966, BArch B 162/4170 (Ludwigsburg).

were then transferred to Wulkow. In January 1945, Rudolph returned to Berlin, where some offices were still functioning, but on February 4, 1945 the building in Prinz-Albrecht-Straße was severely damaged in an air attack and the staff were forced to evacuate once again.²³

The frequent relocation and reassignment of women towards the end of the war, and the ensuing chaos, provided some with an opportunity to escape from potential capture by the approaching Allies. Shortly before the war ended, Herta Thurann was seconded to the *Gestapo* department for Communism and Marxism which moved to the region of Poznań, in Poland. Her relocation initially imperilled her, situating her in a precarious location. However, from there, she was able to escape from the approaching front line and return home, to Güterfelde in eastern Germany.²⁴ Fuelled by self-preservation, Thurann would have wanted to ensure that she was as far away as possible from the oncoming Red Army, which was determined to exact revenge upon those, like Thurann, who had been employed in pursuit of Communists. In late summer 1944, Gertrud Hendrichs, who was working in the sub-section of the *Gestapo* responsible for occupied Western Europe, was moved east from Berlin to a reserve camp. As the Russians approached, she and her colleagues were brought back to Berlin. The staff were supposed to subsequently depart for Austria, but Hendrichs took the opportunity to remain in Berlin with her parents, and she left her job.²⁵ This could conceivably be considered an act of desertion by Hendrichs, yet she did not appear to suffer any adverse repercussions.

At the same time as departments were being carted out of Germany, one secretary was desperately attempting to return. Erika Albrecht, who had been working in The Hague, was determined to find a way back to Berlin. She wished to leave the Security Office of Jewish Affairs where she had been sent because she “foresaw the invasion”.²⁶ Her desire to return home was also influenced by the

²³ Testimony of Elfriede Rudolph, March 24, 1965, LAB B Rep 057-01 2519.

²⁴ Testimony of Herta Thurann, October 12, 1966, BArch B162/4560 (Ludwigsburg).

²⁵ Testimony of Gertrud Hendrichs, October 27, 1966, BArch B162/4556 (Ludwigsburg).

²⁶ “die Invasion voraussah”, testimony of Erika Albrecht, October 24, 1967LG Berlin, 3P KS 1/71 gegen Otto Bovensiepen und andere Bd. XXXVIII, pp.127-148.

hanging of an acquaintance, a former member of the SD. Although she did not know why the Nazi authorities in the Netherlands had executed him, she had reason to be concerned for her own safety. Shortly before his death, he had asked her to destroy certain files pertaining to a Jewess in Amsterdam, whose arrest he hoped to prevent. Albrecht does not testify which course of action she took, but she had discussed the request with her superior. Although her superior was unwilling to take the risk of destroying the files, Albrecht was fearful that she had exposed herself to danger and so she sought to return to Germany. She was successful in her endeavours: in early 1944 she secured herself a role in the Department for Jewish Affairs in the RSHA in Berlin.²⁷

As the RSHA administrators were being evacuated out of Berlin, their paths effectively crossed with those of the *Helperinnen*, who were being evacuated back into Germany. Despite their classification as civilian employees of the *Wehrmacht*, some *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* found themselves in precarious positions towards the end of the war when the Allies approached. Some evacuation procedures resulted in luggage, and sometimes the girls themselves, being left behind in the confusion.

The day the Allies landed in France, the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* operating the telephone exchanges in Arras were inundated with calls. Clare Varner-Rassmann, who was employed there, saw chaos descend as “everyone wanted to speak to everyone, no one could wait”. While she operated the exchange she noted that “all conversations were hurried, vital and secret”.²⁸ The *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* were evacuated from Arras in such a rush that they did not have time to pack properly.²⁹ The girls were taken to the *Nachrichten* school in Gießen, and buses from all directions arrived until the school was overcrowded and “bursting at the seams”.³⁰ The girls had to eat in shifts. To relieve the situation, some girls were offered the choice of re-training: for example, Varner-Rassmann was given the

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ “Jeder wollte jeden sprechen, keiner konnte warten”, “Alle Gespräche waren eilig, wichtig und geheim”, Clare Varner-Rassmann, “Briefe an Franzl” in Jürgen Kleindienst, ed., *Täglich Krieg Deutschland 1939-1945* (Berlin: JKL Publications, 2000) Reihe ZEITGUT, Band 9, p.180.

²⁹ Ibid., p.182.

³⁰ “aus allen Nähten platzten”, *ibid.*

choice between retraining either as a radio operator in Kiel or as a telex operator, for the marines, on the Island of Rügen.³¹

The evacuation journeys undertaken by the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* were often difficult. In March 1945, Sigrid Meißner* and her 30 female comrades were marched from Düsseldorf in the direction of Bavaria. For much of this journey they had to travel on foot, with food in short supply, even though the women were still officially serving.³² The *Nachrichtenhelferin* Eva Hahn wrote about the challenges she and her comrades faced. They found themselves marching over 50 kilometres a day, with no food and drink, yet the girls showed “an uncomplaining endurance”.³³ They had to endure physical hardships, although this paled into insignificance compared with the continual risk of capture by Russians or Czechs.

The *SS-Helferinnen* on duty abroad faced similar challenges to the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* in getting back to Germany. Journeying from Paris in October 1944, one group of *SS-Helferinnen* found themselves being shot at, and bombarded by low-flying airplanes. They were forced to abandon their luggage, and some of the women became separated from the group in the confusion. Eventually the group arrived back at their school.³⁴

Princess Ingeborg, who had been posted to Prague in April 1945, was tasked with arranging the evacuation of the *SS-Helferinnen*. Ingeborg herself was in the last group of Germans to leave Prague; the group were led by Czech representatives carrying white flags, for protection, yet the white flags were not universally respected, and the group was involved in street fighting. It took three attempts to successfully leave Prague. Princess Ingeborg stated that she and her colleagues “all expected and hoped that the Americans would reach and occupy the capital”.³⁵ The

³¹ Ibid., p.183-185.

³² Interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Sigrid Meißner* in Franka Maubach, *Die Stellung halten* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), pp.266-7.

³³ “ein klagloses Durchhalte”, Werner Niehaus, *Die Nachrichtentruppe 1914 bis heute: Entstehung und Einsatz* (Stuttgart: Motorbuch-Verlag, 1980), pp.287-288.

³⁴ Report written by *SS-Helferin* Rosl Bader, October 3, 1944, BArch SF A0002.

³⁵ Princess Ingeborg’s account of the last days of the German occupation in Prague, reprinted in

group crossed the Moldau river, which, until 11.30am the day they crossed had been the boundary between the Americans and the Russians. Ingeborg and her group arrived “one hour too late” and were imprisoned, together with 40,000 German soldiers, in an American camp and handed over to the Russians, much to their distress.

The SS school in Oberehnheim, where the *SS-Helferinnen* had been trained, was evacuated in late 1944, due to the fast approaching Allies. Taken ill a few days after she arrived at the SS school in early November 1944, Charlotte Rebeling was taken to the nearby civil hospital in Strasbourg. The city was liberated by the French shortly afterwards. The school lost all contact with Rebeling, and had no knowledge of her whereabouts.³⁶ The remainder of the school staff and pupils were relocated to three separate locations, in Heidenheim an der Brenz, Erfurt and Bopfingen, all of which were deeper in central Germany. The school in Heidenheim was disbanded just days before Heidenheim surrendered to the Americans on April 24, 1945 and the staff and *SS-Helferinnen* headed towards Bavaria.³⁷

At the school in Gießen, the discharge of the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* began in winter 1944. Many of the girls were relieved and even though only a certain number of layoffs occurred each day, large queues formed as the girls hoped to receive their discharge papers.³⁸ Rumours spread among the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* that the SS were poaching girls for the *SS-Helferinnenkorps*. According to one *Helferin*, Elisabeth L.*, this was perceived as “terrible news”; the girls feared being taken into the service of the SS.³⁹ However, as the SS were only interested in girls who met their height requirements, Elisabeth claimed that the

James Lucas, *Das Reich. The Military Role of 2nd SS Division* (London: Arms and Armour Press, 1991), pp.195-199.

³⁶ Personal file of Charlotte Rebeling, letter December 21, 1944, BArch SF B0020. Disappointingly, her file does not note whether or not she was found.

³⁷ Jutta Mühlberg, *Das SS-Helferinnenkorps. Ausbildung, Einsatz und Entnazifizierung der weiblichen Angehörigen der Waffen-SS 1942-1949* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2011), p.260.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ “Schreckensnachricht”, report by *Nachrichtenhelferin* Elisabeth L.* in Gerda Szepansky, *>Blitzmädel< >Helfenmutter< >Kriegerwitwe<*. *Frauenleben im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1986), p.97.

tall *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* hid themselves and no longer wore high heels. When Elisabeth received her release papers at the end of 1944 she was delighted: “finally, finally free and back home”.⁴⁰

A number of *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* who had not been offered the chance to return home but who were eager to leave active service, decided to take matters into their own hands, and deserted. In spring 1945, *Nachrichtenhelferin* Sigrid Meißner* was seconded to a small town. The train she was on passed through her home town, and Meißner took advantage of the situation and disembarked.⁴¹ Hilde Kerer had been captured, released and put on a train. When she realised the train was going in the wrong direction, she jumped from it while it was still moving, so desperate was she to return home.⁴²

Although Elisabeth L.* was released from service at the end of 1944, she ended up in Berlin and was conscripted again as a radio operator. The conditions had worsened since her previous spell in Berlin, with frequent air raids, minimal food, and rumours circulating about the end of the war. Elisabeth was told by a colleague at Landsberg that Russian tanks were nearby. Shortly afterwards, Elisabeth decided to give up and simply stopped going to work. She spent the short time until the end of the war at home.⁴³

The remaining *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* were granted general release on May 7, 1945.⁴⁴ They were recommended to look for a shelter nearby, or to return home, and to get rid of their uniform to avoid identification by the Allies.⁴⁵ Fear of capture by the Allies was prevalent among the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen*. The Armed Forces High Command was prepared for the eventuality having published in 1943 a code of

⁴⁰ “Endlich, endlich frei und wieder nach Hause”, report by *Nachrichtenhelferin* Elisabeth L.* in *ibid.*

⁴¹ Interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Sigrid Meißner in Maubach, *Die Stellung halten*, pp.266-7.

⁴² Interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Hilde Kerer, “Vom Willen des Lebens getrieben” in *Brixner*, May 2006, pp.12-13, available online: <http://issuu.com/brixmedia/docs/brixner-196---2006-mai>.

⁴³ Report by *Nachrichtenhelferin* Elisabeth L.* in Szepansky, *>Blitzmädel<*, pp.97-98.

⁴⁴ Dismissal command, May 7, 1945, BArch RL 7/547a.

⁴⁵ Franka Maubach, “Als Helferin in der Wehrmacht. Eine paradigmatische Figur des Kriegsendes”, *Osteuropa* 55, 2005 Nr. 4-6: Sonderheft “Kluften der Erinnerung. Rußland und Deutschland 60 Jahre nach dem Krieg”, p.203.

conduct for the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* to abide by if captured. It was recommended that the use of firearms be avoided.⁴⁶

The climate of fear amongst the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* was exacerbated by advice given by German soldiers to the girls. As the war came to a close, some German soldiers had advised Ursula R.* and her colleagues to wear civilian clothes if they were at risk of capture by the Russians.⁴⁷ Given the choice of the Russians, Americans and Canadians, they should avoid being caught by the Russians. She was captured and imprisoned by the Canadians.⁴⁸ Similarly, Ullmann, like many of the long-serving staff within the *Helferinnen*, was taken into captivity by the Allies, even though she had removed the insignia from her uniform. She was interned in Bad Kreuznach, recalling that the women received food and were fortunate in that they “were lucky” as they were harassed less than others.⁴⁹

Towards the end of the war, Hilde Kerer went on a short holiday to her native Austria with one of her fellow *Nachrichtenhelferinnen*. A jeep appeared looking for German fugitives. Although, as an Austrian, Kerer was not obligated to go with, she chose to accompany her German friend. They were taken to a prison camp, and eight days later transferred to another camp where conditions were inhospitable: the women were kept outside, behind barbed wire. Kerer became ill and was able to secure her release.⁵⁰

Evacuation procedures implemented to bring the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* back to Germany were not always successful. A large number fell into the hands of Allied forces, and thousands were taken prisoner in Southern France.⁵¹ From March 1945 until June 1946, 8,717 German women were imprisoned there, although only

⁴⁶ Franz W. Seidler, *Frauen zu den Waffen* (Koblenz/Bonn: Wehr&Wissen 1978), p.170.

⁴⁷ Interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Ursula R.* in Rosemarie Killius, *Frauen für die Front: Gespräche mit Wehrmachtshelferinnen* (Leipzig: Militzke Verlag, 2003), p.55.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p.57.

⁴⁹ “Glück gehabt”, interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Leni Ullmann* in Maubach, *Die Stellung halten*, pp.275, 277; Ullmann does not specify which of the Allies she was captured by but it is possible it was the French, as Bad Kreuznach was in their zone of occupation.

⁵⁰ Kerer, “Vom Willen des Lebens getrieben” in *Brixner* (May 2006), p.13.

⁵¹ Seidler, *Frauen*, p.170.

348 were officially identified as prisoners of war in the capacity of women auxiliaries to the army; a further 1,096 were Red Cross nurses, while the remaining women were unclassified. In Eastern Europe, many *Helferinnen* of all kinds suffered a similar fate, including 1,500 women in Ukraine.⁵²

When the Americans advanced through Italy with the Allied forces, *Nachrichtenhelferin* Ilse H.* and her comrades did all they could to avoid captivity, because, she claimed, they were under the impression that they would “be sent to brothels in America”. It was not until spring 1945 that the Americans reached Ilse’s location in Northern Italy. At this time, Ilse was responsible for 600 girls. The majority of the girls left Verona, with instructions to meet in Bolzano, in the German-speaking enclave in northern Italy. The last 70 girls, including Ilse, were transported in vehicles carrying the communications equipment, although they frequently had to leave the vehicles as “low flying aircraft attacks” occurred. The girls were housed in a school, and rejoiced every time more of their number successfully arrived in Bolzano. They were given permission to continue journeying on their own, and some made their way beyond Cortina D’Ampezzo, a town in the Southern Alps, to a village. The people there were “German-friendly”, and some housed between ten and twenty girls for the night. Other girls, including Ilse, spent the night in a sports hall.⁵³

This calm was interrupted by the arrival of the Americans, who informed the girls they were prisoners of war. They were given only biscuits for sustenance and forbidden from leaving. Ilse was still considered to be in a position of responsibility and she was driven through Cortina in a jeep, flanked by Americans with fixed bayonets. The residents of Cortina were now, according to Ilse, “very nasty” and threw flower pots at her. The girls were taken back to Verona and held in a former soldiers’ camp. After three days they were transported once again, this time to Florence, where they were held in another camp. The girls felt that the Americans,

⁵² Ibid., pp.171-172.

⁵³ “in Bordelle nach Amerika zu schicken”, “Tieffliegerangriffe”, “deutschfreundlich”, interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Ilse H.* in Killius, *Frauen für die Front*, pp.33-35.

particularly the Jews among them, were exacting their revenge on them, treating them “like Nazis”. One man came at Ilse “menacingly with his stick”. They considered this reaction to be “understandable”. After three months in the camp, with limited food and water, and having slept on bare boards, the girls were divided and released to the various occupied zones. As her home was now in the Russian zone, Ilse was supposed to be under Russian authority. However, her parents had moved to Celle, in northern Germany, which was under British jurisdiction, and so Ilse was turned over to the British who imprisoned her for only two weeks. Ilse believes that she was fortunate; her friends who ended up in the Russian zone were “never heard of again”.⁵⁴ These statements must be placed in context: these women were expressing their recollections in a self-pitying manner, conceivably exaggerating their own experiences to emphasise what they had been through.

By the beginning of 1945, even ardent Nazis had to accept that the war was going to be lost. Those departments within the RSHA which had not already evacuated began to prepare for the consequences. It was no longer a question of evading bombs and finding locations safe from aerial attacks. Nazis were now concerned to avoid Allied retribution and to find safe havens. More departments were uprooted to Prague, not only because it was considered safer, but also because it was perceived as an easier base from which to escape the possibility of Allied retribution. Ruth Tilgner intimated that “almost all the departments still in Berlin” were evacuated,⁵⁵ and she was correct: by the end of 1944,

“most agencies of the RSHA were housed in thirty-eight alternate locations outside of Berlin, from Bad Sulza to Prague, from Grudziadz to Marienbad, and from Weissensee and Theresienstadt to Vienna”.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ “ganz eklig”, “wie Nazis”, “drohend mit seinem Stock”, “verständlicher Weise”, “nie mehr etwas gehört”, interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Ilse H.* in *ibid.*

⁵⁵ “fast der ganzen noch in Berlin befindlichen Dienststellen”, testimony of Ruth Tilgner, October 15, 1965, BArch B162/4174 (Ludwigsburg).

⁵⁶ RSHA, I Org, Verzeichnis sämtlicher Ausweichdienststellen und Standorte des Reichssicherheitsamtes ausserhalb von Berlin, December 21, 1944, IfZ, Nürnberger Dokument 107-L, cited in Wildt, *An Uncompromising Generation*, p.350.

As defeat became imminent, the Nazi administration employed tactics to protect its staff. It began by burning records to destroy evidence of its crimes, in anticipation of the arrival of the Allies. Elisabeth Marks, who had remained in Berlin to be near her children, was present in April 1945 when files were burnt in the courtyard of the building housing Eichmann's Department for Jewish Affairs at 116 Kurfürstenstraße.⁵⁷ The records of a genocide were burnt as Marks looked on.

Finally, office staff were told that they were no longer needed, or formally dismissed, either verbally by their bosses, or via communications sent to the regional offices. Friedericke Alphone, an administrator for the SD in Pilsen in the former Czechoslovakia, was discharged on April 21, 1945, after a telex arrived which stated that "all female typists should be dismissed with immediate effect".⁵⁸ On April 18 or 19, 1945, the head of the *Gestapo*, Heinrich Müller, called all the secretaries and female administrators who were still present into his office in Berlin and informed them that their services were no longer required. Lieselotte Wöhler recalled that he offered them all financial support "in case we needed anything".⁵⁹ Müller offered his personal secretary, Barbara Hellmuth, a false passport, to assist her in an escape attempt, should she so wish, but she claimed to have turned this down.⁶⁰

Adolf Hitler personally gave his secretary Traudl Junge a capsule of poison, "as a kind of goodbye present";⁶¹ thereby providing her with an escape option from internment, investigation and possible mistreatment by the Allies. Junge accepted, and treasured the gift. When she was captured, the capsule was taken from her.⁶² Hitler also gifted his other secretaries, Gerda Christian, Johanna Wolf and Christa Schroeder cyanide ampoules; Christian turned his offer down as she had already

⁵⁷ Testimony of Elisabeth Marks, September 8, 1966, BArch B 162/4170 (Ludwigsburg).

⁵⁸ "alle weiblichen Schreibkräfte mit sofortiger Wirkung entlassen werden müssten", testimony of Friedericke Alphone, December 9, 1964, LAB B Rep. 057-01 2353.

⁵⁹ "falls wir irgendwelches benötigten", testimony of Lieselotte Wöhler, September 12, 1969, BArch B 162/4560 (Ludwigsburg).

⁶⁰ Testimony of Barbara Hellmuth, December 12, 1960, BArch B162/3233 (Ludwigsburg).

⁶¹ Traudl Junge, *Until the Final Hour*, Melissa Müller, ed., translated by Anthea Bell (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2003), p.219.

⁶² *Ibid.*

ensured that she was equipped with one.⁶³ Hitler was providing his secretaries with an easy option, which he himself would take; rather than facing Allied retribution and punishment, they could choose to end their own lives. Hitler's actions were not unique: Eichmann also provided his wife with poison capsules; enough for each of their children and for her. However, he instructed her to use them only if the Russians came, but if the Americans or British came, then there was no need.⁶⁴ The implication was that the Russians would treat the women worse than the other Allies, to the extent that even death would be preferable.

Once released from their employment, many women found themselves stranded far from home. Some felt like they had been abandoned, and while others were provided with a means for returning home, this was not always successful. The employees of the Department for Jewish Affairs transferred to Prague were offered varied ways out of the city but these did not extend to the full journey home, so the women had to find their own means of transport for the remainder of the journey. In late April or early May 1945, a group of women travelling together reached Bavaria, where they took refuge in the forest for a few days. The office staff were then told that their services were no longer required and that their jobs were terminated. They were driven to Gmunden in Austria where they witnessed the end of the war.⁶⁵ From there, they had to struggle to make their own way home, crossing war-torn Europe overrun with Allied soldiers. It took Ingeborg Schoenemann until January 1946 to get back to Berlin.⁶⁶

Some members of the department who had remained in Prague were provided with a lorry which took them to Bad Aussee, in western Austria, where they were abandoned.⁶⁷ Also known as Alt Aussee, this area was a Nazi hotbed, where Ernst Kaltenbrunner, Chief of the RSHA from January 1943 until the end of

⁶³ Anton Joachimsthaler, *The Last Days of Hitler. Legend, Evidence and Truth*, translated by Helmut Bogler (London: Arms and Armour, 1996, Cassell Military Paperbacks edition, 2002) , p.170.

⁶⁴ Adolf Eichmann, *Ich, Adolf Eichmann: ein historischer Zeugenbericht*, Rudolf Aschenauer, ed. (Leoni am Starnberger See: Druffel, 1980), p.423.

⁶⁵ Testimony of Gisela Kirschke, June 21, 1966, BArch B 162/4169 (Ludwigsburg).

⁶⁶ Testimony of Ingeborg Schoenemann, October 13, 1965, BArch B 162/4173 (Ludwigsburg).

⁶⁷ Testimony of Hildegard Topel, October 17, 1967, BArch B 162 4174 (Ludwigsburg).

the war,⁶⁸ and one of his close friends, Adolf Eichmann, amongst others, had gathered.⁶⁹

Other employees were not supplied with vehicles for any part of the journey: Ingeborg Wagner was supposed to be evacuated by train at the end of April 1945, yet there were no trains available. Wagner consequently remained with her mother, who had been employed alongside her, and other female employees in Prague.⁷⁰ In April 1945 Hildegard vom Hoff and her colleagues were “released in order to flee”⁷¹ but not provided with any transport. Marianna Müller chose to remain with her boss Ernst Moes, and several other colleagues. This choice was disastrous: Moes shot himself while they were on the run.⁷²

Employees of other departments faced similar challenges. Working for the *Gestapo*, Stephanie Allmendinger had been transferred with her department, which oversaw protective custody issues, to Prague in early 1945. In April 1945, she left Prague on a *Nationalsozialistische Volkswohlfahrt* train, which was unable to complete its journey. Those on the train were abandoned and everyone tried as best they could, according to Allmendinger, to go “in the direction of the Reich”.⁷³

The picture was no rosier for those women who did not have to face a hard and challenging journey home. Many German women were raped by Allied soldiers, who may have seen the women as their reward for defeating the Germans. Antony Beevor postulates that this attitude may have derived from the pillaging and looting which traditionally accompanies war; the spoils to the conquerors. These soldiers

⁶⁸ See Peter R. Black, *Ernst Kaltenbrunner: Ideological Soldier of the Third Reich* (Princeton, New Jersey, Guildford: Princeton University Press, 1984), and Robert E. Matteson, *The Capture and Last Days of SS General Ernst Kaltenbrunner: Chief of the Nazi Gestapo, Criminal Police and Intelligence Services* (Saint Paul, Minnesota: R.E.Matteson, 1993).

⁶⁹ See Gertrude Schneider, *Exile and Destruction: The Fate of Austrian Jews, 1938-1945* (Westport, Connecticut, London: Praeger, 1995), and Moshe Pearlman, *The Capture of Adolf Eichmann* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1961).

⁷⁰ Testimony of Ingeborg Wagner, May 21, 1962 and March 21, 1966, LAB Rep. 057-01 3182.

⁷¹ “freigestellt zu fliehen”, testimony of Hildegard vom Hoff, February 1, 1965, BArch B 162/4168 (Ludwigsburg).

⁷² Testimony of Marianna Müller, September 13, 1966, BArch B 162/4170 (Ludwigsburg).

⁷³ “in Richtung Reichsgebiet”, testimony of Stephanie Allmendinger, July 25, 1967, LG Berlin, 3P KS 1/71 gegen Otto Bovensiepen und andere Bd.XXXIII, pp.85-95.

had been without female company for months, or in some cases, years. They may have felt compelled to immediately quench their thirst for a woman, and raping women satisfied their sexual need.⁷⁴

The rape of German women may also have been seen, in Beevor's view, as inflicting punishment: in the case of the Soviet soldiers for the actions of the German Wehrmacht as they marched through and ravaged their homeland; for the British soldiers, for the Blitz over London, or the bombing of Coventry, for example. Even American soldiers may have felt that German women could be exploited to punish the Germans for creating a war which dragged Americans halfway across the world, and which cost the lives of over 400,000 men. Many women gave in to the soldiers' demands as a means of securing food. By trading their bodies for food from the soldiers, women may have ensured that they or their families lasted another day.⁷⁵ Some semblance of solace could be achieved by these women if they chose one soldier, who in return for exclusive access to her body, would protect her from the advances of other soldiers.⁷⁶

James O'Donnell asserts that when three of Hitler's secretaries, Gerda Christian, Else Krüger and Traudl Junge, left Hitler's bunker in Berlin, they were raped, most likely by Soviet soldiers. As he notes, this was a "clear and ever-present danger" for all women in Berlin, regardless of nationality.⁷⁷ Beevor notes that Red Army soldiers pursued a policy of raping every German female, regardless of age or condition, and that gang rape was common.⁷⁸ While it is unlikely the true number of rape victims in Germany will ever be known,⁷⁹ it has been estimated that one in every three women in Berlin was raped,⁸⁰ and that at least 2 million women across

⁷⁴ Antony Beevor, *Berlin. The Downfall 1945* (London: Viking, 2002), p.326.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p.414.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ James O'Donnell, *The Bunker* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2001), p.211.

⁷⁸ Antony Beevor, "They Raped every German Female from eight to 80", *The Guardian* (London, May 1, 2002), and Beevor, *Berlin*.

⁷⁹ Norman M. Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: The History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945-1949* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995), p.132.

⁸⁰ Atina Grossmann, "A Question of Silence: The Rape of German Women by Occupation Soldiers", *October 72*, Spring 1995, MIT Press, p.46.

the whole of Germany were raped.⁸¹ The total number of sexual abuses committed was even higher, as many women were raped multiple times.⁸²

The topic of rape became taboo in the years after the war.⁸³ This lack of public discourse is reflected in the total absence of reference to the topic in any of the secretaries' post-war testimony: it was not a focus of the questioning, but perhaps it was also not a topic that the women would have been comfortable to discuss, whether through embarrassment or the repression of the incidents in their memories. It is not surprising that these women did not discuss this when interrogated after the war. For many, it would have been a painful reminder of a difficult period, when they had to sacrifice their principles, and themselves, in order to survive. Nevertheless, despite the absence of evidence in their testimonies, given the documented experience of German women generally, there is little doubt that many would have experienced sexual violation by Allied soldiers in the immediate aftermath of war.⁸⁴

All the women who had been engaged in administrative duties, as *Nachrichtenhelferinnen*, *SS-Helferinnen* and secretaries faced difficulties towards the end of the war. The experiences of the women varied, depending on where they were in relation to the bombings or to the approaching Allies. They endured bombing attacks, evacuation procedures, either to or from Germany, arduous journeys, and all with the constant threat of the Allies. They were exposed to the same risk of capture as their male counterparts, yet as women, they were also vulnerable to sexual assault. The women were subjected to unfamiliar situations, created by, and aggravated by the wartime conditions. The war did not differentiate between the different groups of women, and they all experienced

⁸¹ Beevor, *Berlin*, p.410.

⁸² Grossmann, "Question of Silence", p.46.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p.61.

⁸⁴ For more information on the rape of women in Germany see Beevor, *Berlin*, Helke Sander and Barbara Johr, eds., *Befreier und Befreite, Krieg, Vergewaltigungen, Kinder* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2005), Andrea Petö, "Stimmens des Schweigens. Erinnerungen an Vergewaltigungen in den Hauptstädten des "ersten Opfers" (Wien) und des "letzten Verbündeten" Hitlers (Budapest) 1945", *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 47 (1999), pp.892-913, and Anonymous, *A woman in Berlin* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1955).

similar obstacles as the Allies forced them to evacuate their place of work and they faced long and difficult evacuation journeys. For some women this period of uncertainty and chaos lasted for a matter of months, for others the experience continued for several years.

Once they had successfully navigated their return home, the women began, slowly but surely, to face their past. While some women were unable or unwilling to confront their wartime experiences, for others there was no choice, as they met former colleagues, heard rumours as to the fate of other co-workers, or were arrested and interrogated by the Allies. The end of the war meant the beginning of facing the consequences of their war-time employment.

Chapter 7: Condemned to the Consequences

The end of war did not mark the end of the story for these women; their lives after 1945 were affected by their service for their country during the war, whether they were conscripted or whether they volunteered. Women had readily welcomed the chance to become *Helferinnen* because of the opportunities it afforded them: foreign travel; a uniform; serving their country. Others had embraced the opportunity to pursue secretarial roles for the Nazis as they were given financial stability, and a career. However, after the war each woman had to face the repercussions of her actions, the extent dependant on where she ended up after the war, and who she had been employed by. The consequences began immediately after the war, when some were confronted with denazification, interrogation and internment by the Allies. In the 1960s and 1970s many were questioned by West German prosecutors and a few found themselves in the limelight. The consequences of their wartime experiences were, for some, long-term and far-reaching, affecting their future careers and their offspring. How were the various groups of women treated differently in post-war Germany? As Germany slowly came to terms with her Nazi past, were the women who had worked in administrative roles for the Nazis able to come to terms with their own actions?

The *Nachrichtenhelferinnen des Heeres* and the *SS-Helferinnen* had been immersed in National Socialism from a young age. Some women had embraced this upbringing, volunteering to serve their country; others had been swept along with the movement. These women were at a loss once the war, and the Third Reich, came to an end. They had to consider how to rebuild their lives, and whether their activities during the Third Reich would impact their decisions. Many were prompted to make life-changing decisions.

While *Nachrichtenhelferin* Minges* was in captivity, she formulated a plan to study and obtain further qualifications. She wished “to give life, rather than be a

part of a regime which had taken life”, and so she became a midwife.¹ However, this was not a widespread attitude among those who had been part of the regime. After the war, Princess Ingeborg Alix became involved in the *Stillen Hilfe für Kriegsgefangene und Internierte*, an initially covert organisation which provided assistance to arrested, accused and condemned perpetrators of the SS.²

The *SS-Helferinnen* and *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* were treated differently in post-war Germany. The *SS-Helferinnen* were subjected to automatic detention by the Allies.³ However, Horst Pelckmann, a lawyer representing the SS men at the first Nuremberg trial, stated during the proceedings that

“the *SS-Helferinnen* were neither members of the SS, nor were they supporting members. These girls had the same tasks as the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* and *Stabshelferinnen* in the army and should not be confused with the guards in the concentration camps for women prisoners”.⁴

While technically he was correct, there was manifestly a degree of overlap: in the case of Hermine Schachter, for example, who had begun her career as an *SS-Helferinnen*, and been employed as a telegraph operator, in Auschwitz, but became an *Aufseherin*, responsible for guarding women during a death march.⁵ The *SS-Helferinnen* were placed in an environment where awareness of the persecution of the Jews was unavoidable. While some of the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* of the army did see ghettos, and did come into contact with Jews, the *SS-Helferinnen* were trained in a school built by concentration camp prisoners, and a number of the *SS-*

¹ “Leben zu geben statt ein Teil des Kriegsregimes zu sein, das Leben nimmt”, interview with *Nachrichtenhelferin* Käthe Minges* in Franka Maubach, *Die Stellung halten* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), p.289.

² Jutta Mühlberg, *Das SS-Helferinnenkorps. Ausbildung, Einsatz und Entnazifizierung der weiblichen Angehörigen der Waffen-SS 1942-1949* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2011), p.351.

³ Mühlberg, *Das SS-Helferinnenkorps*, p.352.

⁴ “die *SS-Helferinnen* weder Mitglieder der SS waren noch Fördernde Mitglieder. Diese Mädchen hatten die gleichen Tätigkeiten wie die *Nachrichten-* und *Stabshelferinnen* in der Wehrmacht und dürfen nicht verwechselt werden mit den *Aufseherinnen* in den Konzentrationslagern für weibliche Häftlinge”, International Military Tribunal, *Der Prozess gegen die Hauptkriegsverbrecher vor dem Internationalen Militärgerichtshof, Nürnberg, 14. November 1945- 1. Oktober 1946* (Nürnberg, 1947-1949), p.389.

⁵ Sarah Cushman, *The Women of Birkenau* (unpublished PhD Thesis: Clark University, Worcester, 2010), p.238.

Helferinnen were deployed to concentration camps, providing the communication support for those camps. Pelckmann's statement formed the basic defence for the *SS-Helferinnen* upon which they could build their individual cases. Nevertheless, some *SS-Helferinnen* were interned, some had to go through the denazification process in internment camps, some had to face denazification tribunals in their home towns; and yet others avoided internment and denazification and were able to restart their lives without complications.

The Allies began the process of denazification, the removal of National Socialist ideology from all aspects of society, immediately after the war. Each of the Allied zones handled denazification independently of the others, although they all had the same overriding goal: to purge Germany of Nazism. The Allies hoped that denazification would be achieved by removing from any position of power those who had been members of National Socialist organisations.⁶ The Allies also employed re-education as a means to ensure that the German population learnt the lessons from their Nazi past.⁷

The targets of denazification were those whose wartime participation in Nazi activities implicated them. A 131-question survey was employed between 1946 and 1948 to determine the level of participation in National Socialism of every individual over the age of 18.⁸ The answers could result in a summons to appear before a tribunal staffed by Germans. However, the decisions of the tribunal, based on the level of involvement of the individual in the Nazi party were subject to approval by the occupying power. The punishments meted out ranged from

⁶ See Constantine FitzGibbon, *Denazification* (London: Michael Joseph, 1969), and James F. Tent, *Mission on the Rhine: Re-education and Denazification in American-occupied Germany* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

⁷ See, for example, Denise Tschardt, *Re-educating German Women: the Work of the Women's Affairs Section of the British Military Government, 1946-1951* (Frankfurt am Main, Oxford: P.Lang, 2003), Nicholas Pronay and Keith Wilson, eds., *The Political Re-education of Germany and Her Allies: After World War II* (London: Croom Helm, 1985), and Riccarda Torriani, *Nazis Into Germans: Re-education and Democratisation in the British and French Occupation Zones, 1945-1949* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 2005).

⁸ The front page of the blank questionnaire is viewable online, Bildarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz : http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_image.cfm?image_id=1012.

dismissal and employment restrictions to monetary fines, although the latter was not employed in the Soviet zone.⁹

In order to be successful, denazification had to reach a substantial proportion of the German population. At the end of the war, approximately 10 per cent of the population, eight million people, were members of the Nazi party. Large numbers of Germans were affiliated to other Nazi organisations including the German Labour Front, which had twenty-five million members, and the National Socialist People's Welfare, which had seventeen million members.¹⁰

Clearly, the Allies would have had their hands full if they had decided to pursue all those who had been members of the Nazi party. Testimony suggests that the compilation of the target list for denazification was not consistent in its application. Liesa Rethfeldt contended that she was excluded from the denazification process because she had never been a member of the Nazi party, even though she had been employed at the *Stapoleit* Berlin, and had worked for the SD in Riga.¹¹ By contrast, a female office worker who had never been a party member was incriminated in Soviet-occupied Germany because her deceased husband had been a Nazi activist.¹² Soviet denazification was much more rigorous and thorough than that pursued by the other Allies.¹³ Yet, contrarily, some female Nazi party members who had experienced "compulsory transfer" from the BDM to the NSDAP were judged in Soviet-occupied Germany as being not culpable for their party membership.¹⁴ The Western Allies faced such a huge task of denazification that it would have been prohibitively costly as well as disruptive to reconstruction

⁹ See Timothy R. Vogt, *Denazification in Soviet-Occupied Germany, Brandenburg, 1945-1948* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: Harvard University Press, 2000), pp.2-3, 5.

¹⁰ Frederick Taylor, *Exorcising Hitler The Occupation and Denazification of Germany* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011), p.227.

¹¹ Testimony of Liesa Rethfeldt, September 2, 1966, Topography of Terror Archive (LG Berlin), 3P Ks 1/71 gegen Otto Bovensiepen und andere, Bd. XXI, pp.113-127.

¹² Vogt, *Denazification in Soviet-Occupied Germany, Brandenburg*, pp.149-150.

¹³ See Norman M. Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945-1949* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1995).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.147.

to include non-party members who may have been complicit with the regime. The British were particularly concerned not to disrupt reconstruction.¹⁵

In addition to denazification and re-education, the Allies initiated the process of investigation and prosecution of those they considered to warrant punishment. Prior to the end of the war, teams active on behalf of the main Allies created lists of those who had committed 'major war crimes'.¹⁶ As their knowledge of war crimes, and those perpetrating them, increased, further categories were added to the list, including the SS leadership, and *Gestapo* and SD officers. The Trial of the Major War Criminals at Nuremberg, which took place between November 1945 and October 1946, was aimed at prosecuting the most significant of those who had been captured by the Allies.¹⁷

In the first instance, only major Nazi war criminals were targeted for investigation and prosecution, and even then the sheer quantity of those warranting prosecution was problematic. Between 1945 and 1950, 1,800 people were tried in the American zone of occupation, and 1,000 were tried by the British and, in the nine years immediately after the war, 2,000 people were tried in the French zone of occupation, and 12,177 people were tried in the Soviet zone.¹⁸

The Allies each had particular cases they wished to pursue, notably those believed to be responsible for crimes against their own nationals. The individual Allies believed they had an obligation to punish staff of the various concentration

¹⁵ Jon Elster, *Retribution and Reparation in the Transition to Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p.77 and see also, Tom Bower, *The Pledge Betrayed: American and Britain and the Denazification of Postwar Germany* (New York: Doubleday, 1981) and Alan Bance, ed., *The Cultural Legacy of the British Occupation in Germany: The London Symposium* (Stuttgart: Hans-Dieter Heinz, 1997).

¹⁶ The term 'major war crimes' was developed later, at the Nuremberg Trials, and was based on a definition in the London Agreement of the International Military Tribunal, published on August 8, 1945, available online: <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/imt/imtchart.asp>.

¹⁷ For more information on the Nuremberg trial see, for example, H.R. Reginbogen and C.J.M. Safferling, eds., *Nuremberg Trials: International Criminal Law since 1945* (Munich: K.G.Saur Verlag, 2006), Telford Taylor, *The Anatomy of the Nuremberg Trials: A Personal Memoir* (London: Bloomsbury, 1993), and Michael D. Biddiss, ed., *The Nuremberg trial and the Third Reich* (Harlow: Longman, 1992).

¹⁸ Donald Bloxham, "The Holocaust in the Courtroom" in Dan Stone, ed., *The Historiography of the Holocaust* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p.398.

camps they had each liberated.¹⁹ British forces liberated Bergen-Belsen concentration camp; the first and second trials involving the staff of Bergen-Belsen took place before a British military court.²⁰ Similarly, US forces liberated Dachau concentration camp, and they initiated the Dachau Trials, held at the former camp, for the former staff of the camp and for those accused of committing war crimes against American citizens.²¹ The Allies therefore each pursued their own policies of prosecution.²²

At the International Military Tribunal (IMT) in Nuremberg, at which representatives of the four main Allies presided, it had been decided, at the suggestion of the prosecution, not to prosecute “persons employed by the Gestapo for purely clerical, stenographic, janitorial or similar unofficial routine tasks”.²³ The IMT decided that the Allies would not pursue or prosecute secretaries, yet some of these women had proceedings drawn up against them, and were questioned. It is possible that this occurred, despite the IMT ruling, because the Allies interpreted the contribution of these women as not purely clerical. A large number of women were interned, for various amounts of time, across the entirety of formerly occupied Europe, which also served as a measure to facilitate their interrogation. There was not a universal procedure for dealing with these women; it depended heavily on which of the Allied occupied zones they were located in after the war.

Indicting the women who had acted as secretaries and administrators was not a priority for the Allies in these years, yet some of those employed by the RSHA

¹⁹ Toby Thacker, *Defeat, Denazification & Nuremberg, January 1944-November 1946* (Gloucestershire: Tempus, 2006).

²⁰ Raymond Phillips, ed., *Trial of Josef Kramer and Forty-four Others: The Belsen Trial* (London: William Hodge & Co., 1949).

²¹ See Joshua Greene, *Justice at Dachau: the Trials of an American Prosecutor* (New York: Broadway Books, 2003) and Ludwig Eiber and Robert Sigel, eds., *Dachauer Prozesse: NS-Verbrechen vor amerikanischen Militärgerichten in Dachau 1945-48; Verfahren, Ergebnisse, Nachwirkungen* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2007, Dachauer Symposium zur Zeitgeschichte) and L. Yavnai, “Military Justice: War Crimes Trials in the American Zone of Occupation in Germany, 1945-47” in H.R. Reginbogen, and C.J.M. Safferling, eds. *Nuremberg Trials*.

²² Devin O. Pendas, “Seeking Justice, Finding Law: Nazi Trials in Postwar Europe” in *The Journal of Modern History*, 81, 2 (2009), pp.346-368.

²³ International Military Tribunal, *Trial of the major war criminals before the International Military Tribunal: Nuremberg, 14 November 1945 – 1 October 1946, Volume XVII* (Nuremberg, 1948).

were questioned, demonstrating they were of some interest, if not because of their own actions, then because they could provide information on their bosses' wartime activities. The women were, however, not treated in a routine manner. While some were merely questioned, others were interned, and the amount of time they were imprisoned for varied, from a few months to five years or more. These women were pursued and imprisoned in their native Germany by the occupying forces, the Americans, Soviets, French and British. Some women were imprisoned in the countries to which they had been sent to work, such as Czechoslovakia, Denmark and Romania. Other women were fortunate enough to be questioned but not detained. Despite the IMT ruling, the women were subject to extensive scrutiny because they had been employed by the Nazis, and their work was considered integral to the administration of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Allied prosecutors and interrogators frequently embarked on the interviews seeking to find out a particular piece of information, locate a certain individual, or even acquire the services of the women for their own teams. Margaret Russin was repeatedly detained by the Russians and the British. She was specifically questioned about her knowledge of the residence of the State Police Headquarters, where she had worked.²⁴ Traudl Junge was interrogated by the Russians, who were particularly interested to find out information regarding the circumstances of Hitler's death.²⁵ The French authorities contacted Ilse Freutel, who had been seconded to France during the war, working for the Security Office of the RSHA there. According to Freutel, she was asked to join their espionage service, which she refused. In mid-November 1947, Freutel was arrested and detained for a short time in Berlin, before being handed over to French authorities and taken to France. Freutel was released in early July 1948 without, she claimed, having been questioned.²⁶

²⁴ Testimony of Margaret Russin, November 6, 1968, Bundesarchiv (BArch) B 162/4173 (Ludwigsburg).

²⁵ Traudl Junge, *Until the Final Hour*, Melissa Müller, ed., translated by Anthea Bell (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2003), p.219; this will be discussed in more detail below.

²⁶ Testimony of Ilse Freutel, October 14, 1966, BArch B 162/4555 (Ludwigsburg).

The Soviet Union questioned and imprisoned German women who happened to be located in their zone, regardless of where, geographically, they had been employed during the war. After the Soviet invasion of Germany, Erna Groth was seized from her job in a hospital and interrogated by the Soviets. She was, however, released the same day, and not questioned again about her activities with the RSHA until 1966, this time by the West German authorities.²⁷ Herta Thurann was also questioned by a Soviet commission but managed to escape internment,²⁸ as did Irma Stolze, a former clerk, who was interrogated twice by the Soviets about her work at the RSHA.²⁹

Other women who were interrogated by the Soviets were not as lucky, and many in the Soviet sector of Germany were interned, notably in Sachsenhausen. Some women were held for a matter of months, while others were imprisoned for years. Ursula Fischer, who had been an employee in the *Gestapo* department for Communism and Marxism, was interned by the Soviets from August to November 1945.³⁰ Irmgard Goldkuhle, who had worked for the Department for Jewish Affairs, was interned by the Soviets from May 1945 until January 1950.³¹ An employee in the RSHA department entitled 'Foreign Enemies of State', Elli Benz was arrested by the Soviets because of her prior affiliation with the RSHA. She was imprisoned from August 26, 1946 until the end of 1947, firstly in Rangsdorf, south of Berlin and then in Oranienburg, north of Berlin.³² Maria Bek and a colleague from the *Stapoleitstelle* in Berlin, Sonja Wittkowski, were imprisoned by the Soviets.³³ In August 1945, Gerda Giesel, also employed by the *Stapoleitstelle*, was arrested by the Soviets and taken to the camps Hohenschoenhausen and Sachsenhausen. She was released from Sachsenhausen in 1948 and in early 1949 she was exonerated by a

²⁷ Testimony of Erna Groth, August 19, 1966, BArch B 162/4556 (Ludwigsburg).

²⁸ Testimony of Herta Thurann, October 10, 1966, BArch B 162/4560 (Ludwigsburg).

²⁹ Testimony of Irma Stolze, August 10, 1966, BArch B 162/4559 (Ludwigsburg).

³⁰ Testimony of Ursula Fischer, September 27, 1966, BArch B 162/4555 (Ludwigsburg).

³¹ Testimony of Irmgard Goldkuhle, September 15, 1967, LG Berlin 3P Ks 1/71 gegen Otto Bovensiepen und andere, Bd. XXXII, pp. 61-66.

³² Testimony of Elli Benz, July 2, 1969, BArch B 162/4553 (Ludwigsburg).

³³ Testimony of Maria Bek, May 24, 1967, LG Berlin, 3P Ks 1/71 gegen Otto Bovensiepen und andere, Bd. XXIX, pp. 146-151.

denazification tribunal in Berlin.³⁴ As a former employee of the RSHA, Gertrude Krohn was held in Soviet custody from 1946 to 1950, mainly in Sachsenhausen.³⁵

Even women who were employed by non-governmental organisations were a target for Russian questioning and punishment. As a secretary for the managing director of a copper and brass factory, Hildegard Klitzke was arrested by the Russians in 1945. Her boss, who had been given the titles *Wehrwirtschaftsführer* and *Abwehrbeauftragter* to reflect the important role his factory played,³⁶ had been arrested a few days earlier and Klitzke had been taken away on the grounds that she was needed to testify against him. She was, she claimed in correspondence written in 1955, mistreated by the NKVD (the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs; the Soviet Union Secret Police) and held in various camps, including Torgau and Buchenwald. Her family were unaware of her whereabouts during her captivity under the Russians because, she stated afterwards, she had been denied the chance to contact them. In 1950, Klitzke was handed over to the German authorities, in Waldheim in Eastern Germany: the German Democratic Republic had been founded in 1949, and the Soviet Union relinquished its responsibilities over its former zone of occupation. Klitzke was not given more lenient treatment by her compatriots. Under the Germans, Klitzke was sentenced to eight years in prison. Klitzke claimed that she was denied a lawyer and was not allowed to call witnesses in her defence. The reasons for her imprisonment, according to Klitzke, included her membership of the Nazi Party, the accusation that she was a spy for the *Gestapo* and that as secretary for the *Abwehrbeauftragter* she had been complicit in the crimes of the regime. In July 1954 she was granted amnesty and released.³⁷ Klitzke suffered more for her war-time employment than some of those women who had

³⁴ Testimony of Gerda Giesel, May 18, 1965, LG Berlin, 3P Ks 1/71 gegen Otto Bovensiepen und andere, Bd. V, pp. 174-176.

³⁵ Testimony of Gertrude Krohn, November 1, 1967, BArch B 162/4169 (Ludwigsburg).

³⁶ However, it has also been postulated that the title "Wehrwirtschaftsführers" did not reflect the political proximity of the title-holder to the Nazi regime. See, for example, Cornelia Rauh-Kühne, Hans Constantin Paulssen, "Sozialpartnerschaft aus dem Geiste der Kriegskameradschaft", in Paul Erker and Toni Pierenkemper, eds., *Deutsche Unternehmer zwischen Kriegswirtschaft und Wiederaufbau. Studien zur Erfahrungsbildung von Industrie-Eliten* (Munich: Oldenbourg Verlag, 1999), pp.109-192.

³⁷ Letter, December 30, 1954, Niedersächsisches Landesarchiv - Hauptstaatsarchiv Hannover – (NLA-HSTA) Nds.386 Acc.67/85 Nr.194.

been employed as administrators for the RSHA. If she had merely been the secretary for the managing director of a copper and brass factory, eight years imprisonment appears disproportionate, suggesting that there was sufficient evidence to demonstrate her complicity with the regime. Yet the secretaries who had been employed by the RSHA were – on the whole – also complicit with the regime. The severity of the punishment meted out to Klitzke may have been a calculated measure, to demonstrate that employment by non-state organisations was no guarantee of immunity.

The United States employed a similar approach to the Soviet Union, probing the record of those women who were situated in their zone after the war, irrespective of where they had spent the duration of the war. Yet, women who had been employed in similar roles did not receive consistent treatment. While Susanne Surkau, who had been an employee in the department for Polish Affairs at the RSHA, was interned in the American zone from November 1945 until September 1946,³⁸ Brunhilde Schreck, an employee in the same department, was interrogated four times by the Americans after the war, but was never arrested.³⁹ Ursula Kempe, who had worked in several departments within the RSHA, was arrested in autumn 1945 and transferred to Württemberg where she was interned for about half a year.⁴⁰ In 1946, Ingeborg Schoenemann was questioned about her employment in several departments of the RSHA and imprisoned for six months.⁴¹ An employee in the Counterintelligence department of the RSHA, Erika Schimmelpfennig was interned from September 1945 to June 1946.⁴² After the war, Ilse Freutel, who had been employed in the Foreign Intelligence Department of the RSHA was arrested and held until August 1946.⁴³ It is likely that the Americans were keen to locate the head of Foreign Intelligence, Walter Schellenberg, who Freutel had typed for, particularly as the British and Soviets were simultaneously searching for him.⁴⁴

³⁸ Testimony of Susanne Surkau, August 30, 1966, BArch B 162/4559 (Ludwigsburg).

³⁹ Testimony of Brunhilde Schreck, July 29, 1966, BArch B 162/4559 (Ludwigsburg).

⁴⁰ Testimony of Ursula Kempe, August 8, 1966, BArch B 162/4557 (Ludwigsburg).

⁴¹ Testimony of Ingeborg Schoenemann, October 13, 1965, BArch B 162/4173 (Ludwigsburg).

⁴² Testimony of Erika Schimmelpfennig, July 25, 1966, BArch B 162/4558 (Ludwigsburg).

⁴³ Testimony of Ilse Freutel, October 14, 1966, BArch B 162/4555 (Ludwigsburg).

⁴⁴ For more information on Schellenberg, see Reinhard R. Doerries, *Hitler's Last Chief of Foreign*

Barbara Hellmuth, who had been one of *Gestapo* Müller's secretaries in Berlin, had been unable to secure an immigration permit or food stamps in Munich and so she reported, voluntarily, to the American military government in Stuttgart, in November 1945. She was released after three days on condition that she report to the police in Lochham, where she planned to live with her sister. She was summoned for questioning in March 1946, and then interned in several camps. She was released in August 1947. Although Hellmuth had never been a member of the Nazi party, her close connection to Müller meant that she could not be ignored.⁴⁵

Eva Schmidt, another of Müller's secretaries, was acquitted in denazification proceedings.⁴⁶ In later years, Schmidt was repeatedly interrogated in cases against former RSHA employees, especially in the investigations against Müller.⁴⁷ Müller went missing after the war and was wanted by the CIA, among other organisations.⁴⁸ His secretaries, Schmidt and Hellmuth, were subsequently questioned on multiple occasions, but were unable to provide any clues as to his whereabouts. Hellmuth was even placed under surveillance, to determine if she was corresponding with him.⁴⁹ She claimed in one of her interrogations that if she knew where he was, she would say so "without further ado". Where he went after the war, and if he is even still alive, remains unknown to this day.⁵⁰

Czechoslovakia's stance was necessarily different to that adopted by the USA and Soviet Union. Without its own zone of governance within Germany, it

Intelligence: Allied Interrogations of Walter Schellenberg (London: Frank Cass, 2003), and Walter Schellenberg, *The Schellenberg Memoirs*, translated and edited by Louis Hagen (London: Mayflower Books, 1965).

⁴⁵ Testimony of Barbara Hellmuth, March 24, 1965, LAB B Rep. 057-01 1311.

⁴⁶ It is most likely that she was classified as a *Mitläufer*.

⁴⁷ Testimony of Eva Schmidt, November 8, 1966, BArch B 162/20578 (Ludwigsburg).

⁴⁸ Timothy Naftali, Norman J.W. Goda, Richard Breitman and Robert Wolfe, "Analysis of the Name File of Heinrich Mueller", Interagency Working Group, Declassified Records, RG 263 – CIA records, RG 263 Detailed Report, Heinrich Mueller, U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, available online: <http://www.archives.gov/iwg/declassified-records/rg-263-cia-records/rg-263-mueller.html>.

⁴⁹ Testimony of Eva Schmidt, November 8, 1966, BArch B 162/20578 (Ludwigsburg), and also testimony of Barbara Hellmuth, March 24, 1965, LAB B Rep. 057-01 1311.

⁵⁰ For more information on Heinrich Müller, see Naftali, Goda, et al, "Analysis of the Name File of Heinrich Mueller".

instead pursued German women who had been employed in Czechoslovakia during the war. Periods of detention for these women again ranged widely, from days to several years. The majority of employees of the Department for Jewish Affairs who had remained in their former office building in *Mährischen Gasse* because they had been trapped in Prague, were female. On May 5, 1945 they were arrested by the Czechs, and interrogated. As an elderly woman, Ingeborg Wagner's mother was dismissed, and Wagner was able to accompany her as a companion. The pair were deported over the border to Germany at the end of August. Upon arrival in Berlin, Wagner was arrested by the Russians and interrogated. She was released, but re-arrested just two days later, and held in several concentration camps. In August 1948, she was permanently released and returned to Berlin.⁵¹ Marie Knispel, who processed death certificates in the Department for Jewish Affairs, ended the war in Prague and was interned by the Czechs for one year.⁵² In May 1945, Friedericke Alphone was arrested by Czech police. She was sentenced by the Czech People's Court to 20 years of "hard imprisonment";⁵³ Alphone recalled this being calculated as five years for alleged party membership, five years for membership of the SD, and ten years for allegedly denouncing a Czech while in the SD. Alphone was at first taken to an all-female prison in Prague, and from 1946-1953 she was engaged in forced labour. She was released after serving nine and a half years.⁵⁴ Alphone's punishment was particularly severe, and was not in line with that which other female administrators received. Perhaps the Czech authorities wished to take a stand to demonstrate that her actions on Czech soil were unacceptable, and Alphone may have received a particularly severe punishment for the very reason that she had, allegedly, committed a crime against a Czech national.

Wally Schellhorn was employed as a secretary in the German embassy in Copenhagen from August 1941 until the day Germany surrendered, May 8, 1945. On June 1, 1945, she was arrested by Danish police and taken to Oxbøl internment camp, in Denmark, purportedly because of her affiliation with the Foreign Office.

⁵¹ Testimony of Ingeborg Wagner, May 21, 1962 and March 21, 1966, LAB B Rep. 057-01 3182.

⁵² Testimony of Marie Knispel, October 25, 1967, BArch B 162/4169 (Ludwigsburg).

⁵³ "schweren Kerker", testimony of Friedericke Alphone, December 9, 1964, LAB B Rep. 057-01 2353.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

She was kept in a cell, under constant surveillance, until she was released by the Danish Ministry of Justice on October 22, 1945; other colleagues interned with her remained in custody for longer. One such colleague, Louise Falck, testified that Schellhorn's early release was a result of an intervention by her Swedish relatives, as she was granted permission to travel to them.⁵⁵ It is likely that intercession by Swedes persuaded the Danes to release the woman, especially because she was not going to return to Germany, but to a neutral country.

Mystery and rumour surrounded the fate of Hitler at the end of the war. All of the Allies were determined to solve the mystery. The British Intelligence authorities in Germany charged Hugh Trevor-Roper with collecting all available evidence to resolve the matter.⁵⁶ Despite Trevor-Roper's extensive and conclusive efforts, many other historians and journalists have tackled the issue, and have presented contradictory and confusing findings.⁵⁷ The confusion arose from the lack of a body identifiable as Hitler's,⁵⁸ leading to uncertainty as to whether he had really fled, or whether he had died, and by whose hand. The myth of what happened to Hitler still perpetuates to this day: perhaps because the legends are more interesting and mysterious than the truth:⁵⁹ that Hitler shot himself.⁶⁰ One method employed by the Soviets, the British and Americans to establish what really happened was to interrogate all those who were in Hitler's bunker with him towards the end of the war; they were vital eye-witnesses who might have been

⁵⁵ Letter to the city of Bonn, from Luise Falck, November 21, 1958, NLA-HSTAH Nds.386 Acc.67/85 Nr.1352.

⁵⁶ H.R. Trevor-Roper, *The Last Days of Hitler* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1974, fourth edition), p.xii.

⁵⁷ See, for example, Lev Bezymenski, *The Death of Adolf Hitler. Unknown Documents from Soviet Archives* (London: Michael Joseph, 1968), and Anton Joachimsthaler, *The Last Days of Hitler. Legend, Evidence and Truth*, translated by Helmut Bogler (London: Arms and Armour, 1996, Cassell Military Paperbacks edition, 2002).

⁵⁸ See, for example, William Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* (New York: Random House, 2002), p.1134 and Alan Bullock, *Hitler. A Study in Tyranny* (London: HarperCollins, revised edition, 1962), p.800.

⁵⁹ Suggestions as to what really happened to Hitler include that a body double was murdered, to enable the real Hitler to escape; or that Hitler took poison. Trevor-Roper asserts that Hitler may have also taken poison, but that he died from a gunshot wound to the head; see, Trevor-Roper, *The Last Days of Hitler*.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.xii.

able to shed light on where Hitler – or his body – were to be found. To this end, Hitler’s secretaries were questioned, repeatedly.

Hitler’s youngest secretary, Traudl Junge, was imprisoned by the Russians in June 1945, and experienced an “odyssey through various temporary prisons”.⁶¹ After her release, Junge slowly, with the assistance of an Armenian employed as an interpreter for the Russians, was able to rebuild a life for herself; the only condition was that she had to stay in the Soviet zone, presumably in case new evidence came to light regarding Hitler’s disappearance. However, she was able to make several illegal trips out of the Russian zone and back without any serious consequences, and so Junge determined it would be safe to leave permanently, and in April 1946 she made her way to her mother, in Bavaria, in the American sector. It was not long before Junge was arrested by the Americans. She was interrogated just once, and asked to write an account of the last days in the Bunker. That the different occupying powers were “pursuing very different ends” benefited Junge, as did the fact, which she herself acknowledges, that “no one was interested in the fate of the adjutants, servants, chauffeurs and secretaries”.⁶² Junge evidently impressed the Americans with her intelligence and good looks. After her release, several American officers invited her to go sailing; but she declined. She was then placed under local house arrest, maybe as retribution for declining their invitation, or perhaps because the Americans did not want the Soviets to think they were being lenient with such a key witness.⁶³

Hitler’s other secretaries were also interrogated and imprisoned. Christa Schroeder was arrested shortly after the end of the Second World War, in May 1945, by the US Army Counter-Intelligence Corps. At first Schroeder was convicted as a war criminal,⁶⁴ and she was required to attend the International Trials in

⁶¹ Traudl Junge, *Until the Final Hour*, Melissa Müller, ed., p.222

⁶² *Ibid.*, p.230.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp.219, 222-230.

⁶⁴ Anton Joachimsthaler, “Who was Christa Schroeder?” in *Seven*, Sunday Telegraph magazine, April 26, 2009, p.11 and also Anton Joachimsthaler, “I was Hitler’s Secretary”, in *The Daily Telegraph*, April 26, 2009, available online: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/booknews/5201025/I-was-Hitlers-secretary.html>.

Nuremberg, together with Johanna Wolf, another of Hitler's secretaries, as a witness.⁶⁵ According to the newspaper *Die Stuttgarter Zeitung*, Schroeder was then classified as a war criminal because she had been awarded the *Goldenen Ehrenzeichen*, the Decoration of Honour in Gold,⁶⁶ one of Austria's highest honours.⁶⁷ Yet it transpired that Hitler had, allegedly, distributed the award to his drivers, pilots and secretaries as "recognition for good performance".⁶⁸ At a tribunal to determine Schroeder's status, a vital witness for Schroeder had not been called, much to her chagrin. It was ultimately decided that her classification had been based upon a "legal error",⁶⁹ and that the facts would have to be re-examined. A second tribunal hearing determined that she had merely been a stenographer, that she "did not have any independent authority to issue orders, nor was she able to exercise even the slightest influence over the course of events".⁷⁰ She was reclassified as a collaborator and released shortly afterwards, in May 1948.⁷¹

For one secretary, the interrogations proved to be an overwhelmingly positive experience. As secretary to Martin Bormann, Hitler's private secretary and head of the Party Chancellery,⁷² Else Krüger was a target of British interrogation after the war. However, she fell in love with her post-war interrogator, Captain Leslie James, who became a professor of international relations at Cambridge

⁶⁵ Christa Schroeder and Anton Joachimsthaler, ed., *Er war mein Chef, Aus dem Nachlaß der Sekretärin von Adolf Hitler* (Munich: Langen Müller Verlag, 1985), p.241.

⁶⁶ *Die Stuttgarter Zeitung*, Third Year, nr.98, December 10, 1947, reprinted in Schroeder and Joachimsthaler, ed., *Er war mein Chef*, p.250.

⁶⁷ For information on the Decoration of Honour, including whom it is awarded to and its appearance, see the Austrian Federal President's website, "Decorations of Honour": http://www.bundespraesident.at/index.php?id=193&no_cache=0&L=1.

⁶⁸ "Anerkennung für gute Leistungen", *Die Stuttgarter Zeitung*, Third Year, nr.98, December 10, 1947, reprinted in Schroeder and Joachimsthaler, ed., *Er war mein Chef*, p.250.

⁶⁹ "Rechtsirrtum", *ibid.*, p.251. Schroeder does not detail what the legal error was or how it had been made.

⁷⁰ "Ohne daß sie auch eine irgendwie geartete selbständige Anordnungsbefugnis gehabt hatte und auch nur den geringsten Einfluß auf den Ablauf der Geschehnisse hätte ausüben können", *ibid.*

⁷¹ Joachimsthaler, "Who was Christa Schroeder?" in *Seven*, April 26, 2009, p.11 and also Joachimsthaler, "I was Hitler's Secretary", in *The Daily Telegraph*, April 26, 2009.

⁷² Jochen von Lang, *The Secretary. Martin Bormann: The Man Who Manipulated Hitler*, translated by Christa Armstrong and Peter White (New York: Random House, 1979), p.14 and Richard Evans, *The Third Reich in Power* (New York: Penguin Group, 2005), p.47.

University. They were married in England in December 1947, where they subsequently settled down.⁷³

Through their testimonies, the women were able to recall their experiences as administrators during the war. Yet at this time they lived in East and West Germany, both countries where anything other than a negative, anti-fascist view of the past was taboo. This would have impacted on how they remembered the past and even how they constructed their life histories and personal identities. There are many difficulties in relying on memory and testimony, and consequently the historian must proceed with caution. As memory is a social construction, collective memory may have also influenced their recollections of the past.⁷⁴ Collective memory was shaped in Germany through events such as media coverage of mass trials. Yet the memories of these women were and continue to be an integral resource, both to the prosecutors at the time, and to historians using the documents.

Through their questioning, the Allied prosecutors attempted to gauge whether the women remained in touch with former colleagues, effectively encouraging denunciation. Information gleaned from this line of questioning was beneficial to investigations and could lead to further arrests. After a former colleague denounced her, Christa-Elisabeth Lenz, a former employee in the Economic and Press departments, was interned for four and half years by the Soviets, in Hohenschönhausen and Sachsenhausen concentration camps.⁷⁵ Marie Schmiedl, who had been working in the department for Polish Affairs, was arrested by the Soviets in November 1945 due to “the betrayal of a former colleague”, who

⁷³ James O’Donnell, *The Bunker* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2001), p.293 and see also testimony of Gerda Christian, September 19, 1962, BArch B162/3234 (Ludwigsburg).

⁷⁴ There is vast literature on the topic of Holocaust survivors and memory, see for example, Lynn Rapaport, *Jews in Germany after the Holocaust: Memory, Identity and Jewish-German Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), and Dalia Ofer, Françoise Ouzan, Judith Tydor Baumel-Schwartz, *Holocaust Survivors: Resettlement, Memories, Identities* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2011). However, the topic of everyday German citizens and their memories and identities has been less discussed in literature, see for example, Siobhan Kattago, *Ambiguous Memory: the Nazi Past and German National Identity* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2001).

⁷⁵ Testimony of Christa-Elisabeth Lenz, September 5, 1966, BArch B 162/4557 (Ludwigsburg).

informed the Russians that she had been employed by the RSHA.⁷⁶ She was taken to Sachsenhausen concentration camp where she remained until February 1950.⁷⁷ The women presumably thought that by reporting their colleagues they would be looked upon favourably when their own punishment was decided upon. Indeed, Schmiedl suspected that she had been denounced by a former colleague in order that they would be “released from arrest”,⁷⁸ and the fact that she did not meet any of her former colleagues in Sachsenhausen appears to support her hypothesis.

More often than not, however, this line of questioning failed to deliver. Very few women were able to provide relevant information; or, perhaps, they claimed to be out of contact to protect their workmates. Sometimes they remained in contact with one another but only for a short period of time. Maria Bek had remained in touch with Sonja Wittkowski, a former colleague from her time in the *Stapoleitstelle* in Berlin. However, after they were both arrested by the Russians Bek did not hear from Wittkowski again.⁷⁹ After the war, Erika Hesselbarth had no contact with any colleague from the *Gestapo* department with responsibility for occupied countries, although this was not through lack of effort. In order to secure her pension, Hesselbarth needed to prove that she had formerly worked at the RSHA. Despite intensive searching, she was unable to locate any of her ex-colleagues.⁸⁰ Hesselbarth may have needed her former colleagues to enable her to receive a pension, yet she was unable to rely on any friendships she had made.

The denials evident in testimonies disguise hidden loyalties, and are not necessarily representative. Indeed, some women do admit to remaining friends with their former colleagues. Margarethe Reichert and Ingeborg Westphal, both employed by the Department for Jewish Affairs in the RSHA, stayed in touch,

⁷⁶ “durch den Verrat einer früheren Arbeitskollegin”, testimony of Marie Schmiedl, July 22, 1966, BArch B 162/4558 (Ludwigsburg).

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ “von einer Verhaftung frei zu kommen”, *ibid.*

⁷⁹ Testimony of Maria Bek, May 24, 1967, LG Berlin, 3P Ks 1/71 gegen Otto Bovensiepen und andere Bd. XXIX, pp.146-151.

⁸⁰ Testimony of Erika Hesselbarth, April 23, 1965, BArch B 162/4556 (Ludwigsburg).

occasionally exchanging greeting cards.⁸¹ When questioned in 1962, one of Hitler's secretaries, Gerda Christian, was able to identify the whereabouts of several other women who had been in Hitler's bunker, indicating that they had remained in touch. Christian knew that Traudl Junge was in Munich and that Else Krüger was in Cambridge.⁸²

A group of ten secretaries who worked together in Rovno, Ukraine for the RSHA during the war remained life-long friends. They had held administrative roles in Rovno, and were responsible to *Gauleiter* Koch. After the war they formed a network and they met up once or twice a year, with several women coming from East Germany to meet those who were in the West. Anneliese Engler recalled that the women who lived in the East would buy items such as coffee, tea or shoes, which they could not buy in the GDR. On occasion, those residing in West Germany would "send [items] over to the GDR". Lieselotte Zimmerman fondly recalled weekends spent at the Englers, with five or six members of the group, and their husbands. The three surviving members of this network are still in touch with one another, and continue to visit each other.⁸³ Their war-time experiences, both the hardships and the comforts, and the commonality of what they encountered, forged life-long bonds. They were able to provide support for each other, recall shared events and they could do more than just sympathise; they were able to empathise with one another.

The *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* found that they had much in common with their comrades and bonded over their shared experiences. The comradeship between the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* extended beyond their duty of service. Many of them stayed in touch with one another after the war, and they helped each other in starting up businesses. In order to secure their pensions, some women needed to prove that they were *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* during the war and the women came

⁸¹ Testimony of Margarethe Reichert, date is illegible, but possibly is May 27, 1962, LAB B Rep. 057-01 2422.

⁸² Testimony of Gerda Christian, September 19, 1962, BArch B 162/3234 (Ludwigsburg).

⁸³ "übergeschickt nach der DDR", author interviews with Anneliese Engler and Lieselotte Zimmerman, June-July 2011.

to each other's aid, providing testimony for one another. The friendships went beyond mutual support. As one *Nachrichtenhelferin* reported, they arranged get-togethers, initially just with those they had served with, but this expanded to all *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* and turned into an annual *Traditionstreffen der Nachrichtenhelferinnen des Heeres* with several hundred women in attendance.⁸⁴ These women had been brought together at a time when most of them were young and impressionable. The experiences they underwent were invariably exciting and stressful. For some, these extreme experiences forged life-long connections. Their friendships, according to another former *Nachrichtenhelferin*, often ended only with death.⁸⁵

The western Allies soon realized that denazification and the prosecution of "war criminals" would not be possible without paralysing reconstruction and alienating still further the German population whose cooperation was deemed essential. The increasing friction with the Soviet Union impelled the western Allies to look for ways out of the impasse in which they had placed themselves. They increasingly felt the need to appease the German people who thought of themselves more as victims than as perpetrators,⁸⁶ a self-perception aggravated by the Nuremberg tribunal and denazification, both of which suggested that responsibility for Nazi crimes rested on a few – who had been dealt with. There existed ill-feeling among some Germans that an injustice was being perpetuated, as periods of internment were irregular, and they felt they had suffered and atoned enough through the Allied bombings.⁸⁷

In 1949, with the establishment of the Federal German Republic and the German Democratic Republic, the Allies passed on their responsibilities for the processes of denazification, amnesties, and compensation. As Germans regained sovereignty in 1949, they also took over responsibility for the prosecution of Nazi

⁸⁴ Maubach, *Die Stellung halten*, pp.304-305.

⁸⁵ Hilde Kerer, "Vom Willen des Lebens getrieben" in *Brixner* (May 2006), p.13 available online: <http://issuu.com/brixmedia/docs/brixner-196---2006-mai>, and author interview, April 2012.

⁸⁶ Norbert Frei, *Adenauer's Germany and the Nazi Past*, translated by Joel Golb (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), pp.5-6.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

war criminals. The West Germans were criticised for their lack of apparent rigour and zeal prosecuting alleged Nazis criminals.⁸⁸ The Ulm Einsatzgruppen trial, in 1958, highlighted that there were many perpetrators who remained unpunished. The *Zentrale Stelle der Landesjustizverwaltungen zur Aufklärung Nationalsozialistischer Verbrechen* was established to assist with the prosecution of former Nazis. The *Zentrale Stelle* researched and investigated crimes and became a vital resource and archive.⁸⁹ The Bundestag officially ended denazification in 1951, and it was hoped that former Nazi officials, with the exception of those who had been classified as ‘Major Offenders’ or ‘Offenders’, would reintegrate smoothly into society, and find employment.⁹⁰

In March 1963, the Chief Prosecutor’s office in West Berlin, led by Guenther, instigated proceedings against some of the staff of the RSHA for their involvement in killing and murder.⁹¹ The accusation was that, as *Schreibtischtäter* they had issued the orders for murder from Berlin.⁹² After initial research, 900 defendants were named. Between 1963 and 1973, thirty-five preliminary proceedings were instigated, but these were all discontinued because of lack of sufficient evidence, inability to identify the suspect, or death or incapacity of the suspect.⁹³ One planned trial of almost 300 defendants could not take place due to a reform of the criminal code, which had come into effect in October 1968; just months before the opening of the trial was scheduled.⁹⁴ The reform made it necessary to demonstrate that the perpetrators had base motives or intentions, resulting in “an appreciable

⁸⁸ Landesarchiv Berlin (LAB) B Rep. 057-01 Findbuch (Berlin: Landesarchiv).

⁸⁹ Henry Friedlander, “Nazi Crimes and the German Law” in Nathan Stoltzfus and Henry Friedlander, eds., *Nazi Crimes and the Law* (New York: Cambridge University Press and the German Historical Institute, Washington D.C., 2008), p.28 and Adalbert Rückerl, *Die Strafverfolgung von NS-Verbrechen 1945-1978* (Heidelberg, Karlsruhe: C.F. Müller Juristischer Verlag, 1979), pp.50-58.

⁹⁰ David Art, *The Politics of the Nazi Past in Germany and Austria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), and Alan E. Steinweis and Daniel E. Rogers, *The Impact of Nazism: New Perspectives on the Third Reich and Its Legacy* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003).

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² LAB B Rep. 057-01 327 and LAB B Rep. 057-01 329; see also A. Rückerl, *NS-Verbrechen von Gericht: Versuch einer Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (Heidelberg: Müller, 1982), p. 190.

⁹³ LAB B Rep. 057-01 349.

⁹⁴ Stiftung Topographie des Terrors, *Topography of Terror: Gestapo, SS and Reich Security Main Office on Wilhelm- and Prinz-Albrecht-Strasse, a Documentation*, translated by Karen Margolis and Pamela Selwyn (Berlin: Stiftung Topographie des Terrors, 2010), p.127.

restriction on the possibility of judicial punishment of Nazi murder”.⁹⁵ Consequently, it was possible in only four separate cases to indict and try a defendant: Fritz Wöhrn; Otto Bovensiepen; Richard Hartmann; and Friedrich Bosshammer.⁹⁶ Even these four trials did not all result in the defendants serving full sentences: after suffering a heart attack while standing trial, Bovensiepen was deemed to be unfit to continue; and Bosshammer was sentenced to life imprisonment in 1972 but died later that year. Wöhrn was sentenced to twelve years and Hartmann to six years.

Although the secretaries and other female administrators of the RSHA could not be tried, they would form a vital role in the trial preparations, and hundreds of former employees were questioned. Women who had been questioned by the Allies previously found themselves being interrogated again, this time by compatriots. The prosecution team, consisting of six prosecutors from Berlin and six from other West German federal states, located the former administrators of the RSHA throughout Germany and travelled to each destination to question the women in their own neighbourhoods. In some instances, women were examined in the comfort of their own home; other women had to visit the local police station for their interviews. The statements collected by the prosecution typically carried the same format. Each witness began her testimony with a declaration that she had been informed of the line of questioning and that she was prepared to make statements about herself and her activities at the RSHA. The interrogations were a vital part of the preparations for trials although the women themselves would not be prosecuted or punished. Within these interrogations the women reflected back on previous times that they had been questioned, allowing an insight into their post-war experiences.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ “spürbaren Einschränkung der Möglichkeiten einer gerichtlichen Ahndung nationalsozialistischer Mordtaten”, A. Rückerl, *NS-Verbrechen von Gericht*, p.190.

⁹⁶ LAB B Rep. 057-01 Findbuch.

⁹⁷ Michael Wildt, *An Uncompromising Generation. The Nazi Leadership of the Reich Security Main Office*, translated by Tom Lampert (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press: 2009: London), pp.410-418, and see also the testimony given by the women as cited in this thesis.

Problems which had begun under the Allied occupation were perpetuated under German administration, as categories of victims and perpetrators became blurred. This was pertinent when determining who to punish, and who to award compensation to. To alleviate the air of confusion, which made it difficult to determine who was truly guilty, amnesties were granted.⁹⁸ In August 1946 an amnesty which applied to all those born after 1914 affected Traudl Junge, resulting in her classification as a *Mitläufer* for her wartime employment:⁹⁹ a *Mitläufer* was someone considered to have jumped on the National Socialist bandwagon and who got swept along with the movement; therefore, presumably, they could be perceived as less guilty and given amnesty. In the interests of all “lesser offenders” and “fellow travellers”, another amnesty law was proposed by the West German Government, submitted to the Allied High Commission, and eventually passed on December 31, 1949. This amnesty ensured that, if the perpetrators had not acted “out of cruelty, dishonourable sentiments, or greed”, and had not committed a crime of deliberate misdemeanour within the past three years, they would be given a maximum of one year imprisonment and fines would be no higher than 5,000 marks.¹⁰⁰ This was itself supplemented with another Amnesty Law, passed in 1954, which was aimed at concentration camp survivors, who had broken the law once they returned to Germany, by, for example, possessing false documentation. Inadvertently, the law also worked to the benefit of those who had committed crimes in the name of National Socialism “during the collapse” of Germany.¹⁰¹

Those who had been employed by the Nazis faced many obstacles to their reintegration into German society. A federal law, known as Article 131, was instigated to assist those who may have struggled financially, or been unable to find jobs, as a result of their wartime employment. The law would “regulate the legal status of persons, including refugees and expelled persons, who were public

⁹⁸ See David A. Blumenthal and Timothy L.H. McCormack, eds., *The Legacy of Nuremberg: Civilising Influence or Institutionalised Vengeance?* (Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff, 2008), and Gerhard Werle, ed., *Justice in Transition: Prosecution and Amnesty in Germany and South Africa* (Berlin: BMV, Berliner Wissenschafts-Verlag, 2006).

⁹⁹ Traudl Junge, *Until the Final Hour*, Melissa Müller, ed., pp.234-235.

¹⁰⁰ Frei, *Adenauer's Germany and the Nazi Past*, pp.14-19.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p.70 and p.85.

employees on May 5, 1945, left service for reasons other than regulations regarding public officials and salaries, and until now have not been reinstated".¹⁰² As this was also pertinent to those who had not been formally dismissed but rather had "simply lost their employers", including those employed in the *Gestapo*, and in the Reich Labour Service,¹⁰³ it would also have been relevant to those employed at the RSHA. While the absorption of those affected was successful, and resulted in political stability, the secretaries who returned from internment did not always find it so easy to reintegrate back into society.

Nevertheless, many of the former RSHA employees had no trouble securing a job after the war; indeed, some found employment within the civil service and continued to administrate for those running the country. Lieselotte Zimmerman, who had been employed as a secretary in Ukraine during the war, worked as a secretary for the government in Hanover in the 1970s.¹⁰⁴ Johanna Heym was employed by the City Council of Berlin.¹⁰⁵ Although she had worked for a division of the Foreign Office during the war, and had been interned in Romania for almost two years, Katharina Hilger had no trouble finding a job. She worked for the British Military Government in Berlin from September 1947 until April 1952. Afterwards, she was employed by the Press and Information Office of the Federal Government in Bonn.¹⁰⁶ Traudl Junge had no difficulty finding employment as a secretary after the war. She found that the fact that "she once worked for the head of state vouches for her good qualifications". She was even employed by a half-Jew who had been persecuted by the Nazis, who said that she was hired because he "felt sorry for her".¹⁰⁷

Indeed, this progression of events was not untypical of the wider trend among those heavily involved in the Nazi regime, despite the efforts of

¹⁰² As Frei explains, "refugees and expelled persons" refers to Germans expelled from Germany's former eastern territories after the defeat, Frei, *Adenauer's Germany and the Nazi Past*, pp.43, 329

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p.43.

¹⁰⁴ Author interview, July 2011.

¹⁰⁵ Testimony of Johanna Heym, June 14, 1966, LG Berlin, 3P Ks 1/71 gegen Otto Bovensiepen und andere, Bd. XIX, pp. 125-148.

¹⁰⁶ Katharina Hilger's CV, NLA-HSTAH Nds.386 Acc.67/85 Nr.1637.

¹⁰⁷ Junge, *Until the Final Hour*, Müller, ed., pp.231-2.

denazification to purge society of those key players. Nazi doctors, industrialists, journalists and lawyers were all able to continue their careers after 1945, often with the support of their former colleagues.¹⁰⁸ This occasionally caused farcical results, for instance, when a former Nazi doctor, Werner Heyde, who had, by using an assumed name, continued to practise medicine after the collapse of the Third Reich, testified as an expert witness in Nazi crime trials.¹⁰⁹

It was not, however, plain sailing for everyone. Traudl Junge wished to emigrate to Australia but was refused a permanent residence permit by the Australian authorities, because of her role as Hitler's secretary. This was the only difficulty she faced as a consequence of her wartime role and she resolved the issue by visiting Australia as a tourist, and persuading herself that she would rather live in Germany.¹¹⁰

A specific law, *Heimkehrergesetz*, was passed in 1950 to assist *Heimkehrer*, usually applied to prisoners of war, to return home and to ease the transition by supporting them financially and promoting their reintegration into society.¹¹¹ The term *Spätheimkehrer*, was given to all those who were released as prisoners of war after December 31, 1946. They were awarded compensation, under the 1952 *Lastenausgleichsgesetz*: a system of financial compensation for losses suffered in the Second World War. This pertained to those who had suffered as a direct effect of the war, through bombing, expulsion from the former German Reich, and for those defined as *Spätheimkehrer*.¹¹² The returning prisoners of war were given different

¹⁰⁸ See Norbert Frei, *Karrieren im Zwielicht, Hitlers Eliten nach 1945* (Frankfurt and New York: Campus, 2002).

¹⁰⁹ Heyde was ultimately discovered and committed suicide before he could be brought to trial. See John P. Teschke, *Hitler's Legacy: West Germany Confronts the Aftermath of the Third Reich* (New York, Berlin and Oxford: Peter Lang, 2001), and Klaus-Detlev Godau-Schütte, *Die Heyde/Sawade-Affäre: wie Juristen und Mediziner den NS-Euthanasieprofessor Heyde nach 1945 deckten und straflos blieben* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1998).

¹¹⁰ Junge, *Until the Final Hour*, Müller, ed., p.245.

¹¹¹ For more information on the *Heimkehrergesetz*, the law passed, see Frank Biess, *Homecomings: Returning POWs and the Legacies of Defeat in Postwar Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

¹¹² For the full text of the Lastenausgleich law, see Bundesministerium der Justiz, available online: <http://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/lag/>. For more information about the issue, see Michael L. Hughes, *Shouldering the Burdens of Defeat: West Germany and the Reconstruction of Social*

receptions in West and East Germany; in the DDR it was forbidden to discuss experiences as a prisoner of war and shed any bad light on the Soviet Union, for example.¹¹³

Katharina Hilger, who had no trouble securing employment after the war despite working for the Nazi Foreign Office, did however suffer a setback when she applied to be recognised as a *Heimkehrer*. Hilger sent numerous letters and submitted seven different documents to support her case. It took until May 1966 for her to be successful in her application. The letter which confirmed her recognition as a *Heimkehrer* stated that she was “not entitled to severance pay nor the welcome gift from the federal government”.¹¹⁴ Although Hilger was not able to claim these reparations, it is unlikely that these gifts would have provided much financial support; the severance pay was 200 Deutschmarks, and the welcome “donation” from the federal government was 100 Deutschmarks.¹¹⁵

Wally Schellhorn, who had worked as a secretary at the German embassy in Copenhagen, travelled to Sweden after her internment in Denmark, yet she wished to return to Germany. It took her two years to achieve this goal, and once back in Germany she applied to be a *Heimkehrer*. Schellhorn believed she was eligible as she had been interned for several months, and she wished to be classified as a *Heimkehrer* for employee insurance purposes; holding a *Heimkehrer* certificate would explain the time she had spent in internment. As a basic requirement was to return to Germany within two years of being discharged from an internment camp, Schellhorn struggled to be recognised as a *Heimkehrer*. In order for her application to be successful, she was required to clarify the exact circumstances leading to her internment, and to justify the time it took for her to re-enter Germany. Schellhorn

Justice (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

¹¹³ Hans Reichelt, *Die deutschen Kriegsheimkehrer – Was hat die DDR für sie getan?* (Berlin: Edition Ost im Verlag Das, 2007).

¹¹⁴ “Entlassungsgeld und Begrüßungsgabe der Bundesregierung stehen nicht zu”; letter May 17, 1966, NLA-HSTAH Nds.386 Acc.67/85 Nr.1637.

¹¹⁵ “Spende”, various letters to and from Katharina Hilger, 1944-1966, NLA-HSTAH Nds.386 Acc.67/85 Nr.163; In 1950, 100 marks were worth roughly \$24, (William Boyes, Michael Melvin, *Economics* (Hampshire: Cengage Learning, 2010), p.790) and this is approximately £171, or \$275, in today’s money.

spent much time and money pleading her case and was eventually granted *Heimkehrer* status, in 1959, as she was able to prove that she had attempted to re-enter Germany within two years of being discharged, but had been unable to do so “because of the destruction caused by the effects of war on the railway lines”.¹¹⁶ Schellhorn was sent a “Guide for Returnees” and, like Hilger, she received neither the severance pay nor the welcome gift.¹¹⁷

As she had been imprisoned by both the Russians and the Germans for her employment as a secretary for an operations office and a defence business, Hildegard Klitzke subsequently found it difficult to obtain employment. Even when she did find a part-time position in the Soviet zone within Germany, she felt that she was being constantly observed. This in fact aided Klitzke when she applied for a residence permit for Western Germany and recognition as a *Heimkehrer*. She had applied specifically as she feared being rearrested by the Soviets and the German authorities noted that her request was not “unfounded”,¹¹⁸ as “experience has shown that former internees in the Soviet zone are subject to special observation and spying”.¹¹⁹ Klitzke was ultimately granted her application to become a German citizen.¹²⁰

An employee for the RSHA who rose through the ranks to take charge of deportations of Jews, Gertrud Slotke was briefly held by the Canadians as a prisoner of war, but, in denazification proceedings in 1948 she was classified as a *Mitläufer*, implying she had been swept along with the movement and had not played a decision-making role and therefore, she was granted an amnesty.¹²¹

¹¹⁶ “wegen der durch Kriegseinwirkungen verursachten Zerstörung der Eisenbahnlinien”, report on Wally Schellhorn’s application, June 4, 1959, NLA-HSTAH Nds.386 Acc.67/85 Nr.1352.

¹¹⁷ “Wegweiser für Heimkehrer”, letters to, from and about Wally Schellhorn, 1953 – 1959, *ibid*.

¹¹⁸ “unbegründet”, document detailing Hildegard Klitzke’s application to be a *Heimkehrer*, March 5, 1955, NLA-HSTAH Nds.386 Acc.67/85 Nr.194.

¹¹⁹ “Erfahrungsgemäß unterliegen ehemalige Internierte in der SBZ der besonderen Beobachtung und Bespitzelung”, letter written by Hildegard Klitzke, December 30, 1954 and letter written by the head of the Residence Permits Committee, March 5, 1955, NLA-HSTAH Nds.386 Acc.67/85 Nr.194.

¹²⁰ Letter May 5, 1955, NLA-HSTAH Nds.386 Acc.67/85 Nr.194.

¹²¹ Elisabeth Kohlhaas, “Gertrud Slotke – Angestellte im niederländischen Judenreferat der Sicherheitspolizei” in Klaus-Michael Mallmann and Gerhard Paul, eds., *Karrieren der Gewalt*,

However, Slottke was later accused, investigated, charged and put on trial, the preparations for which began in 1959,¹²² but the trial itself did not take place until 1967.¹²³ This was considerably later than the main trials which had taken place under the Allies, but was less than a decade after three high-profile trials, the Ulm *Einsatzgruppen* trial, in 1958, Eichmann's trial, in 1961, and the Frankfurt Auschwitz trials, 1963-1965, which all pushed the Holocaust into public consciousness and spurred on West German prosecutors to continue their job of seeking and punishing Nazi war criminals.¹²⁴

The jury concluded in its ruling that Slottke concealed information about her wartime tasks and the extent of her knowledge about "the actual fate of the Jews deported to the East", allegations Slottke denied. She was awarded a five-year prison sentence.¹²⁵ The court determined that Slottke had been a "highly reliable, efficient, dutiful and ambitious staff member of the Nazi persecution apparatus in the Netherlands". Although Slottke had been a part of the Nazi apparatus, she was not merely a cog in the wheel, because "she happily represented herself". Slottke considered herself a victim and did not feel any compassion for the real victims of the Holocaust, nor did she express any remorse during the trial, in contrast to Zoepf, her former superior, who also testified. She condemned the process as a miscarriage of justice and made several requests for early release for health reasons. Her requests were denied: Slottke was being used as an example and therefore was expected to serve her full sentence. Her imprisonment was cut short by her death from ill health in 1971.¹²⁶

Nationalsozialistische Täterbiographien (Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft: 2004, Darmstadt), p.208.

¹²² Harald Fühner, *Nachspiel: die niederländische Politik und die Verfolgung von Kollaborateuren und NS-Verbrechern, 1945-1989* (Münster: Waxmann, 2005), p.220.

¹²³ Testimony of Gertrud Slottke, October 3, 1968, BAArch B 162/4173 (Ludwigsburg).

¹²⁴ David Cesarani, ed., *After Eichmann. Collective Memory and the Holocaust since 1961* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2005), David Cesarani, *Eichmann. His Life and Crimes* (London: Vintage Books, 2005), Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age*, translated by Assenka Oksiloff (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), p.96, and Devin O. Pendas *The Frankfurt Auschwitz Trial, 1963-1965, Genocide, History and the Limits of the Law* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

¹²⁵ "wirkliche Schicksal der nach dem Osten deportierten Juden", testimony of Gertrud Slottke, October 4, 1968, BAArch B 162/4173 (Ludwigsburg).

¹²⁶ "äusserst zuverlässige, tüchtige, pflichtbewusste und ehrgeizige Mitarbeiterin des NS-

Denazification questionnaires, interrogation and imprisonment were methods which those in authority employed to determine and punish levels of culpability. Individuals, both those directly involved and their descendants, had their own means for resolving their, and their predecessors', involvement in the Nazi regime. Some women, and their families, chose to ignore their experiences and avoid discussion of their involvement. The trial of Adolf Eichmann, in 1961, received unprecedented worldwide attention, and was broadcast live by international news networks,¹²⁷ bringing the Holocaust and trials of its perpetrators into the public arena. As Slottké's case was made public, featuring in newspapers in Germany,¹²⁸ and around the world,¹²⁹ the attention her story attracted may have encouraged – or forced – other women to confront their own pasts.

Some secretaries were ultimately able to profit from their past experiences by sharing their stories. Two of Hitler's private secretaries, Traudl Junge and Christa Schroeder, have published written accounts of their experiences.¹³⁰ Their books have been translated into numerous languages, and Junge's memoirs even inspired a documentary, *Im toten Winkel*,¹³¹ in 2002, and an award-winning film, *Der Untergang*,¹³² produced in 2004. In the 1950s, Junge was employed as an adviser, and assistant director, for the film *Der letzte Akt*. The film's director, G.W.Pabst,

Verfolgungsapparates in den Niederlanden", "sie sich selbst gerne darstellten", Kohlhaas, "Gertrud Slottké" in Mallmann and Paul, eds., *Karrieren der Gewalt*, pp.210, 215.

¹²⁷ David Cesarani, ed., *After Eichmann*, David Cesarani, *Eichmann*, pp.324-356, and Jeffrey Shandler, *While America Watches: Televising the Holocaust* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

¹²⁸ Dietrich Strothmann, "Eine Angeklagte und ihr Opfer" in *Die Zeit*, May 17, 1967, available online: <http://www.zeit.de/1967/07/eine-angeklagte-und-ihr-opfer> and Dietrich Strothmann, "Die Sache Harster und andere" in *Die Zeit*, January 27, 1967, available online: <http://www.zeit.de/1967/04/die-sache-harster-und-andere>, for example.

¹²⁹ "Former Gestapo Chief Arrested", *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, January 14, 1966, available online: <http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1129&dat=19660114&id=ep5RAAAAIBAJ&sjid=imwDAAAIBAJ&pg=7269,1941371> and "Three Nazis Jailed in Anne Frank Case", *Watertown Daily Times*, New York, February 24, 1967, Vol. 105, No. 259, available online: <http://fultonhistory.com/Newspapers%20Disk3/Watertown%20Times/Watertown%20NY%20Daily%20Times%201967%20Feb%20Grayscale.pdf/Watertown%20NY%20Daily%20Times%201967%20Feb%20Grayscale%20-%200444.pdf>.

¹³⁰ Traudl Junge, *Bis zur letzten Stunde: Hitlers Sekretarin erzählt ihr Leben*, Melissa Müller, ed.(Munich: Claassen, 2002), and Schroeder and Joachimsthaler, ed., *Er war mein Chef*.

¹³¹ *Im toten Winkel*, directed by André Heller and Othmar Schmiderer, 2002.

¹³² *Der Untergang*, directed by Oliver Hirschbiegel in 2004, was nominated for the 2005 Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film and won the 2005 BBC Four World Cinema competition.

wished to have an eye-witness for his film based on the book, *Ten Days to Die* by Michael A. Musmanno, about Hitler's last days in the bunker.¹³³ Junge had also been interviewed for the book.¹³⁴ While Junge was paid handsomely for her contribution to the film,¹³⁵ her motivations for her involvement in the various films and books may not have always solely financial; Junge is alleged to have said to the producer of the documentary, *Im toten Winkel*, "Now that I've let go of my story, I can let go of my life".¹³⁶ She died shortly afterwards; her words eerily prophetic and telling.

Such instances of financial gain were unequivocally rare: only those close to the main players could realistically expect such opportunities, and even then not all were so keen to share – or sell – their story. Brunhilde Pomsel, Goebbels' personal secretary, remained silent for more than sixty years, repeatedly shunning requests for interviews or to publish her memoirs. In September 2011 she finally consented to a request for an interview with *Bild*,¹³⁷ although even that only transpired after five months of deliberation.¹³⁸ While she did not say why she finally broke her silence, perhaps she too, like Junge, felt a need to "let go" of her own story, having held on to it for so long.

As the Holocaust was thrust into the public eye, through trials, through television programmes,¹³⁹ through exhibitions,¹⁴⁰ and through published

¹³³ Michael A. Musmanno, *Ten Days to Die* (London: Peter Davies, 1951).

¹³⁴ Müller, "Confronting Guilt" in Müller, ed., *Until the Final Hour*, p.240.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ John Hooper, "Obituary: Traudl Junge", *The Guardian*, February 14, 2002, available online: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/2002/feb/14/guardianobituaries.humanities>.

¹³⁷ Frankziska von Mutius, "Ich war die Sekretärin von Joseph Goebbels", *Bild*, August 23, 2011, available online: <http://www.bild.de/regional/muenchen/joseph-goebbels/seine-sekretaerin-im-interview-19534892.bild.html>.

¹³⁸ Tony Paterson, "Goebbels was a coward: former secretary spills wartime secrets", *The Independent*, September 2, 2011, available online: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/goebbels-was-a-coward-former-secretary-spills-wartime-secrets-2347846.html>.

¹³⁹ The American television mini-series, *The Holocaust*, was broadcast in West Germany, 1978-1979, Tom Dreisbach, "Transatlantic Broadcasts: Holocaust in America and West Germany", in *Penn History Review*, 16, 2 (Spring 2009).

¹⁴⁰ An exhibition on the crimes of the Wehrmacht, produced by the *Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung*, toured the country between 1995-1999, Wolfram Wette, *The Wehrmacht: History, Myth, Reality*, translated by Deborah Lucas Schneider (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard

memoirs,¹⁴¹ those who had been active in the Third Reich had to confront the fact that they had worked for the Nazis, the perpetrators of the evils of the Holocaust. Ordinary Germans were able to see the extent of their peers' actions and those who had previously declared an ignorance of the Holocaust, either at the time or in the immediate aftermath, would no longer be able to claim a lack of knowledge of the events. The prior conceptions of the women who had administrated for the Nazis were challenged as more information about the Holocaust came to light. The women had no choice but to consider their own pasts, and reflect upon their connections with the Nazi regime.¹⁴²

Detention provided an opportunity to reflect on wartime experiences. Erika Albrecht had believed her close colleague, Frau Wagner, to be a convinced National Socialist, yet she still shared with Wagner her own criticisms of Nazism. Even though she never spoke with Albrecht about the fate of the Jews, Albrecht was left with the impression that Wagner "knew more than I [Albrecht] did". After the war, they were imprisoned in Sachsenhausen together, and Albrecht pressed Wagner on the issue. Wagner only admitted that "everything was terrible" and did not acknowledge any knowledge of the Holocaust. In Albrecht's opinion, however, Wagner was aware of the fate of the Jews, and her silence was due to unwavering adherence to the confidentiality agreement she had signed as a member of staff of the RSHA.¹⁴³

University Press, 2006).

¹⁴¹ For example, when Albert Speer was released from prison, he did a major interview in *Der Spiegel*, in November 1996, Dan Van der Vat, *The Good Nazi: the Life and Lies of Albert Speer* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1997), pp.333-334, and he went on to publish his memoirs, *Albert Speer, Inside the Third Reich*, and *Spandau: the Secret Diaries*, both translated by Richard and Clara Winston (New York: Macmillan, 1970 and 1976).

¹⁴² There is some literature which tackles the issue of how women in Nazi Germany confronted their Nazi past, although the books use media such as literature and film to examine the topic. There is a dearth of literature which assesses how everyday women who had been active in Nazi Germany confronted and reflected upon their past. See, for example, Elke P. Frederiksen and Martha Kaarsberg Wallach, eds., *Facing Fascism and Confronting the Past: German Women Writers from Weimar to the Present* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2000) and Susan E. Linville, *Feminism, Film, Fascism: Women's Auto/biographical Film in Postwar Germany* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998).

¹⁴³ "mehr als ich gewußt", "alles schrecklich gewesen", testimony of Erika Albrecht, October 24, 1967, LG Berlin, 3P KS 1/71 gegen Otto Bovensiepen und andere Bd. XXXVIII, pp.127-148.

Joseph Goebbels' secretary, Brunhilde Pomsel, was interned by the Russians after the war, in Buchenwald and Sachsenhausen, the former Nazi concentration camp. Pomsel claimed that it was only after she was released, in 1950, that she became aware of the Holocaust. Until then, she said, she "was a stupid and politically disinterested nobody from a simple background". Once she knew of the heinous crimes that Goebbels had been responsible for, she believed that she would not "be able to live a happy life". She was unable to forgive Goebbels for "what he did to the world or for the fact that he murdered his innocent children".¹⁴⁴

The children of those who perpetrated the Holocaust found themselves reflecting on their parents' actions. This generation asked awkward questions of their parents,¹⁴⁵ as they had to deal with being only one age bracket removed from their heinous crimes. Some historians argue that the generational confrontation culminated in the mass student protests, in 1968, as they questioned their parents' involvement, and the fact that there were former Nazis in governmental positions.¹⁴⁶ This generation did not want to carry the burden of their parents' sins, and wished to show the world that they were coming to terms with their country's Nazi past, and moving on from it, even if their parents were unable to do the same.

Both Anneliese Engler and Lieselotte Zimmerman experienced altercations with their children because of their own Nazi past. Engler and Zimmerman admitted that they were now fully aware of the atrocities committed by the Nazis, yet

¹⁴⁴ Tony Paterson, "Goebbels was a coward: former secretary spills wartime secrets", *The Independent*, 2 September 2011, available online: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/goebbels-was-a-coward-former-secretary-spills-wartime-secrets-2347846.html>.

¹⁴⁵ There is much literature dealing with the topic of being the child of a Holocaust perpetrator. See, for example, Alan L. Berger and Naomi Berger, eds., *Second Generation Voices: Reflections by Children of Holocaust Survivors and Perpetrators* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2001), Stephan and Norbert Lebert, *My Father's Keeper: the Children of the Nazi Leaders – an Intimate History of Damage and Denial*, translated by Julian Evans (London: Little Brown, 2001), Gabriele Rosenthal, ed., *The Holocaust in Three Generations: Families of Victims and Perpetrators of the Nazi Regime* (London: Cassell, 1998), Erin McGlothlin, *Second-generation Holocaust Literature: Legacies of Survival and Perpetration* (Woodbridge: Camden House, 2006).

¹⁴⁶ For a discussion of this, see Michael Schmidtke, "The German New Left and National Socialism", pp.177-193, and Konrad H. Jarausch, "Critical Memory and Civil Society, The Impact of the 1960s on German Debates about the Past" p.21, both in Philipp Gassert and Alan E. Steinweis, eds., *Coping with the Nazi Past: West German Debates on Nazism and Generational Conflict, 1955-1975* (New York, Oxford: Berghahn, 2006).

neither of them were able to speak negatively about the Nazis. While both acknowledged that the persecution of the Jews was “the most horrible” act the Nazis perpetrated, with Zimmerman adding that it was “unnecessary”,¹⁴⁷ they both prospered under the Third Reich. Both of these women fondly recalled their time as administrators working for the Nazis, particularly their time in Ukraine, where they befriended each other. They denied any knowledge of the atrocities against the Jews at the time of their employment under the Nazis, which caused problems with their offspring. Zimmerman has been unable to discuss this subject with her son. He has been adamant that she must have known the true course of events, an allegation she has refuted, insisting that her son cannot have known as he was not present. Engler’s daughter moved out of the family home, when it became apparent to her that her mother would not confront her past.¹⁴⁸

Irrespective of whether they were able to confront their own involvement in the Nazi regime, each woman suffered some consequences for having been a constituent part of the regime. Their experiences varied greatly, heavily dependent on circumstance. The lack of uniformity of experience during the closing phase of the war and immediate aftermath was perhaps to be expected, as the administrators contended with a Europe facing the consequences of unprecedented upheaval. However, that the onset of peacetime did not bring with it consistency is more telling, exemplifying the different attitudes and goals of the Allies. The women were pursued either based on the geographical location they had been employed in during the war, or as a result of the occupied zone of Germany in which they ended the war. The authorities were not consistent with one another, or even with themselves. While some women were interrogated and released, others were interned, yet the length of incarceration was inconsistent.

The female perpetrators who were tried by the Allies, those who had been in more directly murderous roles, were harshly sentenced;¹⁴⁹ Ilse Koch, wife of the

¹⁴⁷ “die schrecklichste”; “unnötig”, interviews with the author, July – August 2011.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Edith Raim “Coping with the Nazi Past: Germany and the Legacy of the Third Reich”, *Contemporary*

Buchenwald concentration camp commander, and a concentration camp guard in her own right, was sentenced to life imprisonment, and Irma Grese, a concentration camp guard at both Auschwitz and Ravensbrück camps, was sentenced to death. The severe sentences imply that “the press, who certainly demonized some of the perpetrators, affect[ed] investigations and trials”.¹⁵⁰ These women were treated differently to their male counterparts as, initially, the media, public and even the judges grappled with the concept that women were capable of sadistic acts, of brutal beatings, and of murder. Although these women were in a small minority – there were approximately 3,500 female concentration camp guards compared to 51,500 men¹⁵¹ – they received disproportionate attention in the media, and in popular culture.¹⁵² By making these women into monsters, society was looking for a way to explain, and even excuse, their actions: they were not ‘everyday’ human beings who had acted immorally; rather they were beasts, not in control of their actions. This perception has been challenged as the passage of time since the Holocaust has increased; numerous studies on the female concentration camps demonstrate that they were ‘everyday’ women, some of whom had sadistic tendencies and took advantage of the opportunities presented to them, while others got swept along with the regime.¹⁵³

Admittedly, the involvement of the female concentration camp guards in atrocities was more immediate than the actions of employees of the RSHA, given that they had physically committed murders. The secretaries, female administrators of the RSHA and the *Helferinnen* were unlike the female of concentration camp guards: with notable exceptions such as Gertrud Slotke, they were not in decision-

European History, 12 (2003), p.558.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ Daniel Patrick Brown, *The Camp Women: the Female Auxiliaries who Assisted the SS in Running the Nazi Concentration Camp System* (Atglen, PA: Schiffer Publishers, 2002), p.9.

¹⁵² See, for example, Bernhard Schlink’s fictitious *Der Vorleser* (Zürich: Diogenes, 1995), which was made into an award-winning film, *The Reader*, directed by Stephen Daldry, and also Lina Wertmüller’s film *Seven Beauties* (1975) and Don Edmonds’ film, *Ilsa (sic), She Wolf of the SS* (1975) both of which were inspired by Ilse Koch.

¹⁵³ For more information on female perpetrators and the issue of whether they were “monsters” or “ordinary”, see Ulrike Weckel and Edgar Wolfrum, eds., *“Bestien” und “Befehlsempfänger”: Frauen und Männer in NS-Prozessen nach 1945* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003), and Olaf Jensen and Claus-Christian W. Szejnmann, eds., *Ordinary people as Mass Murderers: Perpetrators in Comparative Perspectives* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

making roles. Consequently, even though some women suffered through internment, and some struggled through bureaucratic red-tape to receive recognition as *Heimkehrer*, most of the former employees of the RSHA were fortunate compared to the women who had been employed as concentration camp guards by the Nazis. Yet, while their individual tasks varied, collectively their administrative role ensured the smooth-running of the RSHA, which allowed the leaders to perpetrate the Holocaust of European Jewry, and the persecution of many other groups besides.

Upon release from their internment, some women were able to put the past behind them and their lives reverted to relative normality reasonably quickly. Women who were able to return to family and friends might have found it easier to reintegrate, as they had a support system in place. Similarly, those women who were able to find employment speedily were able to establish a routine, and this also helped enable them to ease back into reality. Indeed, the whole of Germany had to reconstruct itself following the war, economically, politically and legally.¹⁵⁴

Whether they were conscripted or volunteered, the secretaries of the RSHA and the *Helferinnen* all contributed to the National Socialist regime through their war-time employment. The mutual experiences of these women were mainly limited to their involvement in the German war effort, be it through their employment at the RSHA, supporting the *Wehrmacht*, or the SS, and, that they consequently suffered for their wartime employment. Even when women endured the same hardship as a consequence of their previous service, variables and inconsistencies ensured that each worker went through her own individual odyssey, resulting in multiple accounts within the same narrative. One constant remained: almost all of these women paid some price for their involvement in the Nazi regime.

¹⁵⁴ For more information on the reconstruction of Germany, see, for example, Robert G. Moeller, ed., *West Germany Under Construction: Politics, Society, and Culture in the Adenauer Era* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1997).

Conclusion: All's Fair in Love and War

Academic interest in *Täterforschung* has intensified over recent decades, significantly aiding both our understanding of Nazism and the roots of the Holocaust.¹ By extension, the study of ordinary people present, and active, within the Nazi regime provides an insight into how the German nation allowed the Holocaust to take place, to determine whether those ordinary people were simply cogs in the machine, or whether they played a larger role. The topic of gender and the Holocaust has been a specific area of study preceding, and with different origins to, the *Täterforschung* discussion. Yet gender is also an important subsection of *Täterforschung*. The women researched in this thesis have been considered in this context.

The classification of women in the Third Reich into either perpetrators or victims has been the subject of extensive debate among Claudia Koonz, Gisela Bock and Christina Herkommer.² Through an examination of three groups of women who provided administrative support for the Nazis, this thesis shows that women were not perpetrators in the classical definition, yet neither were they solely at the mercy of their male compatriots. The research presented here supports the conclusions of Bock and Herkommer: it is not possible to categorise all women as perpetrators or victims. These women must be considered as individuals, and, like men, have multiple narratives which cannot be encompassed by simple, unitary generalisations. Their gender made them subservient to men, defining their role within society; yet some women were able to challenge this stereotype, either rising up and taking on responsibilities above their expected station, or speaking out and questioning the horrors unfolding around them.

¹ Dan Stone, *Histories of the Holocaust* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp.4-5.

² See Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1987), Christina Herkommer, "Women under National Socialism: Women's Scope for Action and the Issue of Gender", translated by Richard Littlejohn, in Olaf Jensen and Claus-Christian W. Szejnmann, eds., *Ordinary People as Mass Murderers* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), Gisela Bock, *Zwangssterilisation im Nationalsozialismus Studien zur Rassenpolitik und Frauenpolitik* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1986) and Gisela Bock, "Ordinary Women in Nazi Germany. Perpetrators, Victims, Followers, and Bystanders" in Dalia Ofer and Lenore J. Weitzman, eds., *Women in the Holocaust* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998).

Many ordinary women in Nazi Germany contributed to the establishment, consolidation and maintenance of the regime by administrating for the Nazis. While the Holocaust was perpetrated by those who gave the orders, by those in control, with the support of those who had weapons, it could not have been accomplished without those who typed the orders, answered the telephones, and sent the telegrams. These women knew about the Holocaust, and, even though they were aware of the acts of persecution the Nazis were committing, most of these women took no action. Exceptions, such as Erika Albrecht, the secretary who questioned her bosses, or Greta Wachtel, who exploited her position as a *Nachrichtenhelferin* to assist others, were few and far between.

The shared bond between the three groups of women examined within this thesis – secretaries, *Nachrichtenhelferinnen des Heeres* and *SS-Helferinnen* – was the nature of their employment: clerical and secretarial administration. Ostensibly, the secretaries, who were progressing in their regular jobs, had little in common with those who volunteered to be *Helferinnen*, who specifically chose to do their duty for their country. There was even a substantial gulf between the *SS-Helferinnen* and the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen des Heeres*; while the former chose to work for the notoriously feared SS, the latter assisted the army, a patriotic calling, which women all over the world were simultaneously answering.

Yet these women did have more in common with one another than solely the tasks they performed. Their gender had a role to play in their shared narrative. Each of these women was subservient to men purely because of their gender. The women were all required to work in roles supporting men; the secretaries reported to men, and the *Helferinnen* replaced them, freeing them up to fight at the front. Very few of these women challenged their acquiescence to men, typical of the acceptance society bestowed upon this relationship. Although not necessarily a conscious motivation, some women tackled this traditional judgment by taking on roles considered more typically masculine, yet they were later condemned for their

“breach of gendered norms”,³ and consequently their actions were considered quite sensational. These women were perceived as “monsters who threatened the gender order itself”.⁴ The majority of women, however, did not challenge the convention that women were assigned to subservient roles. Consequently, the women who administrated for the Nazis did not necessarily consciously choose roles that facilitated their subservience to men. Rather, they chose roles which allowed them to make a contribution, albeit in a traditional female way.

Manifold motivations spurred women to volunteer as *Helperinnen*, reflecting the individuality of each woman, and their varied backgrounds. Yet, here, too, we see common threads. Secretaries, while driven also by financial incentives – a benefit not afforded to the volunteer *Helperinnen* who received a stipend rather than a salary – nonetheless shared many other impetuses with the *Helperinnen*. The mood of the nation was mirrored in the drive of the women, as they epitomized a desire to travel abroad, have an adventure, don a uniform (particularly as it was considered chic), and serve their country. The actual role that they would perform was almost irrelevant for the majority of them; rather, it was a means to an end.

In order to complete the tasks expected of them, the women required tuition. The *Helperinnen* were placed in niche roles, created as a necessity of wartime. While the women did not have prior experience in these roles, this was not prohibitive; both *SS-Helperinnen* and *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* were given specialised training. The secretaries, contrarily, did not require any specialised training, as most were continuing with their jobs, or had been trained sufficiently at school for the tasks required of them. The lower standards expected of secretaries prohibited a direct switch from secretary to *Helperin*, as further training would be required; in contrast, the switch from *Helperin* to secretary was more straightforward. A similar implied hierarchy existed within the branches of

³ Jane Caplan, “Gender and the Concentration Camps” in Jane Caplan and Nicholas Wachsmann, eds., *Concentration Camps in Nazi Germany: The New Histories* (Oxford: Routledge, 2010), p.98.

⁴ Ibid. See also, Ulrike Weckel and Edgar Wolfrum, “NS-Prozesse und ihre öffentliche Resonanz” in Ulrike Weckel and Edgar Wolfrum, *Bestien und Befehlsempfänger: Frauen und Männer in NS-Prozessen Nach 1945* (Göttingen: Vandenhöck and Ruprecht, 2003).

Helperinnen: more was required and expected of the *SS-Helperinnen*, as each applicant was the potential wife for an SS man, resulting in the vetting of all applicants and the utilization of stringent training tests. Accordingly, those *SS-Helperinnen* who wished to become *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* exceeded the training required of them, and thus had little difficulty in moving.

The training given to *Helperinnen* was also intended to reinforce ideological support for the regime. Similar to the training given to *Aufseherinnen*, an underlying goal may have been to desensitise the women to enable them to carry out their duties without any thought for the Nazis' victims.⁵ The ideological sessions, which were compulsory, aimed to ensure the women were convinced of the cause and prepared to dedicate themselves entirely to National Socialism. For some women, this was a mere extension of their previous education; they had been surrounded by Nazi propaganda and education from an early age. The training was necessary even to those who had already been rigorously indoctrinated, as it emphasised to these women that there was a contribution they could personally make, that could be vital to the Nazi cause.

The training period fostered a sense of kinship among the women. They bonded by spending time communally, but the friendship extended beyond training. Women deployed together often spent their free time together, and relied upon each other to get through difficult times. This was especially true of secretaries sent abroad; friendships formed then sometimes lasted a lifetime. However, the secretaries who worked alongside each other in RSHA headquarters seemed not to form these same lifelong friendships. This may have been because they were not encouraged to speak to one another – no doubt, an attempt to prevent the spread of rumours; almost every department handled sensitive material. The women working in Berlin could, generally speaking, return home to their family and pre-existing friends: they did not need friendships in the same way

⁵ See, for example, Jack Morrison, *Ravensbrück: Everyday Life in a Women's Concentration Camp, 1939-45* (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishing, 2000), and Helga Schneider, *Let Me Go. My Mother and the SS* (London: Vintage Random House, 2005).

as women sent abroad. Stronger friendships were formed among those posted abroad because the circumstances were more extreme; they faced great hardships, particularly towards the end of the war, when the regime they had whole-heartedly supported came crashing down around them, and in many cases abandoned them. These women were then forced to make their way home, across a razed and war-torn Europe; it is little wonder that they bonded through such experiences.

The geographic locations where these women were deployed highlight a fundamental difference between the three groups. The increased level of trust placed in *SS-Helferinnen* was reflected in the frequency of assignments to concentration camps, and sites where contact with Jewish prisoners could be expected. This is unsurprising: the *SS-Helferinnen* were selected and rigorously vetted; their allegiance to the cause was indubitable, and they had been given additional indoctrination in Nazi ideology. Contrarily, the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* were not directed to areas perceived as sensitive: there is little testimony giving evidence that they witnessed atrocities. Secretaries working for the RSHA, in contrast, handled documentation pertaining to the murders of Jews on a daily basis.

Through their workloads, therefore, knowledge of the Holocaust was available to each group of women to varying degrees. Ironically, the women employed as secretaries at the RSHA were better placed than the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen*, who had volunteered, to find out about the criminal acts being perpetrated by the Nazis. That the secretaries, who were not necessarily inspired by, or trained in, Nazi ideology, were trusted with confidential and potentially incriminating documents, may be a little surprising. However, the secretaries had to swear an oath and perhaps this was enough to persuade their bosses of their loyalty. Indeed, very few of the women took any action once they were aware of the self-evidently criminal enterprise they were involved in. The *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* were implicitly required to demonstrate their devotion to the cause. Their reliability was assumed, perhaps because the majority volunteered,

and because, while their work was crucial for the success of the German army, they were less likely to have to handle sensitive material.

The long-held view that ordinary Germans did not know about the Holocaust has long been discredited. David Bankier, Peter Longerich, Robert Gellately and others have demonstrated that the general public knew a considerable amount in general, if not in detail, about the events taking place, yet distanced themselves from them.⁶ If ordinary people knew about the Holocaust, logically this must apply even more to those employed by the Nazis. From their testimony, their diaries, and interviews conducted with these women, it is evident that virtually all of them, whether secretaries or *Helferinnen*, knew about the Holocaust to some extent, even though many of them claim to have only grasped the full extent of the Nazis' crimes after the war. Some of these women did indeed distance themselves from the persecution they discovered, by choosing to ignore the information they gleaned. They may genuinely have not believed it, or, as some women claimed afterwards, not to have fully understood it. However, given the level of propaganda, indoctrination and specialised training the women had been subjected to, it is highly likely that they did understand to a degree the meaning and implications of the documentation to which they were privy, but chose to ignore it and continue dutifully to perform the tasks required of them, before issuing retrospective denials as a means of self-preservation.

What they knew, and how they came to this knowledge, varied among the different groups of administrators, and from woman to woman. The nature of the sources used demonstrates a difficulty in determining exactly who knew what, and when. The post-war trial documents and oral history rely on both the women's memories, and their integrity. Memoirs written by the women similarly depend on their honesty and their powers of recall. To surmount the obstacles the sources present, all information has been corroborated where possible - testimonies have

⁶ See, for example, David Bankier, *The Germans and the Final Solution: Public Opinion Under Nazism* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, New edition, 1996), Robert Gellately, *Backing Hitler. Consent and Coercion in Nazi Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), and Peter Longerich, *>>Davon haben wir nichts gewusst!<<: Die Deutschen und die Judenverfolgung 1933-1945* (Munich: Siedler Verlag, 2006).

been compared, and dates and places have been checked – and supported by relevant secondary material and research conducted.

Although the women may have been lying in their testimony, the statements they gave indicate that while some women knew very definite details, and some women witnessed specific events, others were aware of general concepts and had only a vague understanding of what was occurring. Some women were able to recall names of the concentration camps; yet they claimed to be unaware of what the names represented. Other women referred to specific, one-off incidents, deportations, executions, and people being tortured; yet, in reality these events were widespread and commonplace. Irrespective of where they were working, and their access to sources of information, virtually all of these women knew something of the atrocities which were being perpetrated in the name of National Socialism.

Given that the majority of the German population knew something approximate about the Holocaust,⁷ it is not surprising that the female administrators were aware to some degree of the atrocities occurring at the hands of the Nazis. The documentation they handled contained indications of persecution varying from the mildly ambiguous to the undeniable: large numbers of death certificates with a suspiciously small range of causes of death; letters of consolation to the families of those who had ‘died’ as part of the ‘euthanasia’ programme; minutes of interrogations of Jews; and administration of deportations. Colleagues provided an informal source of information when rumours were repeated. Some women were even eye-witnesses to acts of persecution. Women working in RSHA offices saw prisoners being tortured, and on occasion, observed deportations. *SS-Helferinnen* were posted to concentration camps and beheld the treatment of Jewish prisoners first-hand.

⁷ Gellately, *Backing Hitler*, Longerich, >>*Davon haben wir nichts gewusst!*<<, Eric A. Johnson, *Nazi Terror: The Gestapo, Jews, and Ordinary Germans* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), and Eric A. Johnson and Karl-Heinz Reuband, *What We Knew: Terror, Mass Murder and Everyday Life in Nazi Germany* (London: John Murray, 2005).

Robert Gellately has postulated a more extreme view: not only had ordinary Germans known about the Holocaust but in fact the Nazis relied heavily on their support to function effectively.⁸ Thomas Kühne takes this a step further, arguing that by 1941 Germans comprised a genocidal community and expressed their belonging through committing or agreeing to the mass murder of non-German groups. While Gertrude Segel was “only” a spectator in the murder of a Jew by her partner Felix Landau, for example, Kühne contends that she “took part nevertheless”.⁹

The *Volksgemeinschaft* was conceived as “the collective body of ‘valuable Aryan’ Germans who would live and work in harmony together under the leadership of the Nazi Party”.¹⁰ While initially contributing to the *Volksgemeinschaft* in their role of “mothers of the nation”,¹¹ women, as personnel, were later able to play their part through their wartime occupations.¹² Determined to be involved, and with a “desire to accept National Socialist standards of conduct”,¹³ the women functioning as *Helperinnen* and secretaries may not have wished to compromise their own position within the *Volksgemeinschaft*, and consequently they performed the roles they were tasked with, without complaint, deliberately ignoring the knowledge of the Holocaust that they had gleaned.

Burdened with knowledge of the Holocaust and having witnessed events for themselves, thereby placing themselves in a position where they could be deemed by Kühne’s interpretation to have “taken part”, most of the women did nothing at

⁸ Robert Gellately, *The Gestapo and German Society: Enforcing Racial Policy 1933-1945* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1995), pp.130ff.

⁹ Thomas Kühne, *Belonging and Genocide. Hitler’s Community, 1918-1945* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010), pp.1, 137-138.

¹⁰ Jill Stephenson, “Inclusion: building the national community in propaganda and practice” in Jane Caplan, ed., *Nazi Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p.99.

¹¹ Lisa Pine, *Hitler’s ‘National Community’ Society and Culture in Nazi Germany* (London: Hodder Education, 2007), p.229.

¹² Gudrun Schwarz, “‘During Total War, We Girls Want to Be Where We Can Really Accomplish Something’ What Women Do in Wartime” in Omer Bartov, Atina Grossman, and Mary Nolan, eds., *Crimes of War: Guilt and Denial in the Twentieth Century* (New York: The New Press, 2002), pp.121-137.

¹³ Fritzsche, Peter, *Life and Death in the Third Reich* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), p.18.

all. From the evidence presented here, of the few who tried to take a stand, almost all were secretaries. Those women prepared to question their bosses were taking a small, but nonetheless brave, step. They had been warned that any deviation from strict adherence to the rules might result in punishment, potentially in a concentration camp. Therefore, these women were risking a great deal. Some, like Elisabeth Marks, even pushed the boundaries further by prying in files, while others – such as Erika Albrecht – deliberately underperformed in their work. Others lacking sufficient fortitude but still wanting to make a stand took measures to ensure that they were not well enough to perform their jobs, providing an apparently legitimate excuse to cease their contribution to the Nazi regime; this course of action was taken by Luise Hering, Waleska Bambowsky and Johanna Quandt. Crucially, none of the women who objected, or evaded, were punished for their actions. Several were warned, such as Johanna Quandt who was cautioned on multiple occasions, that they were treading a thin line, but the warning was the extent of their punishment. One secretary – Johanna Heym – was demoted, but it was her perceived friendliness to Jews, rather than her inquisitive nature, which was the cause of her demotion, and even then she was merely transferred to a less prestigious office. Thus, those who questioned their bosses, and deliberately sabotaged their own work, did not suffer serious repercussions as a result of their actions.

The majority of the women employed as administrators never objected to or obstructed the criminal acts of the regime. With the exception of Gretel Wachtel, none of the *Helferinnen* identified in this study questioned their bosses, attempted to sabotage their own work, or feigned illness in an effort to leave their position. The training that the *Helferinnen* had completed had either been successful in fostering devotion to the regime, or the women, particularly the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen*, were not sufficiently well-informed to consider the risk of taking a stand worthwhile. The example of Wachtel reveals that, even with limited information to hand, dissent was a possibility. Wachtel's punishment, interrogation by the *Gestapo* and internment in a camp, was far more severe than that which any dissenting secretary experienced: the actions she had taken were bolder and she was punished accordingly.

Years later, when interrogated or interviewed, many women used youth as a synonym for naivety, justifying why they did not take action against the regime. They claimed that their young age preordained a lack of interest in their work, their minds being full of other distractions, as Rosemarie von Godlewski asserted. In their post-war testimony, women such as Christa Lesser and Hildegard vom Hoff stated that their youth meant they were ignorant of the true contents of the papers they were typing, or that they were unable to understand them.

Yet, ironically, it was perhaps their youth that made them more susceptible to undertake this type of work. Younger women had been surrounded by and immersed in National Socialism for the majority of their lives. Beginning with their schooling, which included Nazi-designed textbooks, this extended to their free time, in the guise of the various levels of the *Bund Deutscher Mädel*, which, running between ages 10-21, encompassed the majority of their formative years. They were, as a consequence, more prone to National Socialist ideology. While membership of the BDM was compulsory, older women had had a more balanced upbringing and National Socialism only entered their milieu at a later age, when they might have already formed opinions. Their schooling, for example, was not dictated by Nazi standards, and they were not exposed to racial theories in the classroom. Therefore, it was to be expected that younger women would support the Nazi regime; the propaganda and indoctrination which surrounded them had long influenced their mindsets.

Erika Stone, a Jewish childhood friend of Traudl Junge, is convinced that there was not a young girl at the time who would have turned down the job offer Junge received from Hitler. Stone even goes so far as to say: "it could have happened to me".¹⁴ Although this is not a realistic proposal, her sentiment that no one would turn down a job offer to be Hitler's secretary is partially confirmed, given

¹⁴ Melissa Müller, "Confronting Guilt" in Melissa Müller, ed., *Until the Final Hour*, translated by Anthea Bell (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2003), p.241.

the number of women who wrote love letters to Hitler.¹⁵ Stone was demonstrating that even a Jewish youngster could be filled with patriotic fervour and a desire to serve her Fatherland. Similarly, Margaret Baacke, a *Mischlinge*, was disappointed to find out about her heritage, fearful that she would no longer be able to do her duty for her country. Although none of the women who administrated for the Nazis retrospectively admitted it, perhaps their love and admiration for Hitler was a motivating factor.¹⁶

Despite the propaganda, indoctrination, and the mesmerising effect of Hitler, not all young women accepted a role supporting National Socialism. For example, Sophie Scholl, who was a member of the White Rose resistance group, was just 22 years old when she distributed anti-war leaflets; she and other members of the White Rose were found guilty of treason and executed.¹⁷ Scholl has become an emblem for resistance within Germany, and her story has captivated audiences around the world.¹⁸ Her actions demonstrate that youth was not an adequate reason for acquiescing in Nazi rule. Irene Gut Opdyke was also 22 years old when she began assisting Jews. Initially, she smuggled food from her place of work into the nearby ghetto, in Tarnopol, Eastern Galicia, and she later smuggled Jews into nearby woods, and provided food for them there. Opdyke became employed as a housekeeper to Eduard Rügemer, a German major, and she hid nine Jews in the cellar of his house. Rügemer discovered the Jews, and Irene was forced

¹⁵ See, for example, Henrik Eberle, ed., *Briefe an Hitler. Ein Volk schreibt seinem Führer. Unbekannte Dokumente aus Moskauer Archiven* (Gladbach: Verlagsgruppe Lübbe, 2007) and Helmut Ulshöfer, ed., *Liebesbriefe an Adolf Hitler: Briefe in den Tod* (Frankfurt am Main: VAS, 1994) and Alexander C.T. Geppert, “‘Dear Adolf!’: Locating Love in Nazi Germany” in Luisa Passerini, Lilianna Ellena and Alexander C.T. Geppert, eds., *New Dangerous Liaisons. Discourses on Europe and Love in the Twentieth Century* (New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2010).

¹⁶ It should be noted that German men were equally fascinated with Hitler, demonstrated by the throng of men and women who lined streets to greet Hitler, wrote letters to him, and signed up to serve him, see for example, Christoph Kuehberger, “Sexualisierter Rausch in der Diktatur: Geschlecht und Masse im italienischen Faschismus und deutschen Nationalsozialismus”, *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 51, no.10 (2003).

¹⁷ For more information, see for example, Inge Scholl, Dorothee Solle, *The White Rose: Munich, 1942-1943*, translated by Arthur R. Schultz (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1983) and Frank McDonough, *Sophie Scholl* (Stroud: The History Press, 2010).

¹⁸ *Sophie Scholl – Die letzten Tage* [The Final Days], an Oscar nominated film, released in 2005, grossed more than \$10.8 million dollars worldwide, and won awards at the Berlin Film Festival, the European Film Awards and the German Film Awards.

to become his mistress to prevent him exposing them.¹⁹ Opdyke was named a Righteous Among the Nations by Yad Vashem, The Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority, after the war. She offers further evidence that young women did not automatically get swept along with the crowd, and that it is not acceptable to hide behind youth.

Youthful dissidence also arose in the form of the Edelweiss Pirates, groups of teenagers from across Nazi Germany who came together to express their displeasure with the regime. Their actions, defined by such historians as "between nonconformity and dissidence", ranged from creating an alternative to the Hitler Youth, to brawling with members of the Hitler Youth.²⁰ The *Gestapo* was determined to crush the Edelweiss Pirates, and in November 1944 publicly executed its leaders,²¹ yet the very existence of these groups demonstrates that even those as young as 14 were able to make a stand against the Nazi regime, if they believed it worth doing so. Clearly, age did not have to be a determining factor.

Fear of the repercussions may have prevented *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* from following suit, or it may be that the women were all enjoying themselves too much, at least in the earlier war years, during which many people prospered under the Nazi regime. Indeed, this was a deliberate ploy by the Nazis: communal pleasures were used to foster a sense of nationalism.²² The programme *Kraft durch Freude* epitomized the drive for communal leisure activities, providing holidays, for example, to ensure more devotion to the *Volksgemeinschaft*.²³ This extended beyond organised leisure activities. Numerous *Helferinnen* report that their war-

¹⁹ See Martin Gilbert, *The Righteous. The Unsung Heroes of the Holocaust* (London: Transworld Publishers, 2002), pp.38-39 and Irene Opdyke, *In My Hands: Memories of a Holocaust Rescuer* (New York: Knopf Books, 1999). A Broadway play based on her book was produced in 2009. For more information see: <http://irenasvow.com/>.

²⁰ Patricia Hebrerer, *Children During the Holocaust* (Lanham: AltaMira Press in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2011), pp.252-253.

²¹ Lisa Pine, *Education in Nazi Germany* (Oxford: Berg, 2010), pp.108-109.

²² Corey Ross, Pamela Swett, Fabrice d'Almeida, eds., *Pleasure and Power in Nazi Germany* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

²³ Shelley Baranowski, *Strength through Joy: Consumerism and Mass Tourism in the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

time experiences were the best of their lives; they made life-long friends, saw the world, and fell in love.

Love affairs among the staff working for the RSHA were undoubtedly widespread. Dagmar Herzog observes, that “in view of Nazism’s horrific crimes, sexuality might be seen as a frivolous or inappropriate subject for scholarly study of twentieth-century Germany”. Yet, as Herzog argues, a

“consideration of the history of sexuality and insistence on integrating the history of sexuality with more traditional topics of historiography can also challenge our assumptions about key social and political transformations and provide new insights into a broad array of crucial phenomena”.²⁴

Similarly, an examination of the relationships between the female administrators and their male colleagues provides more than just a morbid insight into the sexual proclivities of the men who murdered millions, and their secretaries. Rather, it is a valuable tool for analysing the inconsistencies between Nazi policies and practices towards women.

While toeing the party line was essential, the boundaries appear to have been flexible, particularly with regard to women. Those permitted to marry SS officers were highly vetted, with strict rules and regulations to ensure that only those who met the high criteria were granted permission; yet because of an impending birth, the rules were occasionally stretched to allow permission to those who did not meet the necessary requirements. It was preferable for Aryan Germans to produce legitimate children, even if the woman might not have been highly desirable as an SS wife. Arthur Liebehenschel and Anneliese Hüttemann were granted permission to marry because she was pregnant, even though the bride was considered unsuitable due to an earlier relationship with a Jew. Ironically, this ruling was itself turned on its head as yet another concession was granted to those deemed Aryan. Initially children were to be born solely in wedlock because of the importance of the traditional family unit, yet when high ranking Nazis, including

²⁴ Dagmar Herzog, *Sex After Fascism. Memory and Morality in Twentieth-century Germany* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005), p.1.

Heinrich Himmler and Oswald Pohl, began producing illegitimate offspring, with their secretaries, who they took as their *zweitfrauen*, it became a permitted practice, as it was considered vital to produce Aryan, German children, even at the cost of weakening the traditional nuclear family. These inconsistencies in Nazi attitudes towards women demonstrate that the regime was willing to adapt certain policies that impinged on traditional concepts of the family and marriage.

Relationships with male bosses and colleagues were widespread among the secretaries of the RSHA. What happened to these women as a result of their liaisons sheds light on Nazi attitudes to women. Many women who had relationships fell pregnant and subsequently gave up their jobs, without adverse repercussion, demonstrating that even though the work they had performed was considered vital, motherhood was paramount. Even at times when there was a dearth of volunteers to become *Helperinnen*, and more women were urgently needed, pregnant women were turned away; it was in Germany's long-term interests to ensure a safe and healthy pregnancy and birth, even at the expense of Germany's short-term interests. Women were valued more highly for their ability to reproduce than for their work productivity.

The appeal of Nazism for some women may have been its claim to "return women to the home and to the tasks of childbearing and child-rearing". But while this was a key component in Nazi propaganda and Nazi daily life, "the Third Reich saw numerous tendencies toward female emancipation in work, in family relations, and in sexuality".²⁵ Despite the claim that it would restore woman to her more traditional role, the Nazi party actually relied heavily on the contribution which single women could make to society, such as in the role of *Helperin*, even if these women then left the service when they fell pregnant.

While clearly not the major incentive, the employment of women could be partially perceived as a smokescreen for matchmaking. Large numbers of women

²⁵ Herzog, *Sex After Fascism*, p.13.

met their spouse and the father of their children at work. This was certainly the case for the *SS-Helferinnen*, deliberately placed in locations near or with SS men, in the hope that conjugality would occur. The number of relationships established between administrators and their male colleagues was indicative of a wider trend. Male and female colleagues working for the National Socialist cause in offices throughout the Third Reich became romantically involved with one another. Immediately after the war it was argued that these men – and women – were demons, evil monsters;²⁶ the only means of understanding their actions was to define the perpetrators as non-human entities. This slightly dated interpretation has been challenged, and the romantic liaisons of the perpetrators reveal their essential humanity, and underline more recent work on perpetrators that seeks to comprehend them in more human terms. It shows that they were not solely interested in their work and their pursuit of Nazi ideals. Rather, they were susceptible to falling in love, to sexual desires, and to the wish to procreate. Human characteristics emerged when they faced interrelated challenges; their devotion to their spouses can be seen in the number of letters written to Himmler, urging him to allow marriages, to provide advice on cheating partners, or advice on the best place to give birth to an illegitimate, albeit Aryan, child.

The emotions expressed by these men and women demonstrate that the perpetrators were not robots, and cannot simply be dismissed as monsters; they had feelings and were emotional beings. Previous research has examined women's capacity to be evil and perform evil acts, and some of these studies have attempted to determine if we "are all Nazis",²⁷ aiming to show that "perpetrators were 'insane' or 'abnormal', in short: not 'like us'".²⁸ However, the romantic relations between men and women working for the Nazis demonstrates that they were, in one way at least, 'like us'; they showed sentiments which human beings throughout

²⁶ See, for example, James Walter, *Becoming Evil: How Ordinary People Commit Genocide and Mass Killing* (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 2007), Richard Sonnenfeldt, *Witness to Nuremberg* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2006), or Eric Zillmer, *The Quest for the Nazi Personality* (New Jersey: Routledge, 1995).

²⁷ Hans Askenay, *Are We All Nazis?* (Secaucus, New Jersey, Lyle Stuart Inc, 1978).

²⁸ Olaf Jensen and Claus-Christian W. Szejnmann, eds., *Ordinary People as Mass Murderers* (Chippenham and Eastbourne, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p.1.

history have experienced. Consequently, it is possible to connect with the perpetrators, and to relate to them. Some theorists believe that “by setting ourselves apart from others, we do not learn the important message from their experience”.²⁹ By establishing common bonds of sentiment and emotion with these women, we can thereby learn from their behaviour.

Some historians and commentators, such as Lawrence Langer, have considered the use of a gendered approach to examine the Holocaust inappropriate due to the risk of trivialising the subject. By focusing on the difference of experience between male and female victims, for example, there is a danger of losing sight of the fact that all the victims suffered, regardless of their gender.³⁰ However, a closer examination of those women who administrated for the Nazis naturally sheds light on the role gender had to play within the Holocaust, and the title allocated to define the roles of these women explicitly indicated their subordination to men.

Even though the women who supported the army in communication roles were directly replacing men, they were not given the female equivalent version of the title applied to the men. Instead, they were known as “*Nachrichtenhelferinnen*” – female communications auxiliaries, or helpers. There was no male equivalent of this term: the men tasked with this job were known as either “*Nachrichtenmann*” – communication man – or “*Nachrichtenoffizier*” – communication officer. Similarly, the title “*SS-Helferinnen*” – female SS auxiliaries, or helpers – was created especially for the group of women who supported SS men. There were no “*SS-Helfern*”, which would be the male alternative. The titles bestowed upon these women indicate their subordination to the men they were working with. The emphasis is clear: these women were helpers, working *for*, not with the men.

²⁹ Philip G. Zimbardo, Ebbe B. Ebbesen, Christina Maslach, eds., *Influencing Attitudes and Changing Behaviour* (Massachusetts and California, Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1977), p.3.

³⁰ Lawrence L. Langer, “Gendered Suffering? Women in Holocaust Testimonies”, in Dalia Ofer and Leonore J. Weitzman, eds., *Women in the Holocaust* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), p.362.

This distinction between male and female titles was not relevant for the secretaries: their role had already been established prior to the war. However, all of the secretaries working for the RSHA were women, as were all the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* and the *SS-Helferinnen*. As men were called up to fight and take their role on the front line, women stepped in – or were called in – to fill the gaps and became the administrators. Thereby, all of the administrators had an additional common attribute - their gender – and by examining these women, we must necessarily look at the Holocaust through the lens of gender.

The gender of these women united them, and provided a commonality of experience. So too did their race, as categorized by the Nazis. All of these women were Aryan. This clearly defined their experiences under National Socialism. Gisela Bock has noted that,

“Racism and sexism were not of the same scale and importance for the Nazi rulers. In many areas the Nazis made concessions to Gentile women, sometimes revising their early pronouncements, but they were adamant in their views about race and especially about Jewish women and men”.³¹

As argued above, the contribution the *Helferinnen* and secretaries could make as women was considered more significant than the contribution they could make as administrators. This initially appears to jar with Bock’s argument that “racial hierarchy prevailed over gender hierarchy”,³² suggesting that their gender was, in fact, more significant than their race. Yet, the inconsistencies granted within marriage policies, and the encouragement of the women to become mothers even at the expense of vital administrative work, were the result of the Nazi determination to preserve the German race. Clearly, it was vital to produce as many children of suitable German stock as possible. Racial hierarchy reigned supreme.

³¹ Gisela Bock, “Ordinary Women in Nazi Germany. Perpetrators, Victims, Followers, and Bystanders” in Ofer and Weitzman, eds., *Women in the Holocaust*, p.95.

³² *Ibid.*, p.94.

The women identified in this thesis do not fall within the traditional definition of perpetrators: those who killed or caused harm directly. Assuming that they were all telling the truth, none of the administrators aimed a gun *and* pulled the trigger; none of them hit, beat, or even touched a Jew. With the exceptions of Friederike Wieking and Gertrude Slottke, who both held decision making roles, these women were not guilty of physically committing atrocities against Jews, or other victim groups. Yet Thomas Kühne would argue that their mere presence was enough to make these women complicit.³³ Melissa Müller stated that the fact Traudl Junge, one of Hitler's secretaries, took no part in the murders "does not excuse her, but it should be borne in mind if we want to understand what happened".³⁴ The role and behaviour of women draws attention to the fact that there is not a simple "black-and-white ideological pattern of those who see the situation as polarized between Nazi villains and anti-Fascist heroes".³⁵ Rather, these women fall into a grey area, to borrow Primo Levi's term, a "sphere of ambiguity and compromise".³⁶

Even with respect to this grey zone, there is still debate as to whether ordinary people bore any responsibility. Claudia Koonz argued that women were perpetrators within their role of caring housewife or mother, as they created a society which accepted and nurtured the men who committed atrocities and waged war.³⁷ It therefore follows that this classification would stretch to include the female administrators; they too, provided the necessary surroundings which allowed the men to commit their crimes, and Koonz would classify them, too, as perpetrators. However, to demonstrate that Koonz's statement is a sweeping generalisation, Gisela Bock and Christina Herkommer both emphasise the multiplicity and variety of roles of women under the Nazis.³⁸

³³ Kühne, *Belonging and Genocide*, pp.1, 137-138.

³⁴ Müller, "Confronting Guilt" in Müller, ed., *Until the Final Hour*, p.216.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved* (Vintage International, 1989), p.67. For a detailed exploration of this, see Jonathan Petropoulos and John K. Roth, *Gray Zones: Ambiguity and Compromise in the Holocaust and its Aftermath* (New York; Oxford: Berghahn, 2005).

³⁷ Koonz, *Mothers*, pp.418-419.

³⁸ Herkommer, "Women" in Jensen and Szejnmann, eds., *Ordinary People*, p.110.

Yet, perhaps Bock and Herkommer underestimate Koonz: there is some truth in her assertion. The men did need the support of women to enable them to commit criminal acts, by performing basic administrative tasks, by releasing them from their day job to enable them to fight, and by providing a comfort zone, into which the men could retreat. Perhaps this goes some way to explaining why so many men had romantic relationships with their female colleagues; they needed emotional and physical comfort and support to allow them to perform their daily tasks. Those men who were posted away from their wives or girlfriends turned to their female colleagues for illicit affairs in order to fill the gap in their lives; they required a physical substitution for the care their partner usually provided. Not simply because female comfort and support was crucial for them, and their colleagues were the closest suitable – that is, German – available, but also because their female colleagues could, to a certain extent, understand their shared experiences and circumstances.

Ultimately, however, this thesis strongly supports the conclusions of Bock and Herkommer: while some of the women examined in this thesis did create an environment which enabled men to perpetrate, it is evident that even within one type of role that women held in Nazi Germany – that of administration – there was a multiplicity of narratives. The women who administrated for the Nazis were, however, more complicit than simply fostering an environment which allowed the men to do wrong. In addition to willingly supporting the regime, they made an active contribution to it. The tasks the women performed, such as filing interrogation reports, keeping track of deportations and sending communications about the locations of army troops were all crucial for the wars the Nazis were fighting; the war against the Jews, and the war against the Allies.

Yet these tasks were not perceived by the majority of the women as immoral, even though those same women accept – at least retrospectively – that the regime itself was perpetrating crimes. As stenotypists, Erna Groth and her colleagues typed documents pertaining to the executions of Poles found guilty of intimate relations with German women. They discussed the punishment,

acknowledging its severity. Yet Groth continued to work in the department, seemingly unperturbed by the role she was playing in the process. Their personal convictions allowed these women to perform their tasks; either they justified their work to themselves by not believing they were committing a crime, or they did not see a need to justify their actions at all.

The International Military Tribunal (IMT) at Nuremberg declared that any “persons employed by the Gestapo for purely clerical, stenographic, janitorial or similar unofficial routine tasks” would not be prosecuted.³⁹ By determining not to try any of the female administrators, the IMT as the central prosecuting agency was effectively absolving them of any guilt, and thus concurring with the women’s perception of themselves: that they had not committed any crime. The IMT broadly accepted the gendered interpretation of women’s activities in the Third Reich, assuming, as the Nazis initially intended, that women’s role was within the domestic sphere. Yet other women who played a more active role, notably concentration camp guards, were prosecuted, thereby demonstrating that women did not entirely remain within the realm of “Kinder, Küche, Kirche” [Children, Kitchen, Church]. It is more likely that the IMT’s decision was made out of expediency: it would have been too difficult to prosecute all of the women who had been in administrative roles. By choosing to ignore these women, the IMT would be able to concentrate on those who had played a more significant role, of which there was a large number.

However, this perspective was not universally adhered to. Individual women who had held administrative roles were approached by the various Allies at the end of the war, interrogated and interned. In their testimony, given to West German prosecutors pursuing the chief members of staff at the RSHA, many former secretaries state that after the war they were imprisoned as a consequence of their employment. There was no differentiation between the tasks they performed; it

³⁹ International Military Tribunal, *Trial of the Major War Criminals Before the International Military Tribunal: Nuremberg, 14 November 1945 – 1 October 1946, Volume XVII* (Nuremberg, 1948).

was enough that they had been working at the RSHA. Their specific activities were irrelevant. Similarly, some *SS-Helferinnen* and *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* were also interned after the war for their wartime employment, irrespective of their exact job and the agency for which they had been working. What these women were imprisoned for was not explicitly referred to in their testimony or diaries. Rather than being considered guilty themselves, usually they had valuable insights into agencies or individuals of interest to the Allies, such as Traudl Junge, interviewed in the hope that she could shed light on Hitler's fate, or Barbara Hellmuth, who it was hoped could help locate her former boss, Heinrich Müller.

The female administrators might be considered responsible for standing by and doing nothing, knowing – to varying degrees – that people were being murdered. Yet if this was a crime, then a vast number of the population of Germany – the majority – would need to be prosecuted, clearly a futile proposition. A viable alternative was to re-educate the nation, a primary goal of denazification. For some of the female administrators it was deemed necessary to call them before denazification tribunals to purge them of their Nazi sympathies.

In 1951, the West German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer stated that, “No one may reproach the career soldiers on account of their earlier activities”;⁴⁰ they had just been following their orders. Accordingly, the female administrators would be viewed from the same perspective: they too had been following orders; the implication is that they should not be reproached for their involvement. At most, however, Adenauer's statement should only apply to the *Nachrichtenhelferinnen des Heeres* as they were supporting the Wehrmacht. The secretaries and the *SS-Helferinnen* did not fit within the parameters of this dispensation as their agencies of work, the RSHA and the SS, were deemed to be criminal organizations by the IMT, whereas the Wehrmacht was judged not to be inherently criminal. Yet, several eminent historians have since argued that the Wehrmacht was, in fact, a criminal

⁴⁰ Norbert Frei, *Adenauer's Germany and the Nazi Past*, translated by Joel Golb (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), p.48.

organization,⁴¹ and even the IMT noted that it had committed crimes during the war.

These women did not just know about the Holocaust: they chose to facilitate it. While their dedicated support for the Nazi cause can be explained by the propaganda and indoctrination encompassing all aspects of a woman's life, this is not enough to explain the willingness of so many women to support the Nazi cause. Perhaps "we look too hard for explanations. The capacity for evil is a sliding scale, and we are all on it somewhere";⁴² and it is not possible to predict where someone falls on the scale or how they might act under extreme circumstances.

In a world where the Jewish victims of the Nazis faced "choiceless choices",⁴³ the women administrating for the Nazis did have a choice. Their Aryan status gave them scope to refuse orders, to an extent. Even those women who questioned their bosses, which could have been interpreted as an act of defiance, went unpunished. As they had a choice, they can, and should, be considered responsible for their actions. However, it is in human nature to determine moral standards from the society within which one lives, so can these women be blamed for choosing a path that many of their peers chose?

These were predominantly "ordinary women" who got swept along with the Nazi regime. Most of them took advantage of the situation and the opportunities that came their way. While the opportunities varied, ranging from paid employment, to foreign travel, from wearing a uniform to serving their country, it is clear that the majority of the women derived personal benefit from the regime.

⁴¹ See, for example, Omer Bartov, "Soldiers, Nazis and War in the Third Reich", in Christian Leitz, *The Third Reich The Essential Readings* (London: Blackwell, 1999), pp.129-150, Richard Evans, *In Hitler's Shadow West German Historians and the Attempt to Escape the Nazi Past* (New York: Pantheon, 1989), pp.58-60 and Wolfram Wette, *The Wehrmacht: History, Myth, Reality*, translated by Deborah Lucas Schneider (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England: Harvard University Press, 2006), notably chapter 5, *The Legend of the Wehrmacht's "Clean Hands"*.

⁴² Dr Hugo Milne, quoted in Jean Ritchie, *Myra Hindley* (London, Angus and Robertson Publishers, 1988), p.290.

⁴³ Lawrence Langer, *Versions of Survival. The Holocaust and the Human Spirit* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1982).

Many of the administrators prospered under the Nazis, making life-long friends, meeting the love of their lives, and seeing the world, albeit a war-torn Europe. Very few women identify any regrets, rather they fondly recall the time they spent serving their country, even if they had not been ideologically motivated to do so.

Considered the weaker sex, as women they were able to enjoy themselves more than the men; they had fewer responsibilities, because they were perceived as less significant to the war effort. Yet each of these women had a role to play in the war, and without their contribution and dedication events might have turned out differently. Each of the female administrators may have been, in one *Nachrichtenhelferin's* view, "small"; she felt that she and her colleagues "could not have done anything" to challenge those in positions of authority.⁴⁴ Indeed, they were drops in the ocean, but it is the drops themselves which make up the ocean. The Nazis needed these women as administrators and as supporters of the regime. The vast majority of the women knew about the Holocaust, contributed towards its outcome, and took no action to prevent it occurring.

⁴⁴ "klein...wir haben nicht machen können", Hilde Kerer, author interview, April 2012.

Glossary of German terms and organisations

Abwehrbeauftragter	Representative in charge of (military) defence
Anfangs-Stenotypist	Trainee typist
Aufseherinnen	Female concentration camp guards
Auslandsorganisation	NSDAP organisation for party members living outside of the Third Reich
Ausrottung	Annihilation
Blitzmädchen	Lightening girl; nickname given to Nachrichtenhelferinnen
Bund Deutscher Frauenvereine (BDF)	League of German Women's Organisations
Bund Deutscher Mädel (BDM)	League of German Girls
Deutsch-Kolonialer Frauenbund	German Colonial Women's league
Deutschbluetigen	Full-blooded Germans
Deutsche Arbeitsfront (DAF)	German Labour Front
Deutsche Jugend (DJ)	German Youth movement
Deutsches Afrika Korps	German Africa Corps (later known as the Panzer Armee Afrika)
Deutschtum	Germanness
Dienstverweigerung	Denial of service
Einberufung	Call up
Fernschreiberin	Teleprinter operator
Fernsprecherin	Telephone operator
Flakhelferin	Female anti-aircraft auxiliary
Flintenweiber	Gun woman
Frauendienst	Women's service
Führeranwärterin	(Female) candidate for leader

Führerin	Female leader
Führernotiz	Note from the Führer
Führerpaket	Gift sent to families of those supporting the war effort
Gauleiter	Regional leader
Gefälligkeitspässen	Passports of convenience
Geheimraum	Secret room
Geheimnisträgerin	Keeper of secrets
Gemeinnützige Stiftung für Anstaltspflege	Literally: 'Charitable Foundation for Institutional Care'; a euphemistic name for T4 programme
Generalgouvernement	The German name for General Government, an area of occupied Poland during the Second World War.
Gerichts-SS-Führer	SS Court Leader
Gestapo	Secret State Police
Goldenen Ehrenzeichen	(Austrian) Decoration of Honour in Gold
Greuelpropaganda	Atrocity propaganda
Großdeutsches Reich	Greater German Reich
Heeresschule	Army school
Heimkehrer	Home comer, term given to returning prisoners of war; this term had also been applied to Volksdeutsche brought back into the Third Reich
Heimkehrergesetz	Home coming law
Heimleiterin	Matron
Helferin/nen	Female auxiliaries (singular/plural)
Höheren SS- und Polizeiführers	High SS and Police leader
Judenreferat	Department for Jewish Affairs,

	IVB4 of RSHA
Jugendorganisation des Jungdeutschen Ordens	Youth Organisation of the Young German Order
Jungmädel (JM)	Young Girls
Kennbuch	ID book
Klappenschränken	Telephone switchboards
Kommandeur der Ordnungspolizei	Commander of the Order Police
Kraft durch Freude	'Strength through Joy'; an organisation promoting communal leisure activities
Kriegshilfsdienst	War Auxiliary Service
Landdienst	Land service
Lastenausgleichsgesetz	System of financial compensation for losses suffered in the Second World War
Lebensborn	Literally: Spring of Life; an organisation providing assistance for unmarried mothers
Liquidierungen	Liquidation
Mädchen für alles	Girl for all (a "gofer")
Mischlinge	Literally: cross-breed; used by the Nazis to denote those with one or two Jewish grandparents
Mitläufer	Literally: fellow-traveller
Nachrichtendienst	Communications service
Nachrichtenhelferinnen-Ausbildungsabteilungen	Nachrichtenhelferinnen training divisions
Nachrichtenhelferinnen des Heeres	Female communication auxiliaries of the army
Nachrichtenmann	Male communications worker
Nachrichtenoﬃzierung	Communications officer

Nachrichtentruppe	Communications Troops
Nationalsozialistische Volkswohlfahrt (NSV)	Nazi People's Welfare Organisation
Nördischen Völker	Northern peoples/race
NS-Frauenschaft	National Socialist Women's League
Oberführerin	Upper (female) leader
Oberhelferinnen	Female head auxiliaries
Oberkommando des Heeres	High Command of the Army
Organisation Todt	Construction arm of the Wehrmacht
Osteinsatz	Service in the East
Pflichtjahr	Civil year of duty for women
Rasse- und Siedlungshauptamt (RuSHA)	Race and Settlement Main Office
Rassenkunde	Racial Studies
Reichsarbeitsdienst (RAD)	Reich Labour Service
Reichsausschuß zur Erfassung von erb- anlagenbedingte Leiden	Literally: 'Reich Committee for the detection of hereditary and related ailments'; euphemistic name for the T4 programme
Reichsführer-SS	SS Reich leader; title given to Heinrich Himmler
Reichsgebiet	Reich territory
Reichsjugendführung	Reich Youth Leadership
Reichskommissariat	Reich commissariat
Reichsmütterdienst	Reich mothers' service
Reichspost	Reich postal service
Reichsreferentin	Female speaker/lecturer
Reichsschule-SS	SS Reich school
Reichssicherheitshauptamt (RSHA)	Reich Security Main Office
Schreibtischtäter	Desk-bound perpetrators

Schutzhaft	Protective custody
Schutzhaft von Juden	Protective custody of Jews
Sicherheitsdienst (SD)	Security Service: Intelligence Agency of the SS
Sicherheitspolizei (SiPo)	Security Police
Silberspange	Silver buckle; awarded to SS-Helferinnen
Sonderbehandlung	Literally: special treatment; euphemism for murder in concentration camps
Sonderbehandlungsanordnungen	Literally: special treatment arrangements
Sonderkommando	Special Action Unit
Spätheimkehrer	Late home comer
SS-Chef des Fernmeldewesens	Chief of Communications
SS-Helferinnen	SS female auxiliaries
SS-Helferinnenkorps	SS female auxiliary corps
SS-Oberabschnitt	SS senior district
SS-Reichsarzt	SS physicians
SS-Reichsschule für Leibeserziehung	SS empire school of Physical Education
SS-Sippengemeinschaft	SS clan community
Stabshelferinnen	Staff auxiliaries
Staatspolizeileitstelle (Stapoleit/Stapoleitstelle)	State Police Control Centre
Stillen Hilfe für Kriegsgefangene und Internierte	Literally: Silent Assistance for Prisoners of War and Interned Persons; a covert aid organisation
Täterforschung	Perpetrator research
Tiergartenstrasse 4 (T4)	Name of the 'Euthanasia' programme
Traditionstreffen der Nachrichtenhelferinnen des Heeres	Traditional meeting of the Army Nachrichtenhelferinnen

Trostbriefe	Letters of consolation
Umwandererzentralstelle	Central Emigration Office
Vernichtung	Extermination
Volksdeutsche	Ethnic Germans
Volksgemeinschaft	People's community
Vorläufige Einsatzordnung für SS-Helferinnen	Initial operational orders for SS auxiliaries
Waffen-SS	Armed SS
Wehrmacht	German armed forces
Wehrmachtangestellte	Employee of the army
Wehrwirtschaftsführer	Leader of the (Reich) Association of Industry
Weibliches Nachrichtenkorps	Female Communications Corps
Westeinsatz	Service in the West
Wirtschaftsverwaltungshauptamt (WVHA)	Economy Administration Main Office of the SS
Zentrale Stelle der Landesjustizverwaltungen zur Aufklärung nationalsozialistischer Verbrechen	Central Office of the Judicial Authorities for the Investigation of National Socialist Crimes
Zweitfrau	Second (and illegitimate) wife

SS Ranks

<u>SS Rank</u>	<u>British Equivalent</u>
SS-Schütze	Private
SS-Oberschütze	-
SS-Sturmmann	Lance Corporal
SS-Rottenführer	Corporal
SS-Unterscharführer	Sergeant
SS-Scharführer	Staff Sergeant
SS-Oberscharführer	Warrant Officer II
SS-Hauptscharführer	-
SS-Sturmscharführer	Warrant Officer I
SS-Untersturmführer	2 nd Lieutenant
SS-Obersturmführer	Lieutenant
SS-Hauptsturmführer	Captain
SS-Sturmführer	Major
SS-Obersturmbannführer	Lieutenant Colonel
SS-Standartenführer	Colonel
SS-Oberführer	-
SS-Brigadeführer	Brigadier
SS-Gruppenführer	Major General
SS-Obergruppenführer	Lieutenant General
SS-Oberstgruppenführer	General
Reichsführer-SS	-
Führer	-

Source: Gordon Williamson, *The Waffen-SS* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2003), p.5

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Acknowledgments

Since I was inspired by Professor David Cesarani to begin a PhD, he has been a beacon of support as my supervisor, always keen to hear my latest archival findings, and offering valuable insights. I am extremely grateful, and could not have asked for a better supervisor. Thank you. Thanks must also go to Professor Dan Stone and Dr Zoë Waxman, who provided assistance along the way, and to Marie-Christine Ockenden, the finest post-graduate administrator the history department at RHUL could ask for. I would also like to thank the many academics and my peers, who have provided support and suggestions.

I have visited many archives and libraries in the course of my research. I would like to thank all the archivists and librarians who have assisted me, both in the UK, including the British Library, the Wiener Library, Senate House Library, and the Institute for Historical Research, and abroad, notably the Bundesarchiv in both Berlin and Ludwigsburg, the Landesarchiv in Berlin, the Staatsbibliothek, Berlin, and the Landesarchiv in Hannover. Particular thanks must go to the German Historical Institute, London (GHIL), whose staff are always so welcoming and friendly, and to Claudia Steur at the Topography of Terrors Documentation Centre, Berlin, for providing me with more information than I could have hoped for.

This PhD would not have been possible without the many organisations, institutions and individuals who provided me with financial support. Many thanks to all these: Royal Holloway for awarding me a College Research Scholarship; Bnei Brith Foundation for a two year scholarship; the Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst (German Academic Exchange Service) for providing me with a two month scholarship; GHIL for a one month scholarship; the German History Society for a research grant; Friendly Hand for funding several bursaries allowing me to research abroad and attend conferences; and the Michael & Morven Heller Charitable Foundation, Alan Brill, and the Lewin Lowenstein Trust.

I am fortunate to have lots of family and friends, who have been a valuable support network, provided me with great assistance and encouragement, and who have endured my absences as I have devoted increasing amounts of time to the PhD. I would like to thank them all for their understanding and support.

Finally, this thesis is dedicated to my husband Dan. It is no exaggeration to say that the PhD would not have been possible without him. From providing encouragement to putting up with my trips to archives abroad, to proof-reading every single word three times (at least!), Dan has been there for me every single step of the way. I owe him more than words can express, and I will be forever grateful.