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Your Soul Number is 5: Adventure and freedom are the cravings of your soul. You have an inner desire for variety, change, and new experiences. Your soul is curious and adaptable, always seeking to explore new horizons and embrace the unexpected. Freedom is essential to your inner happiness and growth. Image source, Getty ImagesImage caption, Heinrich Himmler was head of the SS and a key architect of the HolocaustA document vital to the capture of top Nazi Heinrich Himmler has been unearthed in the UK 75 years after his death. The items belonging to the SS leader, found in the possessions of a judge, are now due to go on display.On 22 May 1945, a trio of odd-looking men was spotted by a patrol near a checkpoint in Bremervrde, northern Germany. It was just a few weeks after World War Two had ended but many Nazis were still at large and there were fears some might try to regroup or escape. Two of the men, wearing smart long green overcoats, were walking ahead of a third man. The trailing figure, sporting an eye patch, looked broken and dishevelled. The pair in front kept glancing back as if to make sure he was still there. They were taken to a checkpoint where British soldiers asked to see their papers. They handed over the A4-sized identity document German soldiers were given at the end of the conflict which listed their name, rank, date of birth and other information. The third man's papers said he was a sergeant named Heinrich Hizinger. He must have hoped that the document and his lowly rank would mean he would pass through checkpoints. He was wrong.On the document was an official stamp and British military intelligence had seen the same stamp and unit details being used by members of the SS who had been trying to flee. And so word had gone out that anyone else with those details was to be detained.Image source, Military Intelligence MuseumImage caption, Himmler's documents, complete with false name and stampNext morning, the three men were taken to a detention camp. Once there, Hizinger asked to see a senior officer. Although his cover was still intact, he must have feared it would not last long and perhaps hoped he could bargain his way out of the situation. So he took off his eye patch and calmly revealed who he really was. He was Heinrich Himmler, the man who had been head of the SS and a key architect of the Holocaust. After Hitler's death in his bunker, this made him one of the most-wanted Nazis still alive and a man responsible for many of the worst crimes of the Third Reich. The British team began to question him to confirm he was who he said.Image source, Getty ImagesImage caption, Himmler alongside Adolf HitlerA few hours later a medical officer, Capt Wells, was told to check Himmler. As he came to look inside his mouth he saw a small blue-tipped object hidden in his cheek. As Capt Wells tried to pull it out, Himmler struggled with the doctor, pulled his head away and crushed the object between his teeth. It was a cyanide capsule. He was dead within minutes.Himmler had been given away by a fake stamp that his own people had placed in a document. The incriminating papers remained hidden for 75 years, but they can now be seen for the first time after being donated to the Military Intelligence Museum in Shefford, Bedfordshire.And alongside the papers are a slightly more bizarre item - the braces that Himmler was wearing when he was captured. Souvenir-hunting was common and many of Himmler's personal items were snapped up (one of the sergeants who carried out the original arrest got hold of Himmler's slippers, someone else got his shaving foam and razor blades).In the case of the documents, they were recently donated by the great niece of Lt Col Sidney Noakes. Image source, Military Intelligence MuseumImage caption, Lt Col Sidney Noakes is thought to have interrogated Himmler before his deathNoakes, born in 1905, was a lawyer who joined the Intelligence Corps in 1943 but was seconded to MI5. Much of what he did at MI5 remains shrouded in secrecy, but after the war he returned to his career as a lawyer, eventually ending up a County Court Judge. He died in 1993. So how did he end up with the papers?Documents detailing the arrest say "a gentle interrogation" of Himmler by MI5 officers took place before the final medical examination. These officers, by convention, would not have been named, and so it is not certain who they were. "The logical assumption is that he was one of the two MI5 interrogators," says Bill Steadman, curator of the Military Intelligence Museum. "I can't think of any other way he could have got them." He believes it is possible Noakes was given permission to keep the documents by his superiors once any intelligence value had been extracted.The objects stayed with Noakes and his family until they were recently donated and they will be on display once the museum reopens. They are more than just a curiosity but also explain how a senior Nazi was caught. "Without this damning stamp on the document it is possible that Himmler may have been able to pass through the system unnoticed, and escape as did many other wanted Nazis," says Bill Steadman. "What appeals to me most about this story is that the Germans themselves made his unmasking an absolute certainty." A portrait of a young Heinrich Himmler. Courtesy of the United State Holocaust Memorial Museum.Heinrich Himmler was born on October 7, 1900 to a middle-class family in Munich, Germany. In his early life, he had a strong desire to join the army. But World War I ended soon after he came of age to join the military, and restrictions placed on the German army in the Treaty of Versailles dismissed any chance of a military career. Instead, Himmler turned his focus to agriculture, and began studying for his degree at the Technical University of Munich. While attending the university, Himmler joined a German-nationalist student group where he began to read racist and nationalistic literature. Due to the political climate of the interwar years, such material was popular among right-wing radical Germans. By the time Himmler obtained his degree in 1922, he was a fanatic nationalist.In August 1923, Himmler joined the Nazi Party. Idolizing the partys leader, Adolph Hitler, Himmler quit his job and devoted his career to the party. On November 9, 1923, Himmler marched alongside Hitler, Ernst Rhm, Hermann Gring, and other Nazi leaders in the Beer Hall Putsch. The failed coup placed Hitler temporarily in jail, and Himmler found work building his reputation within the Nazi Party. He gave many speeches that followed themes of the German race, the need for German expansion, and the struggle against enemies of Germany. Himmler, pictured with Nazi leader Adolph Hitler as he salutes passing SS troops. Courtesy of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.In 1929, Hitler appointed Himmler Reichsfhrer of the Schutzstaffel (SS.)At the time, the SS served as bodyguards for Hitler and other top Nazi leaders. As the newly appointed leader of the SS, Himmler sought to develop an elite faction of the Nazi Party. In 1929, the SS totaled 280 men. By the time the Nazis came to power in 1933, Himmler had grown the SS to 52,000. Himmler inducted two new functions for the SSinternal security and guardianship over racial purity. In 1931, Himmler established the Sicherheitsdienst (Security Service, or SD) to gather intelligence and monitor opponents within the Nazi Party, leaders of other political parties, and government officials. In 1934, the SD was distinguished as the sole political intelligence agency for Germany. Five years later, in September 1939, Himmler fused the SD with the Reich Security Main Office (RSHA.) A portrait of Himmler in his Reichsfuhrer SS uniform. Courtesy of Yad Vashem.Following the Nazis invasion of Poland, in 1939 Hitler appointed Himmler as the Reich Commissar for the Strengthening of the German Ethnic Stock. This new position authorized Himmler and the SS to have complete control over German resettlement in areas of occupied Poland and eventually the Soviet Union in 1941. Himmler had complete say over who was German, where ethnic Germans should live, and which populations should be moved out or destroyed to make room for resettled Germans. Himmlers plan for resettlement would be conducted with the help of the Einsatzgruppen, also known as the SSs mobile killing units. The Einsatzgruppen was tasked to initiate and partake in mass murder of Jews, government officials, Roma, and people with disabilities, no matter the age or gender. Himmler visiting a site near Minsk, Belorussia where he observed an Einsatzgruppen Aktion and witnessed the mass murder of local Jews. Courtesy of Yad Vashem.Einsatzgruppen activity increased with the invasion of the Soviet Union. In the Soviet Union, Einsatzgruppen units would follow army groups to secure territory following a battle. Known as Aktions, members of the Einsatzgruppen, with the help of Waffen SS and collaborative police units, rounded up victims and marched them to a killing site. If mass graves were not already dug, the victims would be forced to dig the graves themselves. All Aktions generally followed the same method. Victims were stripped of their clothes and valuables, placed before the mass grave, and shot. One of the most well-known Aktions occurred at Babi Yar, a ravine in Kiev, where 33,771 Jews were shot and buried in mass graves. In total, at least 1.5 million Holocaust victims died in mass shootings or gas vans in Soviet territory.Himmlers atrocities did not stop in the Soviet Union. Within the history of World War II, Himmler is best known for his role in the implementation of the Nazi concentration camp system and the Holocaust. In 1933, Himmler established the Nazis first concentration camp in an abandoned munitions factory at Dachau. Initially, concentration camps were made for the purpose of housing political prisoners. The first prisoners of Dachau consisted of communists, social democrats, and other political opponents to the Nazi regime. Hitler, impressed with Dachau, authorized Himmler to establish an entire system of concentration camps. By the end of the war, the Nazi camp system grew to contain thousands of camps including concentration camps, forced labor camps, POW camps, transit camps, and killing centers.In 1941, Himmler assigned General Odilo Globocnik with the implementation of Operation Reinhard. The operation, named after the SS General Reinhard Heydrich, was the constructed plan to systematically murder the Jews of occupied Poland, and later the entirety of European Jewry. With Operation Reinhard, Himmler established three killing centers in PolandBelzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka. More killing centers came to follow. Chelmno, the first camp to test the use of the killing by gassing, became a killing site where at least 152,000 people were killed. Majdanek served time to time as a killing center, used primarily to kill forced Jewish laborers who were too weak to work. The last camp Himmler designated as a killing center was Auschwitz-Birkenau in the spring of 1942. Standing as a symbol for the Holocaust and the Nazi camp system, approximately one million Jewish men, women, and children from various European countries perished at Auschwitz. Under the direction of Himmler, the Nazis murdered nearly 2,700,000 Jews, political prisoners, Roma, a-socials, homosexuals, and others in these killing centers by either asphyxiation with gas or shooting. A photo of bodies discovered in a storeroom at Auschwitz. Death was a common sight throughout Himmler's concentration camp system. Courtesy of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.After a failed assassination attempt on Hitler in July 1944, Himmler began to formulate a negotiation for a separate peace with the western Allies while Germany continued to fight the Soviet Union. He even considered using prisoners within the concentration camps as a bargaining chip to initiate the negotiations. The Allies, though, could not consider negotiating with a man who was as implicated in Nazi war crimes as Himmler. In April 1945, Himmler asked the President of the Swedish Red Cross, Count Folke Bernadotte, to transmit his offer of surrender to the Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces, Dwight D. Eisenhower. Word of Himmlers offer reached Hitler, who then stripped Himmler of his positions and ordered his arrest. Himmler attempted to escape the Third Reich by dressing in a Secret Field Police uniform and shaving his mustache, equipped with papers assigned to Heinrich Hitzinger. He was captured by Russians on May 20, 1945 and then turned over to the British, to whom he confessed his identity. Three days later, on May 23, 1945, Himmler committed suicide by biting on a cyanide capsule that was hidden in his mouth. The body of Heinrich Himmler following his suicide while in British custody.Courtesy of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.Hitler entrusted Himmler with the implementation of The Final Solution of the Jewish Question, and in turn six million Jews lost their lives in the Holocaust. In the Soviet Union, Himmlers Einsatzgruppen units became responsible for the deaths of another nearly two million people. Seventy fiveyears later, when looking upon the legacy left behind by Himmler, it is a legacy of terror and violence. Himmler managed to use his own position and privileges to put in place his racist views across Europe and the Soviet Union. Serving as Hitlers right-hand man, Himmler was a true architect of terror during World War II. Heinrich Himmler (1900-1945) was the Reich Leader (Reichsfhrer) of the dreaded SS of the Nazi Party from 1929 until 1945. Himmler presided over a vast ideological and bureaucratic empire that defined him for manyboth inside and outside the Third Reichas the second most powerful man after Adolf Hitler in Germany during World War II. Given overall responsibility for the security of the Nazi empire, Himmler was the key and senior Nazi official responsible for conceiving and overseeing implementation of the"Final Solution," the Nazi plan to murder the Jews of Europe.BackgroundHimmler was born into a middle-class, conservative Catholic family in Munich, Germany, on October 7, 1900. His father, Gebhard, taught at the Ludwig academic high school (Gymnasium) in Munich. In 1913, Himmler's family moved to Landshut, a town located about 40 miles northeast of Munich, after Himmler senior took the job of assistant principal of the Gymnasium in Landshut.As a youth, Himmler was fervently patriotic. During World War I, he dreamed of service on the front as an officer and, using his reluctant father's connections, left high school to begin training as an officer candidate on January 1, 1918. On November 11, 1918, however, before Himmler's training was complete, Germany signed the armistice that would end World War I.Himmler graduated from high school in Landshut in July 1919. After the restrictions imposed on Germany by the Versailles peace treaty dashed his hopes of joining the army (Reichswehr), he studied agriculture at the Technical University in Munich. There he joined a German-nationalist student fraternity and began to read deeply in the racist-nationalist (vlkisch) literature popular on the radical right of the interwar German political spectrum. By the time he received his university degree in August 1922, Himmler was a fanatical vlkisch nationalist and a political activist.Forced to take a job in a manure-processing factory in Schleissheim, near Munich, Himmler made contact with the National Socialists through SA chief of staff Ernst Rhm. In August 1923, he joined the Nazi Party, to which he devoted his career after he quit his job one month later. On November 9, 1923, Himmler marched with Hitler, Rhm, Hermann Gring, and other Nazi leaders in the Beer Hall Putsch against the German government.Unemployed and at loose ends after the collapse of the putsch, Himmler found work as secretary and personal assistant to Gregor Strasser, whom Hitler appointed Reich Propaganda Leader of the Nazi Party in 1926. Himmler also built his own reputation in the party as a speaker and organizer. His speeches stressed the following themes:race consciousnesscult of the German racethe need for German expansion and settlementsthe struggle against eternal enemies of Germany. These "eternal enemies" were Jewish capital, Marxism (i.e., socialism, communism, and anarchism), liberal democracy, and the Slavic peoples.In 1928 he married Margarete Boden. She bore him a daughter, Gudrun, in 1929.Leadership of the SSIn January 1929, Adolf Hitler, the Fhrer (Leader) of the Nazi party, appointed Himmler Reichsfhrer SS. The SS, which in 1929 totaled 280 men, was subordinate to the SA and had two major functions: to serve as bodyguards for Hitler and other Nazi leaders and to hawk subscriptions for the Nazi party newspaper, Der Vlkischer Beobachter (The Race-Nationalist Observer). From this insignificant beginning, Himmler perceived an opportunity to develop an elite corps of the Nazi Party. By the time the Nazis seized power in January 1933, the SS numbered more than 52,000. Himmler also introduced two key functions to the SS that related to the Nazi party's long-term core goals for Germany: internal security and guardianship over racial purity.After deploying his SS in April 1931 to crush a revolt by the Berlin SA against Hitler's leadership (inspiring the adoption of the SS motto, My honor is loyalty), Himmler created the Security Service (Sicherheitsdienst; SD) in the summer of 1931. The SD kept tabs on Hitler's opponents within the Nazi Party and gathered intelligence on leaders and activities of other political parties as well as on government officials, both federal and local. In August 1934, Nazi Party Deputy Fhrer Rudolf Hess announced that the SD would henceforth be the sole political intelligence gathering and evaluating agency in the Third Reich.On the last day of 1931, Himmler also established a Race and Settlement Office (Rasse- und Siedlungsamt) of the SS to evaluate applications of SS men seeking to marry under a new internal Marriage Decree. The expertise developed in this role of maintaining racial purity in the SS would, in wartime, determine whether an individual was German or not. At a minimum, a positive determination meant a job and better rations in German-occupied territory during World War II; at a maximum, the decision on ethnicity could be a decision on life and death.Control of the German PoliceIn the five years after the Nazis seized power in January 1933, Himmler built an unassailable position for the SS by taking control of the German police forces. On March 9, 1933, he was appointed provisional president of police in Munich. Three weeks later, he was named Commander of the Bavarian Political Police. By late 1934, Himmler sought and obtained command of each of the state political police departments in Germany, and had centralized them within a single new agency in Berlin, the Secret State Police (Geheime Staatspolizei; Gestapo). Photo Heinrich Himmler with Reinhard Heydrich Heinrich Himmler (seated, center), chief of the SS, with Reinhard Heydrich (standing, left), chief of the Security Police and SD. Berlin, Germany, 1938. After Hitler appointed him Reichsfhrer SS and Chief of German Police on June 17, 1936, Himmler centralized the various criminal police detective forces in Germany into the Reich Criminal Police Office (Reichskriminalpolizeiamt) and united the Gestapo and Criminal Police in the Security Police Main Office (Hauptamt Sicherheitspolizei). In September 1939, Himmler fused the Security Police and the SD into the Reich Security Main Office (Reichssicherheitshauptamt; RSHA), the agency that would be tasked with implementing the Holocaust in 1941-1942. Himmler also unified and centralized the uniformed police forces (Ordnungspolizei; Orpo) in Germany.Centralization of the Concentration Camp System Photo Heinrich Himmler during an inspection of the Dachau camp Heinrich Himmler, head of the SS, speaks to an inmate of the Dachau concentration camp during an official inspection. Dachau, Germany, May 8, 1936. In 1933-1934, Himmler also secured for his SS control over a centralized concentration camp system. Although various civilian authorities and police agencies had established autonomous concentration camps during 1933 to incarcerate political enemies of the Nazi government, Hitlerwho was impressed with the Dachau concentration camp established by the SS in March 1933authorized Himmler to create a centralized concentration camp system. Though this SS Inspectorate of Concentration Camps reduced the number of concentration camps to four in 1937, the system grew in wartime to include 30-40 main camps and hundreds of subcamps. SS camp authorities would kill around two million prisonersJews, political prisoners, Roma (Gypsies), so-called asocials, recidivist convicts, homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, and othersin the concentration camp system.Direct Authority from HitlerAs a reward for its role in murdering Ernst Rhm and the top leadership of the SA on June 30-July 2, 1934, Hitler announced that the SS was an independent organization and that Himmler was subordinate to Hitler in Hitler's new capacity as Fhrer of Germany. This position placed his authority outside the legal constraints of the German state. The command relationshipbetween Hitler and Himmler was the basis for the immense power that Himmler accumulated during World War II. By tying the German police forces organizationally to the SS, Himmler effectively removed police personnel, finances, actions, and operations from external judicial or administrative review.As Reichsfhrer SS, Himmler received authority directly from Hitler to carry out ideological policies that the laws of the state might not permit. This ideologically rooted Fhrer authority enabled authorization of indefinite incarceration and mass murder. The Nazi leaders justified this extra-legal chain of command and the policies initiated under its authorization by the national emergency legislation following the Reichstag Fire in 1933 and the intensified emergency created by the war.Expansion of Himmler's Authority during World War IIHimmler expanded his authority during the war. On October 7, 1939, shortly after Germany conquered and partitioned Poland with the Soviet Union, Hitler appointed Himmler Reich Commissar for the Strengthening of German Ethnic Stock (Reichskommissar fr die Festigung deutschen Volkstums; RKFDV). This position authorized Himmler and the SS to plan, initiate, and control the pace of German resettlement projects in occupied Poland, and, later, the Soviet Union. Organizations under Himmler's command had the final say over who was German, where ethnic Germans should live, and what populations should be moved out or annihilated in order to make room for the German settlers.In July 1941, Hitler extended Himmler's authority for both security and settlement operations to the occupied Soviet Union. Himmler's exclusive responsibility for security behind the immediate front line authorized the mobile Einsatzgruppenand other SS and police units to initiate and direct the mass murder of Jews, Soviet officials, Roma (Gypsies), and people with disabilities living in institutions, with the support of German military and civilian occupation authorities. With Hitler's agreement, the SS, within its responsibilities for security and settlement issues, assumed the leadership role in planning and implementing the "Final Solution of the Jewish Question" as well as in annihilation operations throughout the Reich against Roma (Gypsies) and people with disabilities living in institutions.In 1937, the SS had taken control of the Ethnic German Liaison Office (Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle), which ministered to the needs of ethnic Germans living outside the Reich. Among those needs were clothing and household equipment for newly resettled ethnic German communities. These items the SS supplied in part from the personal property taken from Jews murdered at the killing centers.Perhaps in reflection of the growing power of the SS in the state, Hitler appointed Himmler Minister of the Interior in July 1943.The SS and Germany's Armed ForcesIn order to strengthen the position of the SS relative to the established German elites after a victorious war, Himmler persuaded Hitler in late 1939 to permit the establishment of an armed SS force, known as the Waffen SS. Although initially restricted to four divisions, the Waffen SS eventually fielded more than 20 Divisions, putting half a million men under arms and establishing a command and operations structure to rival the German army. That same year Himmler established a separate SS disciplinary system, since neither civilian nor military courts had jurisdiction to investigate criminal acts perpetrated by members of the SS and police or their auxiliary units.As military defeats reduced the prestige of the generals in Hitler's view, Himmler's SS further encroached on the authority of the German armed forces. In February 1944, the Security Police and SD took over control of the Armed Forces Intelligence Service. After the failure of the military putsch of July 20, 1944, Hitler appointed Himmler Commander of the Replacement Army (a position responsible for training and overseeing military personnel) and gave him command of matters relating to prisoners of war. In December 1944, Himmler realized his old dream to have a command in the field, when Hitler appointed him commander-in-chief of Army Group Upper Rhine in southwestern Germany.Challenges to Himmler's PowerDespite appearances to the outside, Himmler was not all-powerful in the Third Reich. His most significant and powerful rival during the last year of the war was Martin Bormann, Hitler's Secretary and chief of the Nazi Party Chancellery. The Nazi Party apparatus, anchored in the political power of the Nazi Party District Leaders (Gauleiter) who also held positions in the State as Regional Defense Commissars, became more significant with the invasion of the Allied armies toward the end of the war. Likewise, Albert Speer, the Reich Minister of Armaments and War Production, wielded great power in the last years of the war, despite his postwar protestations of powerlessness vis--vis the SS.Murderous SuccessA skilled organizer and a capable manager who understood how to obtain and use power, Himmler was the ideological and organizational driving force behind the rise of the SS. Moreover, he understood his SS men and knew how to secure their loyalty to his own person and to the concept of the Nazi elite to which they belonged. His ability to give his subordinates leeway to exercise initiative to implement Nazi policy was a significant factor in the murderous success of many SS operations.When he took over the SS, Himmler recognized the importance of internal security and determination of racial purity for the Nazi movement and successfully expanded the functions of the SS to meet these ideological and practical needs. Himmler understood the importance of police power separated from legal constraint and state supervision; he persuaded Hitlerover the arguments of powerful rivals in the party and the statethat fusion of SS and police would forge the instrument for the Nazi regime to achieve its core, long-term ideological goals.It was Himmler whom Hitler entrusted with the planning and implementation of the "Final Solution." In his most quoted speech, that of October 4, 1943, in Poznan to a gathering of SS generals, Himmler explicitly justified the mass murder of the European Jews in the following words:In front of you here, I want to refer explicitly to a very serious matter.I mean herethe annihilation of the Jewish people. Most of you will know what it means when 100 corpses lie side by side, or 500 or 1,000. This page of glory in our history has never been written and will never be written.We had the moral right, we were obligated to our people to kill this people which wanted to kill us.End of the WarAfter the failure of the July 20, 1944, attempt to assassinate Hitler, Himmler toyed with the idea of negotiating a separate peace with the western Allies while continuing to fight the Soviet Union. During the winter of 1944-1945, he considered using concentration camp prisoners as a bargaining chip to initiate such negotiations. In April 1945, Himmler met with the representative of the World Jewish Congress in Stockholm, Sweden, Hilel Storch, to discuss openings for negotiations. In part because the Allies would not negotiate with a man so implicated in Nazi crimes, and, in part because Himmler could not quite separate himself from Hitler or the belief that somehow the Germans would win the war, his half-hearted feelers came to nothing. In April 1945, Himmler asked Count Folke Bernadotte, the Vice President of the Swedish Red Cross, to transmit an offer of surrender on the western front to General Dwight D. Eisenhower, the commander-in-chief of the Allied forces. News of the offer reached Hitler in encircled Berlin on the night of April 28-29, 1945. In one of his last official acts, Hitler stripped Himmler of all of his offices and ordered his arrest.Despite having continuously assured his SS officers and men that he ultimately would take responsibility for all of their actions, the end of the war found Himmler dressed in Secret Field Police uniform with papers in the name of Heinrich Hitzinger. Captured by Russian soldiers on May 20, 1945, he was turned over to the British, to whom he eventually confessed his identity. While undergoing a body search on May 23, 1945, Himmler killed himself by biting down on a cyanide capsule hidden in his mouth for that very purpose. Heinrich Himmler (1900-1945) was the head of the Nazi SS (Schutzstaffel) organisation. One of the most powerful individuals in Nazi Germany, Himmler built up the SS from a small paramilitary unit to a vast organisation, which included armoured divisions, the Gestapo secret police, the Einsatzgruppen extermination squads, and the Death's Head units, which were responsible for the Holocaust, that is the murder of 6 million European Jews. Early Life Heinrich Himmler was born near Munich on 7 October 1900. His father was a schoolmaster, and the family was Catholic. The historian N. Stone notes that the Himmlers were "a family socially pretentious but materially uneasy" (82). Heinrich had an unremarkable education and then found himself too young for active service in the First World War (1914-18), but he did train as an officer cadet. After the conflict, Heinrich achieved a diploma in agricultural studies at the technical college in Munich; significantly, given his future ideas on race, he had specialised in genetics and breeding. The small bespectacled Himmler found rather unglamorous employment as a salesman of fertilizer. Eager for more out of life, in 1923, Heinrich joined the fascist National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP), or Nazi Party for short. Rise in the Nazi Party Himmler participated in the Beer Hall Putsch, the failed Nazi coup in November 1923, when he carried the banner of the Reichskriegflagge (Imperial War Flag), which later became almost a holy relic for the Nazis. When the party recovered from the fallout of the putsch, Himmler quickly rose in the Nazi hierarchy to become a deputy Gauleiter (regional governor). He found his real niche in the SS, the paramilitary organisation formed by the Nazi Party leader Adolf Hitler (1889-1945) as a counterbalance to the party's main paramilitary group the Sturmabteilung (SA or brownshirts). Himmler joined the SS in 1925 and became the deputy of the organisation in 1927. After impressing Hitler with a successful stint working in the Nazi propaganda department for the 1928 general election, Himmler was made head of the SS on 6 January 1929 and was given the title of Reichsfhrer-SS. Himmler loved order of all kinds. In the midst of his Nazi activities, Himmler found time in June 1928 to marry Margarete Siegroth, a nurse and clinic owner seven years older than him. Margarete sold her clinic to provide the funds to buy a farm outside Munich. The Himmlers raised chickens together and had a daughter, Gudrun (b. August 1929). Himmler was ambitious for much more than this and was keen to utilise his undoubted talents at organisation and planning. Hitler had outlandish ambitions for Europe, but Himmler even more so, including the total resettlement of Europe and the USSR with a new Germanic super race. Hitler's chief architect Albert Speer wrote that Himmler was "a visionary whose intellectual flights struck even Hitler as ridiculous" (373). In 1930, as the Nazis pursued electoral domination, Himmler was elected a member of the Reichstag, the German parliament. In 1933, he was appointed head of the Munich police. The next year, Himmler took over from Hermann Gring (1893-1946) as the figurehead of the Gestapo, the Nazi secret police. In June 1936, Himmler was appointed the overall head of the German police forces. He was determined to reign over two powerful and overlapping branches of the Nazi state: the police in all its forms and the SS. Character Himmler was often regarded as a simple-minded man, even amongst his fellow Nazis. He loved order of all kinds as a teenager he kept meticulous diaries of his every movement and long lists of all the books he had read and the letters he had both sent and received. As a young man, Hitler quickly realised that Himmler's greatest quality was his unflinching loyalty. Others saw different qualities and flaws. Speer noted of Himmler that "He gave me the impression of cold impersonality. He did not seem to deal with people but rather to manipulate them" (Speer, 94). Speer also described Himmler as vain and obsessive, but he was "also a sober-minded realist who knew exactly what his far-reaching political aims were" (Speer, 502-3). Although he had tremendous power and opportunities, Himmler lived a frugal life and refrained from gathering around him the trappings of great wealth. The only thing that seemed to really interest him was collecting offices and titles, for which he had an insatiable appetite. Heinrich Himmler with Wife and Daughter Himmler never enjoyed particularly good health, but after 1939, he experienced regular problems. "He had acute nervous headaches, stomach cramps, a predilection for quack cures and a mysticism that included faith in astrology and the power of mental suggestion" (Boatner, 218). He was not too ill to be systematically unfaithful to his wife, setting up one of his secretaries, Hedwig Potthast, in her own home in a country lodge when she became pregnant with his child (Helge, b. 1942); a second child, Nanette, was born in 1944. Himmler had separated from his wife in 1940, but the couple had long been estranged. Himmler was, amongst an unfortunately large cast of Nazi villains, the most feared man in the Third Reich. The Nazi Police Chief In September 1939, a new Nazi organisation was created, the Reich Security Main Office or RSHA (Reichssicherheitshauptamt). This organisation controlled the Gestapo, the criminal police or Kriminalpolizei (aka Kripo), the police intelligence department the Sicherheitsdienst or SD, and a department responsible for gathering foreign intelligence. Himmler chose his able and utterly ruthless deputy to lead the RSHA: Reinhard Heydrich (1904-1942). Illustrating the overlap in state, police, and SS functions, Heydrich was also a lieutenant-general in the SS. The RSHA had three main roles: policing and repressing enemies of Nazism, gathering intelligence, and eliminating those people identified by the Nazis as being racially inferior. In none of these roles was the RSHA limited by any legal restrictions. Himmler's position allowed him to pry into the private affairs of every German citizen, and, with his absolute power of life and death over those citizens, he became, amongst an unfortunately large cast of Nazi villains, the most feared man in the Third Reich. The SS: Himmler's 'Black Empire' Despite all of his many and varied responsibilities, it was the SS that Himmler focussed on most. From its humble origins as a protection squad for Hitler, Himmler set about methodically creating an entirely autonomous Nazi organisation within the movement, effectively ensuring he became the feared head of "a state within a state" (Dear, 416). This organisation was to become the embodiment of Nazism. The Rise of Nazi Germany, 1919 - 1939 In 1931, the SS Race and Settlement Office (SS Rasse- und Siedlungsamt) was created with Himmler's intention being that his organisation would become a sort of new aristocracy of pure-blooded Germanic people, or 'Aryans'. Obsessed with medieval knights and medieval chivalry, Himmler envisaged something of a throwback to the Teutonic Knights of old. To this end, he rebuilt Wewelsburg castle as his personal headquarters of SS folklore (he used slave labour to do it). Himmler wanted his SS to become the biological, racial, and ideological elite of the Third Reich. In terms of recruitment, people with certain physical characteristics (e.g. tall, blond hair, and blue eyes), with a demonstrably pure Germanic heritage, and with an obvious fanaticism towards Nazi ideas were given special favour. The SS had its own system of ranks "modelled partly on military organizations, partly on monastic orders" (Dear, 814). Like monks, SS members underwent rituals of initiation, were expected to be absolutely loyal to the cause (with Himmler as the Abbot-General), and wore distinctive uniforms, in this case black. All of these features were designed to instil in SS members a belief in their superiority over everyone else, with the consequence that they would enthusiastically carry out such orders as mass executions of innocent civilians. Himmler first prioritised scaling up the SS organisation by pursuing a recruitment drive. Consequently, by the end of 1933, the SS had over 200,000 members. Himmler then set about eliminating the SS's paramilitary rival, the SA. On 30 June 1934, in an event known as the Night of the Long Knives, the leaders of the SA were arrested and executed. Nothing could now challenge the primacy of the SS, which assumed SA functions like running the Nazi concentration camps, a role performed by special 'Death's Head' SS units (SS-Totenkopfverbnde) and one which became greatly expanded with the outbreak of the Second World War (1939-45). The Waffen-SS (meaning 'weapons' or 'armed' SS) was created as the armed branch of the organisation. Himmler envisaged the Waffen-SS as an elite element of the German armed forces with better training and equipment than regular units. This dream was only partially realised, but the Waffen-SS did grow to 600-800,000 members and fought on both the Western and Eastern fronts, usually as armoured divisions deployed where the enemy was strongest. Besides German and Austrian recruits, volunteers were taken from suitably 'Germanic' conquered countries like Norway and Denmark, but, as the war dragged on and casualties increased, volunteers were also taken from any conquered territories. The Waffen-SS had its own cadet schools, but senior officers often came from the regular army. Himmler personally gave SS officers a reward for bravery: a silver death's head ring. Inside the ring was inscribed the date: 30.6.34, the Night of the Long Knives. The fanatical Waffen-SS divisions were notorious for committing war crimes. The SS was involved in other areas, notably economic activities such as using human hair and gold from dentures taken from victims of the concentration and death camps. Other commercial activities managed by the SS Main Office for Economy and Administration (SS Wirtschafts- und Verwaltungshauptamt), often employing slave labour, included the agricultural sector, quarries, forest and timber management, textile factories, and iron processing. There was even an archaeology department of the SS since Himmler was convinced that excavations could prove Germanic people had just as rich a past as the Italians could claim from ancient Rome. The SS even funded expeditions to Tibet to try and find links with Aryans there. Himmler's ambition was for the SS to control, unrestricted by any laws, every aspect of state security in Germany and to ensure the transformation of Nazi policies into a practical reality for all citizens. As historians have noted: "Like no other institution of the Third Reich, the SS represents the arrogance of Nazi ideology and the criminal nature of Hitler's regime." (Dear, 814). Even further, Himmler wanted to control the minds of every person in the Third Reich. To this end, the SS sponsored propaganda campaigns using literature, posters, radio, and film to indoctrinate the population with Nazi ideology. Younger people received the same messages via SS-sponsored educational and research institutions. For Himmler, every citizen was to follow the motto he had given the SS: "loyalty is thy honour". The Holocaust As noted, the SS managed the Nazi labour and death camps. Himmler's deliberate policy of working detainees until they died meant there was little real distinction between the two types. In March 1933, Himmler had created the Dachau concentration camp, north of Munich. One of the first of its kind, it was meant to hold prominent enemies of the Nazi state, but this purpose was soon expanded. The number of people detained in the concentration camps rose from 25,000 in 1939 to 700,000 in 1945. Millions more were murdered in mass executions using firing squads, mobile gas vans, and the gas chambers of camps like Auschwitz. Those detained and murdered included Jewish people as part of the Nazi's Final Solution programme the murder of all European Jews but other significant groups to suffer included Romani people, Freemasons, Communists, intellectuals, homosexuals, prisoners of war, those with a physical or mental disability, political enemies, and anyone else the Nazis considered superfluous to their rule. Himmler sent millions to their deaths, but he was himself squeamish about being present at any killings. On one of the rare occasions he was present at an execution, according to the Waffen-SS Colonel Karl Wolff (1900-1984), Himmler was splashed by blood and matter from a victim who was shot, and he almost fainted as a result. Wolff then told the SS group commander: "It serves him right that happened to him. It's quite right that he should see what he is ordering his people to do" (Holmes, 321). Sign up for our free weekly email newsletter! In addition to the camps, the SS was directly involved in transporting innocent people to those camps using trains, a responsibility of the SS-Gestapo department led by the SS Lieutenant-colonel Adolf Eichmann (1906-1962). Another method of extermination of the innocent was the Einsatzgruppen, the mobile death squads, which worked behind the lines of the advancing regular army. Then there were the SS doctors, like Josef Mengele (1911-1979), who performed horrific medical experiments on people in the camps. Himmler ensured most of these activities remained highly secret or, at least, even if people had their suspicions, there was little concrete evidence of the scale of the horrors going on. Einsatzgruppen on the Eastern Front Himmler's Other Roles Himmler was relentless in creating new offices and organisations for his SS empire, very often deliberately creating overlapping institutions so that power was divided amongst his subordinates while he remained aloof with the absolute power over everyone below. In December 1935, Himmler founded the Lebensborn Registered Society, an organisation which aimed to promote population growth by encouraging members of the SS and police forces to have more children, often with partners they were under no obligation to marry. The Lebensborn organisation also found German foster homes for "racially suitable" children taken from occupied territories. Himmler was made the Reich Commissioner for the Strengthening of German Nationhood in October 1939, which meant he was responsible for all racial matters. Himmler kept on gathering in the official appointments to ensure he had as many fingers in as many Nazi pies of power as he could get away with. Following the invasion of Poland in 1939, Himmler and his SS organisations were given free rein in those parts of the country annexed by the Nazis. Himmler was made minister of the interior in August 1943, which gave the SS chief yet more control over the Reich's civil service and judicial system. It was only the fact that the war went badly for Germany in 1944 that restricted Himmler's ruthless grip over millions of European civilians. Himmler then played a duplicitous game of wait and see who succeeded during the 1944 plot to assassinate Hitler by top army and state officials who wanted to end the war. When the plot failed on 20 July, Himmler further ingratiated himself with Hitler with his relentless pursuit of the conspirators: arresting, torturing, and hanging thousands of suspects, including their children. By the end of July 1944, Himmler had gained yet another appointment, this time as head of Germany's reserve army. One month later, he was tasked by Hitler to form last-ditch defence units, Volkssturm, principally a militia that recruited men too old for regular service and youths too young. In January 1945, Himmler was briefly appointed head of Army Group Vistula, which was tasked with the defence of Berlin against the advance of the USSR's Red Army. Capture & Death As the Red Army closed in on the German capital in April 1945, Himmler withdrew from Berlin to the safety of the Hohenlychen sanatorium in northeast Germany. He then moved further west to Schwerin. In the final weeks of the war, Himmler convinced himself that the Allies would settle for a peace deal and appoint him as the new leader of Germany. The SS chief made overtures to the Allies through an intermediary, Count Folke Bernadotte (1895-1948), but Hitler found out, was furious at his defeatist attitude, and promptly stripped Himmler of all his positions. Hitler also ordered Himmler be arrested, but Germany's most feared individual had already fled. Hitler had Himmler's adjutant executed as the next best thing. With the Red Army closing in on the Fhrer's Berlin bunker, Hitler committed suicide on 30 April. Grand Admiral Karl Dnitz (1891-1980) was appointed Hitler's successor, but he wanted nothing to do with Himmler and rejected his overtures in a meeting where Dnitz kept a gun on his desk. With nowhere else to go, Himmler went on the run to try and return home to Bavaria. He disguised himself rather theatrically by shaving off his moustache and wearing an eyepatch. Pretending to be an ordinary soldier, he was intercepted on 22 May at a roadblock near Bremen and then questioned by the British Army. Realising the game was up, Himmler admitted who he was. While in custody, Himmler committed suicide on 23 May 1945 by taking a cyanide capsule. Medical staff had tried to keep Himmler alive during the 15 minutes it took for the cyanide to take effect. Himmler's body was buried in a secret location in an unmarked grave. Himmler, if he had lived, would certainly have been found guilty of war crimes and crim

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