

# ADOLF EICHMANN



During trial, 1961

Adolf Eichmann was the head of the Jewish section in the SS security apparatus, through which the Nazis dealt with their political, racial, and ideological enemies. He did not make policy, but he did make many decisions concerning the organization of the murder and showed much initiative and enthusiasm for his mission.

Eichmann was involved in all stages of the persecution of the Jews. Most of the time he was a bureaucrat, but at several junctions he also was active in the field. After the annexation of Austria in 1938, he set up the Central Office for Jewish Emigration, which worked to push Jews out of Austria. He set up a similar office in Prague the following year. During the first years of the war, he worked on various plans to isolate Jews and push them out of German territory.

On the orders of his direct superior, Reinhard Heydrich, Eichmann organized the Wannsee Conference to coordinate the murders; the conference took place in Berlin, in January 1942. Once the “Final Solution” was launched, Eichmann’s office issued the orders regarding when and where deportations were to happen. Eichmann himself paid several visits to extermination camps to check on their efficiency and progress, and was directly responsible for the Theresienstadt ghetto.

Eichmann personally directed the 1944 deportations from Hungary, which were closely coordinated with and carried out by Hungarian authorities. For a time, Eichmann took part in negotiations with the Jewish leadership, in which he suggested that in exchange for the lives of Hungarian Jewry, Germany would receive desperately needed material goods. These negotiations were never completed.

In May 1960, Israeli secret service agents found Eichmann living in Argentina under a false name. They kidnapped him and brought him to Israel to stand trial under the Nazis and Nazi Collaborators (Punishment) Law of 1950. He was indicted on fifteen counts, including crimes against the Jewish people, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and membership in various criminal organizations, including the SS, the Security Service (SD), and the Gestapo. The charges against Eichmann also included crimes against the Poles, Slovenes, Roma, and Czechs.

Eichmann was found guilty on all counts as a key figure in the “Final Solution.” On December 15, 1961, he was sentenced to death and was executed.

## Excerpt from Adolf Eichmann’s Testimony in an Israeli Court

**Judge:** Did you never experience a conflict, what one could call a conflict of conscience? Between your duty and your conscience.

**Eichmann:** One could call it a state of being split.

**Q:** Being split?

**A:** A conscious split state, where one could flee from one side to the other.

- Q:** It was necessary to abandon one's personal conscience?
- A:** Yes, one could say that. Because one could not control or regulate it oneself.
- Q:** Except if one accepted the personal consequences.
- A:** One could have said, I refuse to do this, but I don't know what would have happened then.
- Q:** If there had been more civil courage, things would have been different, don't you think so?
- A:** Of course, if this civil courage had been hierarchically organized.
- Q:** Then it wasn't fate, an inevitable fate.
- A:** It's a question of human behaviour. That's how it happened, it was wartime, everyone thought: "It was useless to fight against it, it's only a drop in the ocean. What use is it? There's no point in it, it will do neither good nor harm." It was also connected to the times, I think, with the era, with ideological education, rigid discipline, and all that kind of thing.
- Q:** At that time it was very difficult for individuals to accept the consequences of refusing to obey orders.
- A:** One was living at a time where crime was legalized by the state, it was the responsibility of those who gave the orders.
- Q:** According to you, the idealist you claim to have been is defined as someone who executes the orders he receives from above to the best of his ability.
- A:** For me that meant adherence to the nationalism being preached, and, as a nationalist, to do my duty according to the oath of allegiance. That's how I understood it. Today I realize that all nationalism taken to extremes leads to gross egoism and from there it is only a small step to radicalism.
- Q:** The general outlines both strategically and tactically, of the extermination of the Jews were planned as a campaign psychologically, like psychological warfare, using tactical deception and so on.
- A:** I believe that it gradually crystallized during the course of events. And if necessary Himmler gave orders directly. I do not think that originally—how can I put it—a discussion about what actions were to be taken, in which the whole thing was planned down to the last detail.... I believe it somehow resulted automatically....
- Q:** So you say it evolved organically over the course of time.
- A:** Yes. That's how I'd describe it.