

OPERATION REINHARD (EINSATZ REINHARD)

Background

Operation Reinhard (Einsatz Reinhard) became the code name for the German plan to murder the approximately two million Jews residing in the so-called Generalgouvernement (Government General). The Generalgouvernement was the part of German-occupied Poland not directly annexed to Germany, attached to German East Prussia, or incorporated into the German-occupied Soviet Union.

Though initiated in the autumn of 1941, the operation was later named after SS General Reinhard Heydrich, chief of the Reich Security Main Office (RSHA), who died in June 1942 from injuries sustained during an assassination attempt by Czech partisans. The RSHA was the agency responsible for coordinating the deportation of European Jews to killing centers in German-occupied Poland. In January 1939, December 1940, and July 1941, Adolf Hitler and Hermann Goering had tasked Heydrich personally with

drafting plans for a solution of the "Jewish question."

Administration of the Operation

SS General Odilo Globocnik, SS and police leader in the Lublin District of the Generalgouvernement, directed Operation Reinhard between autumn 1941 and late summer 1943. He established two departments on his staff for this purpose. The first was a deportation coordination team under SS Major Hermann Hoefle, who was responsible for arranging personnel and transport for the planned deportations. Hoefle also coordinated deportation operations, which were usually placed under the command of the regional SS and police commander, with regional SS and police and civilian occupation authorities.

The second department was the Inspectorate of SS Special Detachments under Criminal Police captain Christian Wirth, who was responsible for the construction and management of the three Operation Reinhard killing centers (Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka II). The Operation Reinhard killing centers were managed by small detachments of German SS and Police and guarded by detachments of police auxiliaries trained at the Trawniki training camp.

Goals of Operation Reinhard

As Globocnik listed them in January 1944, the aims of Operation Reinhard were:

- to “resettle” (i.e., to kill) the Polish Jews
- to exploit the skilled or manual labor of some Polish Jews before killing them
- to secure the personal property of the Jews (clothing, currency, jewelry, and other possessions)
- to identify and secure alleged hidden and immovable assets such as factories, apartments, and land.

Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka II

Operation Reinhard: Maps Construction of Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka II began in autumn 1941. Wirth, who had played a significant role in the murder of institutionalized persons with disabilities in Germany between 1939 and 1941, applied his experience of killing with carbon monoxide exhaust fumes to the construction of the Operation Reinhard killing centers. In all three camps, Trawniki-trained guards, supervised by Operation Reinhard staff, murdered their victims by using carbon monoxide gas generated by stationary engines and pumped into gas chambers. After a few test gassings using Polish prisoners and Soviet prisoners of war, killing operations at Belzec began in March 1942. They continued until December 1942. Sobibor began operating in May 1942 and remained functional until October 1943. Treblinka II opened in July 1942 and was closed in August 1943.

German staff and their auxiliaries (most of them trained at the Trawniki training camp) murdered at least 434,508 Jews and an undetermined number of Poles, Roma (Gypsies), and Soviet prisoners of war in Belzec; at least 170,000 Jews and an undetermined number of Poles, Roma, and Soviet prisoners of war in Sobibor; and approximately 925,000 Jews and an unknown number of Poles, Roma, and Soviet prisoners of war in Treblinka II.

Property belonging to the victims of the Operation Reinhard camps was stored in depots in Lublin city, at the Lublin-Majdanek concentration camp, and at the forced-labor camps Trawniki and Poniatowa.

Deportations to Operation Reinhard Killing Centers

The overwhelming majority of victims in the Operation Reinhard killing centers were Jews deported from ghettos in Poland. Once the killing centers were operational, German SS and police forces liquidated the ghettos and deported Jews by rail to those killing centers.

The victims of **Belzec** were mainly Jews from the ghettos of southern Poland, and included German, Austrian, and Czech Jews held in the Piaski and Izbica transit ghettos in Lublin District.

Jews deported to **Sobibor** came mainly from the Lublin area and other ghettos of the eastern Generalgouvernement; this killing center also received transports from France and the Netherlands.

Deportations to **Treblinka** originated mainly from central Poland, primarily from the Warsaw ghetto, but also from the Districts Radom and Krakow in the Generalgouvernement, from District Bialystok, as well as from Bulgarian-occupied Thrace and Macedonia.

Other Operation Reinhard Camps

Also part of Operation Reinhard were several forced-labor camps for Jews in District Lublin, including Poniatowa, the Trawniki forced-labor camp, Budzyn, Krasnik, and the Lublin/Majdanek camp before its formal conversion into a concentration camp in February 1943. For a time, Majdanek also served as a killing site for Jews whom the SS could no longer kill at Belzec in the late autumn of 1942.

Conclusion of Operation Reinhard

In November 1943, after the Sobibor uprising, SS and police units shot the Jewish labor forces still incarcerated at Trawniki, Poniatowa, and Majdanek, 42,000 in all, within the framework of Operation "Harvest Festival." With the completion of "Harvest Festival," Operation Reinhard came to a conclusion, with Globocnik submitting a final report to Himmler in January 1944.

In all, the SS and police killed approximately 1.7 million Jews as part of Operation Reinhard. The victims of the Operation Reinhard camps also included an unknown number of Poles, Roma (Gypsies), and Soviet prisoners of war.