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Central Office for Jewish Emigration in Vienna

Wilhelm Hoettl – Testimony Given for the Trial of Adolf Eichmann



Wilhelm Hoettl

NSDAP (National Socialist German Workers' Party), I would refer to the content of the de-Nazification proceedings opened for me by the Salzburg authorities.

In any case, I can state definitely that until spring 1938 there was no connection with Adolf Eichmann, and at that time I also knew nothing of him. In the course of my subsequent activities in the Foreign Secret Service, I met Adolf Eichmann, as far as I remember, in March or at the beginning of April 1938. In order to obtain an exit permit to Hungary for a Jewish colleague of mine, Dr. Kauders, a lawyer who, I believe, had his office in Mistelbach, I was directed by the Vienna Secret Police (*Geheime Staatspolizei*: hereinafter - Gestapo) to Eichmann, who was said to be able to issue such exit permits expeditiously.

Subsequently, I had frequent dealings with Eichmann in similar cases, and on each occasion he granted my requests. My academic pursuits, which had been made possible by a grant from the German Research Association, were also designed to carry out purely historical research on South-Eastern Europe, and in this context I made several trips to Hungary and Romania, in the first half of 1938, particularly to the areas of German Folkdom (*Volkstum*) there (Banat, Transylvania).

In the course of this work, I received a great deal of support from Professor Dr. Heinrich von Srbik, who held the Chair in Modern History at the University of Vienna. However, this academic

My name is Dr. Wilhelm Hoettl, I am forty-six years old, Roman Catholic, married, administrator of the Bad Aussee Private Secondary School (Privatmittelschule). I was born on 19 March 1915 in Vienna, Esterhazygasse 1, Vienna 6, the son of Johann and Maria Hoettl, nee Renner. My father was an employee in the private sector, and my mother was a housewife.

In Vienna I attended four classes at primary school, eight at secondary school Reinprechtsdorferstrasse 24, Vienna 6, Natural Sciences Trend) and obtained my Certificate of Maturity in the summer of 1933. I then studied History, German and Geography at the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Vienna, graduating in the autumn of 1937 with a doctorate in philosophy. I then taught German, mathematics and correspondence at the Vienna Technical School until, in the spring of 1938, I received a grant from the German Research Association which was to permit me enough time to qualify as a lecturer at the University of Vienna.

My academic pursuits were interrupted in the spring of 1938 when the Historical Institute at the University of Vienna was looking for experts on South-Eastern Europe. In reference to my activities at that time on behalf of the



Austria

- The Anschluss & Austria's Jews
- Hoettl & the Central Office for Jewish emigration
- Vienna Gallery

Belgium

- The Belgian Jews
- Breendonck

Bulgaria

- The Bulgarian Jews

Denmark

- Jews in Denmark
- Werner Best
- Danish Resistance

France

- The French Jews
- Klaus Barbie
- Kurt Lischka

Germany

- Berlin
- Dortmund
- Nuremberg
- Munich

Greece

- The Greek Jews

Hungary

- Hungarian Jews
- The Kastner Report
- Joel Brand "Blood for Goods"

Italy

- The Italian Jews

Luxembourg

- The Jews of Luxembourg

The Netherlands

- Apeldoornse Bos
- Anne Frank
- Dutch Deportations
- Westerbork
- Vught Transit Camp
- Image Gallery

Norway

- Norwegian Jews

Romania

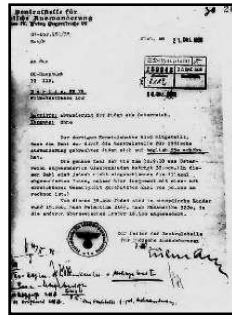
- Romanian Jews
- Romania Gallery

Slovakia

- The Slovak Jews
- The Holocaust in

activity became of minor, merely supplementary, importance, as compared with my new task: research of the states of South- Eastern Europe for the Secret Service.

The grant I have referred to had nothing to do with political matters. The German Research Association was not a political institution. What actually happened was that, because of my prior knowledge of the area, I was approached by the Bureau of the District Office of the Security Service in Vienna 4, *Theresianumstrasse*, with an offer to work with them. I then became an employee on contract and gave up my university career, or rather as of then worked mainly for this office as my chief occupation.



Letter from Eichmann
outlining the deportation of
Austrian Jews

Eichmann also worked in the Fourth District, in a similar office, situated in *Prinz Eugen Strasse*. It was in this building that Eichmann at that time set up the Central Office for Jewish Emigration, with which I intervened on various occasions over the following year, including contacts with Eichmann himself. I was basically interested in enabling Jews with Austrian nationality, with whom I had become acquainted both officially and privately, to leave the country expeditiously.

On one of these occasions - I should think it was in the autumn of 1938 - Eichmann outlined to me his plan which he had implemented by setting up the Central Office. He explained to me that, because of the red tape of the various authorities, and particularly their lack of co-ordination, Jews who were prepared to emigrate found it extremely difficult to leave the country.

For example, when the Revenue Office had issued the requisite certificate of lack of impediment, the exit visa from the passport police would, in the meanwhile, have expired, or it was no longer possible to obtain passage by sea.

It was because of such experiences that he (Eichmann) had for the first time set up in Vienna such a Central Office for Jewish Emigration, at which all authorities and offices which had anything at all to do with emigration, but also travel agencies, shipping companies and so on, had to have a representative.

He claimed that in this fashion he had managed to do away entirely with all red tape in connection with the emigration of the Austrian Jews and to speed up such emigration immensely. This field of Eichmann's activity extended certainly beyond Vienna, probably covering the whole of Austria, particularly since, as far as I am aware, there were no such Central Offices in other regional capitals.

Eichmann presented himself to me as an Austrian - from Linz; but he spoke with a marked north German accent, in a very cheeky style. At the time, as far as I remember, Eichmann was an *SS Untersturmführer* or *Obersturmführer* (second lieutenant or lieutenant), and wore the appropriate uniform with the relevant insignia. The office, which was housed in a large mansion, probably had a staff of some thirty or forty, including numerous female clerks and some civilians who, in my opinion, were representatives of travel agencies, shipping companies and so on.

The only name I remember of the staff or others who worked there is that of Guenther, with whom I intervened later at a similar office for Jewish emigrants in Prague, and also in Berlin. However, judging from his manner of speech, he was not from Vienna, but rather from Saxony or Thuringia. At this Central Office for Jewish Emigrants in Vienna, I met the owner of a Hamburg travel agency by the name of Schlie. During my talks with Eichmann, I gained the impression that he considered it to be his main task to make Austria *Judenfrei*, but obviously without any idea of using actual force.



Jews seeking emigration visas line
up in front of the Polish consulate in
Vienna, Austria, March 22, 1938.

- Slovakia Gallery
- The Hlinka Guard
- Rejowiec Ghetto

Soviet Union

- Occupation of the Soviet Union
- Operation Barbarossa
- Alfred Rosenberg
- Erich Koch
- Maly Trostenets
- Mogilev
- Image Gallery

Sudetenland

- Bohemia & Moravia
- Killing of Heydrich
- Lidice Massacre
- Op. ANTHROPOID Gallery



Der Stürmer, special edition Madagascar plan, 1938

At that time in Vienna nobody, and particularly also not Eichmann, had thought of any physical extermination of Jews, or even considered such a thing. At that time, as far as I remember, there was as yet no mention of deportations either.

As far as Eichmann as a person is concerned, I can state the following in answer to questions from the Court:

I can only base myself on what he told me, according to which he was from Linz (but apparently, as I gathered later, he himself did admit that he was from Solingen in Germany).

In any case, never having completed his education properly, he worked in the private sector (his brother was a lawyer in Linz), I think as a representative of an oil firm. Somehow, he must have been active in politics in Austria in 1932 or 1933, because he told me that in 1933 he fled Austria, going to Germany to the Legion (the Austrian Legion), and was then transferred by it to Berlin, where he was attached to the Head Office of the Security Service.

In order to obtain promotion by way of specialization, he studied Jewish subjects, and when German service units went to Austria, following the entry of German troops on the *Anschluss* in 1938, he accompanied them to Vienna and set up the office already referred to in *Prinz Eugen Strasse*.

He also told me that he had made an official trip to Palestine in 1937, and that he could speak some Yiddish and Hebrew. Whether Eichmann is of Jewish descent, I do not actually know. I can confirm that already in his earlier years that was the impression he gave, and because of that he was teased by his colleagues, which always made him angry; but I never discussed this matter with him.

The circumstances I have described, which applied to Eichmann as much as to me, prevailed until November 1938, at which point, as is common knowledge, considerably severer measures were taken because of the attack on the German Embassy Counsellor in Paris. Up till then, my relationship had basically been a personal one only, not one between offices; it is true that his department and mine were subordinate to the same authority, i.e., the Head Office of the Security Service in Berlin, and also in some measure to the District Office of the Security Service in Vienna.

But the development of these authorities was still in a state of flux. Therefore, during this first period in particular, there can be no question of collaboration between Eichmann and myself. The information I was providing had nothing at all to do with Jewish questions. In answer to the questions, I should like to add that in that first period of activities I heard nothing at all about Eichmann using coercive methods or causing such methods to be used, in order to compel Jewish emigration. If you had to go on business to that office building, you saw queues of Jews all eager to emigrate.



HQ of the Reich Security Service in Berlin



RSA Head Reinhard Heydrich

I myself remember having such dealings with Eichmann in Vienna until the end of 1938, or the beginning of 1939 at the latest. I would assume that he remained in Vienna when the rest of Bohemia was occupied, i.e., March 1939, whereupon he was transferred to Prague, where he set up the same type of Central Office for Jewish Emigration. I am not sure who was his successor in Vienna, and whether this was Guenther, whom I referred to above.

As far as I myself was concerned, at the beginning of 1939 my activities increasingly tended towards Berlin, where at that time the Foreign Secret Service was being reorganized on a large scale. That was also when the Head Office for Reich Security (RSHA) was set up, including the previous Head Office of the Security Service, the Secret State Police Office and the Criminal Police Office.

This was probably when Eichmann joined Department IV (Gestapo) as a Specialist Officer, so that this Central Office for Jewish Emigration - in the meanwhile, apart from the Prague office, one had also been set up in Berlin - was subordinate to the Head Office for Reich Security, and, as I assume, more particularly to Department IV (Gestapo).

The chief of Department IV was SS General Heinrich Müller; the head of Department VI (Foreign Secret Service) was SS General Jost. Because of the different duties of the two Departments, there was obviously no direct official collaboration between their personnel. After my general comments on Eichmann's activities in Vienna,

I shall now add, in reply to the specific questions asked by the representative of the Accused Eichmann in the criminal proceedings, i.e., Nos. 1 to 45, the following:

In accordance with my rank, I was taken on as *SS Untersturmführer* on a full-time basis, and then, at the end of 1939, I was promoted to *SS Obersturmführer*, in 1940 or 1941 to *SS Hauptsturmführer*, and in November 1943 to *SS Sturmbannführer*.

At the end of the war in 1945, I was also demobilized with the rank of *Sturmbannführer* in the *Waffen-SS* (the Armed SS). The reason was that, while I was given the first ranks within the SS (Security Service), I received the last rank as part of the *Waffen-SS*, because in the meanwhile - and I shall return to this later - legal proceedings had been taken against me in the SS and Police Court, as a result of which I was transferred to the *Waffen-SS*. The rank of a *Sturmbannführer* in the SS, including the *Waffen-SS*, corresponds to that of a major in the army.

As to whether I worked in an official capacity in the Head Office for Reich Security, my answer is as follows:

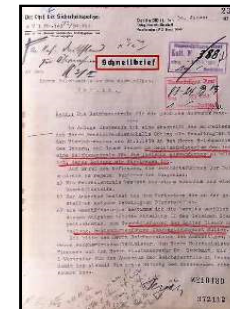


December 1939 Heydrich informed police representatives of a special department for the central administration of "evacuation" operations. Adolf Eichmann appointed director

While my initial activities, described this morning, did not belong directly to this area (the Security Service District Office was merely subordinate to the Head Office for Reich Security), as of the autumn of 1939 I was transferred to the Head Office for Reich Security in Berlin, to Department VI (Foreign Secret Service); this office was located at Berlin W., *Berkaerstrasse*. I worked there until October 1941. In October 1941 my activities were interrupted, or rather terminated, as a result of the legal proceedings mentioned before. I shall return to this later.

My first position in Department VI of the Head Office for Reich Security was that of a "Delegate South" (*Beauftragter Sued*). In practical terms this meant secret service activities in South and South-Eastern Europe. My last position, from 1 February 1943 until the end of the War, was that of a Specialist Officer (*Referent*) and deputy group leader (department head) in Department VI, with almost the same duties.

Because of the distance from Vienna (or Prague, where, as has been mentioned, Eichmann was transferred in March 1939), I was no longer in touch with him as I had been in Vienna, and also our respective official duties did not give occasion for any further contacts. In terms of rank, my position in Berlin was equivalent to that of an *Oberregierungsrat* (senior government counsellor), and my pay was in accordance with the position; thus, it was a position provided for in the office work plan.



Letter from Heydrich to the Reich regarding the Office for Jewish Emigration, 30 January 1939. Announcing the establishment of this authority with Heinrich Müller as director

Such posts required, in principle, an academic degree; in the case of special services to the Party, however, this requirement could be waived. Neither in Vienna nor in Berlin did I receive an official dwelling, but made my own private arrangements. I assume that the question about the *Abteilungsleiter* (department head) relates to the *Amtschef* (bureau chief), because, as far as I know - at least in Department VI - department head was a purely honorary title for Specialist Officers (*Referenten*) who had a particularly large scope of duties.

My Department Chief was SS *Brigadeführer* and Major-General in the *Waffen-SS*, Walter Schellenberg. As far as I know, Eichmann was a Specialist Officer in Department IV of the Head Office for Reich Security, but in the meanwhile there was a change in the names given to the departments. I must here state that Eichmann was also transferred to the Head Office for Reich Security, but independent of my transfer to Berlin, and not to Department VI like myself, but to Department IV, Gestapo.

A department such as Eichmann had there, for Jewish Affairs, was more or less an office or section of its own. His superior chief, as has already been mentioned briefly today, was SS General Heinrich Müller, but it is possible that there was another group leader between them. Several Sections would be subordinate to a single Group Leader, and there must have been four or five Groups altogether. Jewish Affairs was dealt with exclusively by Eichmann's Section, for the whole of Germany.



Walter Schellenberg



Wilhelm Hoettl in the RSHA

As I have said, there were several groups, and several sections in each group; each individual section dealt with a particular category of people: one, for example, would deal with Communists and another with political suspects, and so on. I am not aware of Eichmann having special powers for the running of his Section, or whether these differed from the powers or authority of other Specialist Officers in their work.

I consider it highly improbable that Eichmann would have received any written power - some official appointment or whatever - authorizing him as a Specialist Officer to exterminate the Jews, just as other Specialist Officers were most definitely not authorized to liquidate or exterminate the groups they were called upon to monitor. If any orders to such an effect were given, then, at the very most, they would have been given orally and in complete secrecy. But I do not know anything about such secret assignments.

I have already answered this question in my general description of Eichmann's activities in Vienna. However, I know nothing about the time after the period I have referred to, i.e., from March onwards, and so cannot provide anything concrete from March to July 1939. I can only understand the question about dates by assuming that the person asking the question was perhaps not aware of the fact that the actual date of the transfer to Prague and the date of the order for the transfer were at variance. Whatever the explanation behind the question, I am unable to provide any more information in this context.

In Vienna, Eichmann was a Specialist Officer with the Inspector (*Inspekteur*) of the Security Police and the Security Service. In the first phase (from March 1938 on), this office was actually called the *SD Oberschnitt* (Security Service District Office). It is not simple to answer this question; the main point is that I do not know how long the Central Office in Vienna set up by Eichmann continued to operate, and I would tend to assume that, in the nature of things, it was closed down at the beginning of the War, i.e., in September 1939, because when the War broke out, any legal emigration had to stop.

As I have said, however, I am not sure about this. I only know that also after Eichmann left for Prague, the Central Office in Vienna carried on its work. I would assume that also after he was moved to Prague he continued to be in overall charge of the Vienna Central Office, and occasionally may have come to Vienna, where a deputy of his ran the office.



Gestapo HQ in Vienna the former Hotel Metropole

With several other gentlemen, we went to a pub and had lengthy conversations in which Stahlecker spoke very negatively about German methods in Russia. At this time Stahlecker was the leader of an Operations Unit in Russia and must have been in Vienna on leave.

To the best of my memory, as Inspector of the Security Police and the Security Service in Vienna, Stahlecker gave a great deal of support to Eichmann in realizing his plan to set up a Central Office for Jewish Emigration. If I am not mistaken - although I can only state this with due reservation, later - in Prague, Stahlecker was Eichmann's superior again.

In any case, I do remember Dr. Stahlecker telling me most indignantly of an order from Heydrich to keep under surveillance *Freiherr* (Baron) von Neurath, who was appointed *Reich* Protector for Bohemia and Moravia in 1939, because of his connections (I believe that Mrs. Stahlecker was related to Neurath or to his wife).



Eichmann's forged documents used to gain Argentine citizenship after the war

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Holocaust Historical Society
Jewish Museum of Vienna
Yad Vashem

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