

Gestapo

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The Death's Head emblem similar to [Skull and crossbones](#), often used as the insignia of the Gestapo

The **Gestapo** ([help](#)·[info](#)) ([contraction](#) of *Geheime Staatspolizei*; "secret state police") was the official [secret police](#) of [Nazi Germany](#). Under the overall administration of the [SS](#), it was administrated by the *RSHA* and was considered a dual [organization](#) of the *Sicherheitsdienst* and also a suboffice of the *Sicherheitspolizei*.

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History

The Gestapo was established on [April 26, 1933](#) in [Prussia](#), from the existing organization of the [Prussian Secret Police](#). The Gestapo was first simply a branch of the Prussian Police, known as "Department 1A of the Prussian State Police".

Its first commander was [Rudolf Diels](#) who recruited members from professional [police](#) departments and ran the Gestapo as a federal police agency, comparable to several modern examples such as the [Federal Bureau of Investigation](#). The Gestapo's role as a political police force was only established after [Hermann Göring](#) was appointed to succeed Diels as the Gestapo Commander, in 1934. It was Göring who invented the term "Gestapo" (at first called *Gestapa*) and urged the Nazi government to expand Gestapo power out of Prussia to encompass all of Germany. To this, Göring was mostly successful except in [Bavaria](#), where [Heinrich Himmler](#) (head of the SS), served as the Bavarian Police President and used local SS units as a political police force.


In April of 1934, Göring and Himmler agreed to put aside all differences (due in large part to a combined hatred of the *Sturmabteilung*) and Göring handed over full command of the Gestapo to the authority of the SS. At that point, the Gestapo was combined into the *Sicherheitspolizei* and considered a sister organization to the *Sicherheitsdienst* or SD.

The role of the Gestapo was to investigate and combat "all tendencies dangerous to the State." It had the authority to investigate [treason](#), [espionage](#) and [sabotage](#) cases, and cases of criminal attacks on the [Nazi Party](#) and on [Germany](#).

The law had been changed in such a way that the Gestapo's actions were not subject to [judicial review](#). Nazi jurist Dr. [Werner Best](#) stated, "As long as the [Gestapo] ... carries out the will of the leadership, it is acting legally." The Gestapo was specifically exempted from responsibility to administrative courts, where citizens normally could [sue](#) the state to conform to laws.

The power of the Gestapo most open to misuse was "Schutzhaft" or "protective custody" — a [euphemism](#) for the power to imprison people without judicial proceedings, typically in [concentration camps](#). The person imprisoned even had to sign his or her own *Schutzhaftbefehl*, the document declaring that the person desired to be imprisoned. Normally this signature was forced by beatings and [torture](#).



 Heinrich Himmler (left) chief of the SS, with Adolf Hitler (right)
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Increasing power under the SS

Laws passed in 1936 effectively gave the Gestapo *carte blanche* to operate without judicial oversight. A further law passed in the same year declared the Gestapo to be responsible for the set-up and administration of concentration camps. Also in 1936, Reinhard Heydrich became head of the Gestapo and Heinrich Müller chief of operations (although Müller assumed overall command after Heydrich's assassination in 1942). Adolf Eichmann was Müller's direct subordinate and head of department IV, section B4, which dealt with Jews.

During World War II, the Gestapo was expanded to around 45,000 members.

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Keeping Hitler in power

By February and March 1942, student protests were calling for an end to the Nazi regime. These protests included non-violent resistance of Hans and Sophie Scholl, two of the leaders of the White Rose student group. Despite the significant popular support for the removal of Hitler, resistance groups and those who were in moral or political opposition to the Nazis were stalled into inaction by the fear of reprisals from the Gestapo. In fact, reprisals did come in response to the protests. Fearful of an internal overthrow, the forces of Himmler and the Gestapo were unleashed on the opposition. The first five months of 1943 witnessed thousands of arrests and executions as the Gestapo exercised a severity hitherto unseen by the German public. Student leaders were executed in late February, and a major opposition organization, the Oster Circle, was destroyed in April 1943.

The German opposition was in an unenviable position by the late spring and early summer of 1943. On one hand, it was next to impossible for them to overthrow Hitler and the party. On the other hand, because of the Allied demand of unconditional surrender, and therefore no opportunity for a compromise peace, there seemed to be no other alternative but to continue the military struggle.

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Opposition from within Germany

Despite fear of the Gestapo, some German people did speak out and show signs of protest during the summer of 1943. Despite the mass arrests and executions of the spring, the opposition still plotted and planned. Some Germans were convinced that it was their duty to apply all possible expedients to end the war as quickly as possible, that is, to further the German defeat with all available means.

The fall of Benito Mussolini gave the opposition plotters more hope to be able to achieve similar results in Germany and seemed to provide a propitious moment to assassinate Hitler and overthrow the Nazi regime. Several Hitler assassination plots were planned, albeit mostly in abject terms. The only serious attempt was carried out under the codename Operation Valkyrie, in which several of Hitler's generals attempted a coup d'état. On July 20, 1944, Colonel Claus Schenk von Stauffenberg brought a bomb-laden suitcase into a briefing room where Hitler was holding a meeting. The bomb went off and several were killed. Hitler, along with several others, was wounded, but his life was saved by the conference table, which absorbed the blast. 7,000 people were arrested and 5,000, including von Stauffenberg, were executed in connection with the coup, some within twenty-four hours.

During June, July, and August, Himmler's forces continued to move swiftly against the opposition, rendering any organized opposition impossible. Arrests and executions were common. Terror against the people had become a way of life. A second major reason was that the opposition's peace feelers to the western Allies did not meet with success.

This was in part due to the aftermath of the Venlo incident of 1939, when Gestapo agents posing as anti-Nazis in the Netherlands kidnapped two British Secret Intelligence Service officers lured to a meeting to discuss peace terms. That prompted Winston Churchill to ban any further contact with the German opposition. In addition, the British and Americans did not want to deal with anti-Nazis because they were fearful that the Soviet Union would believe they were attempting to make deals behind their backs.

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Nuremberg Trials

Between 14 November 1945, and 1 October 1946, the allies also established an International Military Tribunal (IMT) to try 24 major Nazi war criminals and six groups. They were to be tried for crimes against peace, war crimes, and crimes against humanity.

Leaders, organizers, instigators, and accomplices participating in the formulation or execution of a common plan or conspiracy to commit the crimes so specified were declared responsible for all acts performed by any persons in execution of such plan. The official positions of defendants as heads of state or holders of high government offices were not to free them from responsibility or mitigate their punishment; nor was the fact that a defendant acted pursuant to an order of a superior to excuse him from responsibility, although it might be considered by the IMT in mitigation of punishment.

At the trial of any individual member of any group or organization, the IMT was authorized to declare (in connection with any act of which the individual was convicted) that the group or organization to which he belonged was a criminal organization. And where a group or organization was so declared criminal, the competent national authority of any signatory was given the right to bring individuals to trial for membership in that organization, in which trial the criminal nature of the group or organization was to be taken as proved.



Gestapo founder Hermann Göring at the Nuremberg trials

These groups, the Nazi leadership corps, the Reich Cabinet, the German General Staff and High Command, the SA (Sturmabteilung), the SS (Schutzstaffel-including the Sicherheitsdienst, or SD), and the **Gestapo** (Secret Police), had an aggregate membership exceeding two million, and it was estimated that approximately half of them would be made liable for trial if the groups were convicted.

The trials began in November 1945, and on October 1, 1946, the IMT rendered its judgment on 21 top officials of the Third Reich. The IMT sentenced most of the accused to death or to extensive prison terms and acquitted three. The IMT also convicted three of the groups: the Nazi leadership corps, the SS (including the SD), and the Gestapo. Gestapo members Hermann Göring and Arthur Seyss-Inquart were individually convicted by the IMT.

Three groups were acquitted of collective war crimes charges, but this did not relieve individual members of those groups from conviction and punishment under the Denazification program. Members of the three convicted groups were subject to apprehension and trial as war criminals by the national, military, and occupation courts of the four allied powers. And, even though individual members of the convicted groups might be acquitted of war crimes, they still remained subject to trial under the Denazification program.

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Today

After the Nuremberg Trials, the Gestapo ceased to exist.

In 1997, Cologne, Germany, transformed the former regional Gestapo headquarters in that city, the EL-DE Haus, into a museum to document the organization's past actions. Although the museum's purpose is historical and educational, it is sometimes considered vulgar and

offensive, especially by those who were psychologically traumatized, tortured, or otherwise hurt by the Gestapo.

Mention of the word "Gestapo", even when using the word as a reference to any sort of unrestricted police, is widely considered to be improper or insulting. In various countries of Central and Eastern Europe, the term is used to denote in a derogatory manner all police forces, but particularly the communist-era riot police, such as ZOMO.

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Organization

When the Gestapo was founded, the organization was already a well-established bureaucratic mechanism, having been created out of the already existing Prussian Secret Police. In 1934, the Gestapo was transferred from the Prussian Interior Ministry to the authority of the SS, and for the next five years the Gestapo underwent a massive expansion.

In 1939, the entire Gestapo was placed under the authority of the RSHA, a main office of the SS. Within the RSHA, the Gestapo was known as "Amt IV". The internal organization of the group was as follows:

[[edit](#)]

Referat N: Central Intelligence Office

The Central Command Office of the Gestapo, formed in 1941. Before 1939, the Gestapo command was under the authority of the office of the Sicherheitspolizei und SD, to which answered the Commanding General of the Gestapo. Between 1939 and 1941, the Gestapo was run directly through the overall command of the *Reichsicherheitshauptamt* (RSHA).

[[edit](#)]

Department A (Enemies)

- Communists (A1)
- Countersabotage (A2)
- Reactionaries and Liberals (A3)
- Assassinations (A4)

[[edit](#)]

Department B (Sects and Churches)

- Catholics (B1)
- Protestants (B2)
- Freemasons (B3)
- Jews (B4)
- Colored People (B5)

[\[edit\]](#)

Department C (Administration and Party Affairs)

The central administrative office of the Gestapo, responsible for card files of all personnel.

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Department D (Occupied Territories)

- Opponents of the Regime (D1)
- Churches and Sects (D2)
- Records and Party Matters (D3)
- Western Territories (D4)
- Counter-espionage (D5)
- Alients (D6)

[\[edit\]](#)

Department E (Counter-Intelligence)

- In the Reich (E1)
- Policy Formation (E2)
- In the West (E3)
- In Scandinavia (E4)
- In the East (E5)
- In the South (E6)

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Department F (Frontier and Border Police)

The border guards of Germany answered directly to the Gestapo as an effort to keep close track of immigration and emigration to and from the Reich. After the start of the World War II, the office of the Border Police lost most of its authority to the German military, who patrolled the borders of Germany and the occupied territories as part of counter efforts to an Allied invasion.

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Local Offices

The local offices of the Gestapo were known as *Gestapostellen* and *Gestapoleitstellen*. These offices answered to a local commander known as the *Inspektor der Sicherheitspolizei und SD* who, in turn, was under the dual command of *Referat N* of the Gestapo and also local SS and Police Leaders. The classic image of the Gestapo officer, dressed in trench coat and hat, can be attributed to Gestapo personnel assigned to local offices in German cities and larger towns. This image seems to have been popularized by the assassination of the former Chancellor General Kurt von Schleicher in 1934. General von Schleicher and his wife were gunned down

in their Berlin home by three men dressed in black trench coats and wearing black fedoras. The killers of General von Schleicher were widely believed to have been Gestapo men. At a press conference held later the same day, Hermann Göring was asked by foreign correspondents to respond to a hot rumor that General von Schleicher had been murdered in his home. Goring stated that the Gestapo had attempted to arrest Schleicher, but that he had been “shot while attempting to resist arrest”.

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Auxiliary Duties

The Gestapo also maintained offices at all Nazi concentration camps, held an office on the staff of the SS and Police Leaders, and supplied personnel on an as-needed basis to such formations as the Einsatzgruppen. Such personnel, assigned to these auxiliary duties, were typically removed from the Gestapo chain of command and fell under the authority of other branches of the SS.

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The Daily Operations of the Gestapo

Contrary to popular belief, the Gestapo was not an omnipotent agency that had its agents in every nook and cranny of German society. So-called “V-men” as undercover Gestapo agents were known only to be used to infiltrate Social Democratic and Communist opposition groups, but these cases were the exception, not the rule.


As the analysis of the *Gestapostellen* done by the historian Robert Gellately has established, for the most part the Gestapo was made of bureaucrats and clerical workers who depended upon denunciations by ordinary Germans for their information. Indeed, the Gestapo was overwhelmed with denunciations and spent most of its time sorting out the credible denunciations from less credible ones. Far from being an all-powerful agency that knew everything about what was happening in German society, the local *Gestapostellen* were under-staffed, over-worked offices that struggled with the paper-load caused by so many denunciations. The ratio of Gestapo officers to the general public was extremely lop-sided; for example, in the region of Lower Franconia, which had about one million people in the 1930s, there was only one Gestapo office for the entire region, which had 28 people attached to it, of whom half were clerical workers.

Furthermore, for information about what was happening in German society, the *Gestapostellen* were most part dependent upon these denunciations. Thus, it was ordinary Germans by their willingness to denounce one another who supplied the Gestapo with the information that determined who the Gestapo arrested. The popular picture of the Gestapo with its spies everywhere terrorizing German society has been firmly rejected by most historians.

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Gestapo counterintelligence



 Insignia pins such as these were issued to Gestapo officers.

The Polish government in exile in London during World War II received sensitive military information about Nazi Germany from agents and informants throughout Europe. After Germany conquered Poland in the fall of 1939, Gestapo officials believed that they had neutralized Polish intelligence activities. Cooperation of NKVD and **Gestapo**: In March 1940 representatives of NKVD and Gestapo meet for one week in Zakopane, for the coordination of the pacification of resistance in Poland. The Soviet Union delivered hundreds of German and Austrian communists to Gestapo, as unwanted foreigners, together with relevant documents. However an advanced Polish intelligence network developed throughout Europe to provide information to the Allies.

Some of the Polish information about the movement of German police and SS units to the East during the German invasion of the Soviet Union in the fall of 1941 was similar to information British intelligence secretly got through intercepting and decoding German police and SS messages sent by radio telegraphy.

In 1942, the Gestapo discovered a cache of Polish intelligence documents in Prague and were surprised to see that Polish agents and informants had been gathering detailed military information and smuggling it out to London, via Budapest and Istanbul. The Poles identified had tracked German military trains to the Eastern front and identified four Order Police (*Ordnungspolizei*) battalions sent to conquered areas of the Soviet Union in October 1941 and engaged in war crimes and mass murder.

Polish agents also gathered detailed information about the morale of German soldiers in the East. After uncovering a sample of the information the Poles had reported, Gestapo officials concluded that Polish intelligence activity represented a very serious danger to Germany. As late as June 6, 1944, Heinrich Müller, head of the Gestapo, concerned about the leakage of information to the allied forces, set up a special unit called Sonderkommando Jerzy, designed to root out the Polish intelligence network in western and southwestern Europe.

Sicherheitsdienst

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Sicherheitsdienst (SD) sleeve insignia.

The ***Sicherheitsdienst*** (SD, Security Service) was the intelligence service of the SS. The organization was the first Nazi Party intelligence organization to be established and was considered a "sister organization" with the Gestapo. Between 1933 and 1939, the SD was under the authority of the *Sicherheitspolizei*, after which it was transferred to the authority of the *Reichsicherheitshauptamt*.

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History

The SD was created in 1932 by Reinhard Heydrich and became more powerful after the Nazis took control of Germany. It was in some competition with the *Sturmabteilung* (SA), but under its chief, Heydrich, on June 9, 1934, it was made the sole "Party information service". In 1938 it was made the intelligence organization for the State as well as for the Party, supporting the *Gestapo* and working with the General and Interior Administration.

The SD was tasked with the detection of actual or potential enemies of the Nazi leadership and the neutralization of this opposition. To fulfill this task, the SD created an organization of agents and informants throughout the Reich and later throughout the occupied territories. The organization consisted of a few hundred full-time agents and several thousand informants. The SD was the information-gathering agency, and the *Gestapo*, and to a degree the *Kriminalpolizei*, was the executive agency of the political police system. Both the SD and the

Gestapo were effectively under the control of Heinrich Himmler as Chief of the German Police.

In 1936 the police were divided into the *Ordnungspolizei* (ORPO or Order Police) and the *Sicherheitspolizei* (*Sipo* or Security Police). The *Ordnungspolizei* consisted of the *Schutzpolizei* (Safety Police), the *Gendarmerie* (Rural Police), and the *Gemeindepolizei* (Local Police). The *Sicherheitspolizei* was composed of the *Reichs Kriminalpolizei* (*Kripo*) and the *Geheime Staatspolizei* (*Gestapo*). Heydrich became Chief of the Security Police and SD.

The *Sicherheitspolizei* was centralized in the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* (RSHA, Reich Security Main Office). The operational sections of the SD became *Amt III* (except for foreign intelligence which was placed in *Amt VI*); the *Gestapo* became *Amt IV* and the *Kripo* became *Amt V*. Otto Ohlendorf was named the Chief of *Amt III*, the SD-Inland (within Germany); Heinrich Müller was named the Chief of *Amt IV*, the *Gestapo*; Artur Nebe was named the Chief of *Amt V*; and Walter Schellenberg became Chief of *Amt VI*, the SD-Ausland (outside Germany). Later, in 1944, most of the sections of the *Abwehr* (military intelligence) were incorporated into *Amt VI*.

Heydrich was Chief of the Security Police and SD (RSHA) until his assassination in 1942, after which Ernst Kaltenbrunner became Chief. Kaltenbrunner took office on January 30, 1943, and remained there until the end of the war. The SD was declared a criminal organization after the war and its members were tried as war criminals at Nuremberg.

[edit]

Organization

The SD was one of the oldest security organizations of the SS and was first formed in 1931 as the *Ic-Dienst*, operating out of a single apartment and answering directly to Heinrich Himmler. By 1933, the organization was known as the *SD-Amt* and, in 1934, became the basis for the official state security organization of the *Sicherheitspolizei*. In 1939, the SD was divided into two offices, the *Inland-SD* and *Ausland-SD*, and placed under the authority of the RSHA.

By 1941, the SD had been organized into the following sections:

[edit]

Inland-SD

The Inland-SD was responsible for intelligence and security within Germany and was divided into the following sub-offices:

- Department A (Law and Legal Structures)
- Department B (Race and Ethnic Matters)
- Department C (Cultural and Religious Matters)
- Department D (Industry and Commerce)
- Department E (High Society)

[[edit](#)]

Ausland-SD

The Ausland-SD was the civilian foreign intelligence agency of the Third Reich. In 1944, the Ausland-SD also took over all functions of the Abwehr. The Ausland-SD was divided into the following sections:

- Department A (Organization and Administration)
- Department B (Espionage in the West)
- Department C (Espionage in the Soviet Union and Japan)
- Department D (Espionage in the American sphere)
- Department E (Espionage in Eastern Europe)
- Department F (Technical Matters)

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Security Forces

The SD was the main source of security forces in occupied territories, and SD battalions were typically placed under the command of the SS and Police Leaders. The SD also maintained a presence at all concentration camps and supplied personnel, on an as needed basis, to such special organizations as the Einsatzgruppen. The SD was also the primary agency, in conjunction with the Ordnungspolizei, assigned to maintain order and security in the Jewish Ghettos of Poland. The typical image of SS troops, storming through ghettos murdering innocent victims, can be attributed to SD troops under the command of local SS and Police Leaders.

[[edit](#)]

Local Offices

The SD also maintained local offices in Germany's cities and larger towns. The small offices were known as *SD-Unterabschnitte*, and the larger offices were referred to as *SD-Abschnitte*. All SD offices answered to a local commander known as the *Inspektor des Sicherheitspolizei und SD* who, in turn, was under the dual command of the RSHA and local SS and Police Leaders.

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Kriminalpolizei

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Kriminalpolizei is the usual designation of the criminal investigation services in the police forces of Germany, Austria and the German-speaking part of Switzerland.

[[edit](#)]

Germany, from 1936 to 1945

The *Kriminalpolizei* was the professional detective service of Germany between 1936 and 1945. Known as the *Kripo*, the Kriminalpolizei were commanded by Artur Nebe until 1944, when Nebe was denounced and presumably executed after the attempt to kill Adolf Hitler in July 1944. In the last year of its existence, the Kripo was commanded by Ernst Kaltenbrunner, indirectly through the RSHA.

The Kriminalpolizei typically worked in conjunction with the Ordnungspolizei with administrative needs furnished by the SS-Hauptamt. The Kripo was organized in a tier system, with central offices in all towns and smaller cities. These, in turn, answered to headquarters offices in the larger German cities which answered to the Central Office of the Kriminalpolizei, considered a sub-office of the RSHA.

The Kriminalpolizei was mainly concerned with serious crimes such as rape, murder, and arson. A main area of the group's focus was also on "blackout burglary", considered a serious problem during bombing raids where criminals would raid abandoned homes, shops, and factories for any available valuables.

Kripo members were considered full members of the Allgemeine-SS but could also hold corresponding Orpo rank. Most Kripo detectives referred to themselves by police investigator titles such as *Kriminalrat*, instead of SS or Orpo rank. The Kripo was also one of the manpower agencies upon which the Einsatzgruppen were formed and several senior Kripo commanders, Artur Nebe among them, were assigned as Einsatzgruppen Commanders.

The novel *Fatherland*, set in an alternate history where Germany won the Second World War, focuses around a central character (Xavier March) who is a Sturmbannführer in the office of the Kriminalpolizei. Artur Nebe also appears in the novel as an Oberstgruppenführer, still serving as the commander of the Kripo twenty years after the close of World War II.

[[edit](#)]

Germany, after 1945

The criminal investigation services of Germany's federal states' police forces are also called *Kriminalpolizei*. They are organized variously according to state law and report to their state's interior ministry. As policing in the Federal Republic of Germany is primarily a matter of the states the state Kriminalpolizei services have responsibility for the vast majority of criminal investigations.

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Ordnungspolizei

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Flag of the Ordnungspolizei

The **Ordnungspolizei** was the name for the regular German police force that existed in [Nazi Germany](#) between the years of [1936](#) and [1945](#).

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History

Translated as "order police", *Ordnungspolizei* referred to police units formed by an act of the German Interior Ministry in the summer of 1936. The act decreed that the regular German police forces were to be absorbed into the SS, which would then incorporate all local, state, and national level law enforcement agencies.

The police were divided into the *Ordnungspolizei* (*Orpo* or regular police), the *Sicherheitspolizei* (*Sipo* or security police), and the *Kriminalpolizei* (*Kripo* or criminal police). The Orpo assumed duties of regular law enforcement while the Sipo consisted of the Gestapo and Sicherheitsdienst (SD). The *Kriminalpolizei* was a core of professional detectives who were tasked with investigating violent and serious crimes. The Kripo existed on a fine line between full SS and regular police until 1942, when the Kripo, SD, and Gestapo were all combined under the authority of the Reichssicherheitshauptamt (RSHA).

[[edit](#)]

Organization

The Orpo was commanded by SS-Oberstgruppenführer Kurt Daluege, who reported directly to Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler. As part of his duties as commander of the SS, which now controlled the Orpo, Himmler was also named as *Chef der Deutschen Polizei*. By 1941, the Orpo had been divided into the following offices, covering every aspect of German law enforcement.

[[edit](#)]

Hauptamt Ordnungspolizei

The Hauptamt Ordnungspolizei was the central command office of the entire Ordnungspolizei and was considered a full SS-Headquarters command.

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Schutzpolizei

The Schutzpolizei served as Germany's municipal police force and was tasked with maintaining order in German cities and larger towns. The Schutzpolizei was further divided into the following:

Schutzpolizei des Reiches (cities and large towns),
Schutzpolizei der Gemeinden (smaller towns), and the
Kasernierte Polizei (police reserve and riot suppression).

[[edit](#)]

Gendarmerie

The Gendarmerie—the rural police—was tasked with frontier law enforcement to include small communities, landward districts, and mountainous terrain. Members of the Gendarmerie were mainly employed to combat poaching and also as Alpine troops for homeland defense.

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Verwaltungspolizei

The Verwaltungspolizei was the administrative branch of the Orpo and had overall command authority for all Orpo police stations. The Verwaltungspolizei also was the central office for record keeping and was the command authority for civilian law enforcement groups, which included the *Gesundheitspolizei* (health police), *Gewerbepolizei* (commercial or trade police), and the *Baupolizei* (building police).

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Verkehrspolizei

The Verkehrspolizei (traffic police) was the traffic-law enforcement agency and road-safety administration of Germany. The organization patrolled Germany's highways and responded to major accidents. The Verkehrspolizei was also the primary escort service for high Nazi leaders who traveled extensive distances by automobile.

[[edit](#)]

Wasserschutzpolizei

The Wasserschutzpolizei ("water protection" police) was the coast guard of the Third Reich. Tasked with the safety and security of Germany's rivers, harbors, and inland waterways, the group also had authority over the *SS-Hafensicherungstruppen* which were Allgemeine-SS units assigned as port security personnel.

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Bahnschutzpolizei

The Bahnschutzpolizei (railway police) was made up of part-time police officers who were also employees of the *Reichsbahn* (state railway). The Bahnschutzpolizei was tasked with railway safety and also preventing espionage and sabotage of railway property.

[[edit](#)]

Postschutz

The Postschutz (postal police) comprised roughly 4,500 members and was tasked with security at Germany's post offices and ensuring the security of other communications mediums such as telephone and telegraph lines.

[[edit](#)]

Feuerschutzpolizei

In 1938, all of Germany's local fire brigades were absorbed into the Ordnungspolizei. The Feuerschutzpolizei (fire protection police) thus consisted of all of Germany's local fire departments under a national command structure. The Feuerschutzpolizei also had authority over the *Freiwillige Feuerwehren*, the local volunteer civilian fire brigades.

At the height of the Second World War, in response to heavy bombing of Germany's cities, the combined Feuerschutzpolizei und Freiwillige Feuerwehren numbered nearly two million in membership.

[[edit](#)]

Luftschutzpolizei

The Luftschutzpolizei (air civil defence police) was the civil protection service in charge of air raid defence and rescue. The Luftschutzpolizei was subdivided into the *Reichsluftschutzbund* (national civil defense), the *Luftschutz Warndienst* (air raid alert service), and the *Sicherheits und Hilfsdienst* (security and rescue service), an emergency service that rescued victims of bombings.

[[edit](#)]

Technische Nothilfe

Known as the *TeNo*, the Technische Nothilfe (technical emergency corps) was a police formation in charge of breaking strike actions and suppressing civil uprisings. By 1943, the TeNo had over 100,000 members.

[[edit](#)]

Funkschutz

The Funkschutz ("radio guard") was made up of SS and Orpo security personnel assigned to protect German radio stations from attack and sabotage. The Funkschutz was the also the primary investigating service for illegal reception of foreign radio broadcasts.

[[edit](#)]

Werkschutzpolizei

The Werkschutzpolizei (factory protection police) were the night watchmen of the Third Reich. Its personnel were civilians who answered to a central Orpo office and typically were issued paramilitary uniforms, mostly surplus black or grey Allgemeine-SS jackets with Orpo insignia.

[[edit](#)]

Police Battalions

Between 1939 and 1945, the Ordnungspolizei also maintained separate military formations, independent of the main police offices within Germany. The first such formations were the Police Battalions, established for law enforcement in occupied territories and anti-partisan duties. The Police Battalions were under the authority of local SS and Police Leaders and were used, more often than not, as security forces patrolling the Jewish ghettos of Poland. The Police Battalions were also the primary pool from which the Einsatzgruppen drew personnel in accordance with manpower needs. The majority of police battalions formed 28 Police Regiments, many of which saw combat on the Eastern Front.

It should be noted that the regular military police of the Wehrmacht were separate from the Ordnungspolizei.

[[edit](#)]

Waffen-SS Police Division

The primary military arm of the *Ordnungspolizei* was the 4th Panzergrenadier Division of the Waffen-SS, known as the SS Polizei Division. Mainly used as a rear guard and reserve formation, the Polizei Division was historically known as being under-trained and lacking in skilled combat tactics. The division consisted of four police regiments comprised of Orpo personnel and was typically used to rotate police members into a military situation, so as not to lose police personnel to the general draft of the Wehrmacht or to the full SS divisions of the regular Waffen-SS.

Very late in the war several Orpo SS-Police regiments were transferred to the Waffen-SS to form the 35th SS and Police Grenadier Division.

[[edit](#)]

Orpo and SS Unity

The Ordnungspolizei was considered a full branch of the SS but maintained a separate system of insignia and Orpo ranks. It was also possible for SS members to hold dual status in both the Orpo and the SS, and SS-generals were referred to simultaneously by both rank titles. For instance, an *Obergruppenführer* in the SS who was also a police general would be referred to as *Obergruppenführer und General der Polizei*. In addition, all Orpo police generals gained equivalent Waffen-SS rank in 1944, so that they would be treated as military officers, instead of police officials, if captured by the Allies. Subsequently Orpo generals who were also members of the SS would be referred to as *SS-Obergruppenführer und General der Polizei und Waffen-SS*.

Heinrich Himmler's ultimate desire for the Ordnungspolizei was to eventually phase the organization out of existence and replace the regular police forces of Germany with a combined racial/state protection corps of pure SS units. In Himmler's dream, local law enforcement would be undertaken by the Allgemeine-SS with the Waffen-SS providing homeland-security and political-police functions. Historical analysis of the Third Reich has revealed that senior Orpo personnel knew of Himmler's plans and were very much against the extinction of the Ordnungspolizei in favor of an SS state police.

[edit]

Orpo legacy

At the close of the Second World War, the Orpo ceased to exist; but many of its personnel continued with business as usual, performing police services for the Allied occupation forces. The traditions of the Orpo continued in East Germany, which maintained a state police force designed closely after Orpo and SS structures. In West Germany, the police were decentralized and law enforcement functions given back to local authorities. The exception was the Landespolizei, which continues to this day as the police force patrolling the Bundesländer of Germany. Many Landespolizei regulations, procedures, and even some uniforms and insignia, can be traced back to Orpo origins.