

Jehovah's Witnesses in National Socialist Concentration Camps, 1933–45*

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Introduction

With thousands incarcerated in the prisons and concentration camps of the 'Third Reich', Jehovah's Witnesses, or *Ernstes Bibelforscher* (Earnest Bible Students), were among the main and earliest victim groups of the terror apparatus of the National Socialists between 1933 and 1945. The Watchtower History Archive of Jehovah's Witnesses in Selters/Taunus, Germany (WTA, Zentralkartei), has thus far registered a total of over 4200 names of male (2900) and female (1300) believers of different nationalities who went through a National Socialist concentration camp by the end of the regime in 1945.¹ Between 1933 and 1935/36 members of this Christian faith were sent to official early camps, and then in far greater numbers to the newly established 'modern' main concentration camps (*Stammlager*), such as Sachsenhausen (1936), Buchenwald (1937) and Ravensbrück (1939). A total of 2800 males and females went through these three camps alone by 1945. Allegedly enemies of the state, the Witnesses proved, as historian Christine King (1982, p. 169) has observed, to be 'a small but memorable band of prisoners, marked by the violet triangle and noted for their courage and their convictions'.

When the concentration camp system was reorganised in 1936, the SS administration, controlled by Heinrich Himmler,² introduced an elaborate classification of prisoners by means of badges with triangles and with black, green, pink, purple and red colours. Jehovah's Witnesses in the Sachsenhausen concentration camp were assigned the purple triangle in July 1936 (Eberle, 2005, p. 92); other camps followed in 1937/38 (Orth, 1999, p. 57; Pingel, 1978, pp. 76, 90). In the opinion of historian Detlef Garbe (2002, p. 94), who has written an extensive study of the history and persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses in Hitler's Germany, this kind of differentiation 'took into account the actual "special position" of this group, which differed markedly from the other prisoner categories in its behaviour'. This article aims to identify these special

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characteristics and, in addition, to delineate the chronology of incarceration and the evolution of the concentration camp system and to assess the Jehovah's Witnesses' share of the overall concentration camp population.

Table 1 presents an updated summary of the statistics of persecution. The Watchtower History Archive, which at the moment has on record about 13,400 names of believers persecuted in National Socialist Germany and in occupied countries, has identified 1490 deaths: 370 females and males were executed, among them over 270 men for conscientious objection (see also Herrberger, 2005, p. 235; Schmidt, 2005a, p. 77). Of the approximately 25,000 members in Germany (as of April 1933), 10,700 suffered from loss of employment or pension, imprisonment, house searches, the seizure of their children and other forms of state persecution, 8800 German believers were arrested and 2800 sent to concentration camps (30.8 per cent). Of the 11,300 Witnesses from various countries who were taken into custody, 4200 (37 per cent) were 'deported' or sent to a concentration camp.³ So far the names are known of some 950 camp prisoners (22 per cent) who lost their lives, including those Witnesses who fell victim to the National Socialist 'euthanasia' programme. The latter, which encompassed the murder of physically and mentally disabled who were deemed 'unworthy of life', was extended to the concentration camps in December 1941. The vast majority, or 63.7 per cent, of the 1490 Jehovah's Witnesses of different nationalities who lost their lives during the National Socialist persecution from 1933 to 1945 died as concentration camp prisoners or shortly after liberation.

In 1933 more than 25,000 active Jehovah's Witnesses in Germany were part of a world-wide organisation, known in Germany as the *Internationale Bibelforscher-Vereinigung* (IBV). (The International Bible Students Association (IBSA) was a legal body of Jehovah's Witnesses in Britain and abroad.) In addition, the publications produced by the *Wachturm-Gesellschaft* in Magdeburg (Prussia), the German branch of the Watchtower Society of Jehovah's Witnesses in Brooklyn, New York (USA), had a readership of over half a million in Germany. Although the state of Prussia banned both corporations, the IBV and the *Wachturm-Gesellschaft*, and the religious activities of Jehovah's Witnesses on 24 June 1933, the German authorities partly rescinded this ban on the German Watchtower Society and the confiscation of property on 7 October 1933 on account of its 'American' legal roots (Yearbook, 1974, p. 116; Garbe, 1999, pp. 108–11; Helmreich, 1979, pp. 392–94). This proved to be a temporary respite: in April 1935 the authorities ordered the disbanding (*Auflösung*) of the Society in Germany (NT, T–175 (both refs); see also Zipfel, 1965, p. 182). This

Table 1. Statistics on the Persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses, 1933–45 (based on registered names of victims in WTA as of November 2005)

	Active Members (see Note 27)	Numbers Persecuted	Deaths	Witnesses Arrested and Imprisoned	Witnesses Sent to Concentration Camps	Deaths in Concentration Camps
Germany	25,000 (c. 12,000)	10,700	950	8800	2800 (31.8 per cent)	540 (19 per cent)
Other countries (occupied)	c. 10,000	2700	540	2500	1400 (56 per cent)	410 (27 per cent)
Total number	c. 35,000 (c. 22,000)	13,400	1490	11,300	4200 (37 per cent)	950 (22 per cent)

action has been interpreted as a 'general ban' on Jehovah's Witnesses on a national level, and as giving the impression that their persecution primarily began in 1935 (Kater, 1969, p. 192; Lahrtz, 2003, pp. 91–96). Although it is true that repression and arrests intensified in 1935 and 1936/37, the persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses in Germany was not significantly relaxed after the initial June 1933 ban in Prussia. Other *Länder* (states) of the German Reich, such as Mecklenburg-Schwerin, Bavaria, Saxony and Hesse, had already banned the IBV and Witness activities in April 1933 (Yearbook, 1974, p. 109; Garbe, 1999, pp. 90–91).

Condemned by the National Socialists as 'elements harmful to the German people' (*Volksschädlinge*) and a 'menace to the state' (*staatsgefährlich*), Jehovah's Witnesses, men, women and children, were targeted by the SA (*Sturmabteilung*, 'storm troopers') and organs of the National Socialist Party and the state, notably the bureaucracy, the justice system, the police, the SS and the Gestapo. A major reason for the intensive persecution of the Witnesses was their refusal to comply with National Socialist ideology. They preached about a coming 1000-year reign by Jesus Christ – not by Hitler. They rejected the Führer cult and National Socialist racial extremism, did not vote in elections, and refused to take part in war-related activities or in National Socialist organisations. They viewed themselves as part of an international brotherhood based on Christian love which has to maintain, under all circumstances, a religious-based position of neutrality in political affairs. The Social Democrat Ernst Fraenkel (1941, p. 117), one of the founding fathers of German political science and a practising attorney in Berlin until he fled the 'Third Reich' in 1938, drew attention to other factors behind the National Socialists' visceral hatred for the Witnesses, 'an obstinate sect': their 'astonishing growth during the last seven years' and an uncompromising opposition greater than that of any other 'illegal group'. He repeats the erroneous conclusion of the National Socialists that the Witnesses' 'exclusive worship of Jehovah involves the negation of every kind of secular authority'. Based on a misinterpretation of the Witnesses' religious views on human governments, Gestapo circulars asserted that Jehovah's Witnesses were no 'harmless sect' but were dangerous to the state and to the German people, 'because they deny every kind of state authority' (*da sie jegliche staatliche Autorität ablehnen*) (quote in Kuropka, 1992, p. 288).⁴ But in reality Jehovah's Witnesses rendered to the state and its representatives, or 'unto Caesar', 'the things that are Caesar's' (taxes, respect, relative obedience) and 'unto God the things that are God's' (their worship, life and absolute obedience) (Matthew 22:21; Wrobel, 2003a, p. 122; Wrobel, 2003b, p. 378; Chu, 2004, pp. 323–27; see also King, 1982, pp. 172–73; Johnson, 1999, pp. 238–39).

Opposition, even in the form of a failure to give the 'Heil Hitler' greeting in routine situations, could ultimately send a Jehovah's Witness to a concentration camp. This was the experience of Arthur Nawroth from Breslau (Wrocław). In a typical eyewitness report, he wrote on 14 August 1936 (WTA, Dok 14/08/36; see also Zürcher, 1938, p. 88):

Because of refusing to give the Hitler salute at my place of work and to fulfil other political requirements, I was taken into protective custody, dismissed without notice – and without any compensation – from my place of work, where I had served for 23 years, and sent to a concentration camp. Later I was sentenced to two months in prison. After serving the term I was immediately taken into protective custody again and returned to the concentration camp for several months.

Only a few years later he was one of over 400 Jehovah's Witness prisoners in the Auschwitz concentration camp; Arthur Nawroth died of starvation on 15 October 1942 (WTA, Zentralkartei; Wontor-Cichy, 2003, p. 81).

The Early Camps, 1933–34

Primary sources prove conclusively that Jehovah's Witnesses were among the earliest inmates in the National Socialist prisons, as well as in the concentration camps of the early years. Some of the findings from these sources, as well as from the memoirs of Witnesses, are presented in the following sections. The first round of imprisonments of Jehovah's Witnesses took place in April 1933, after 19,268 brethren had carried out a public evangelising campaign with the Watchtower brochure *Die Krise*.⁵ One of these early victims in April, the shoemaker Friedrich Parsieglo, from Berlin, was sent to the Sonnenburg concentration camp for three months (WTA, Dok 24/03/37, pp. 8–9; WTA, LB Winkler).⁶ During their special Berlin-Wilmersdorf convention on 25 June 1933 the German Witnesses issued a 'Declaration of Facts' explaining their non-political stand and their determination to obey God's Word alone. *The Golden Age* magazine (Persecution, 1934, p. 452) of the Witnesses reported that 'While ... [they] were engaged in the distribution of this Declaration ... [throughout Germany] many of them were arrested and thrown into prison and concentration camps.'⁷ Among those imprisoned were Konrad Franke, from Mainz, and Georg Krautwurst, from Schaafheim, who were held for several weeks in the Osthofen concentration camp (WTA, Zentralkartei). In addition, a number of adult males were taken into 'protective custody' in the Hohnstein, Sachsenburg, Lichtenburg and Moringen camps in 1933, and others were transferred to Bad Sulza camp in 1934 (WTA, Zentralkartei; Meinel, 1934, p. 157; Kleine, 1934, p. 210; Riebe, 1998, p. 125; Hesse, 2000, p. 108). All prisoners in the early camps – especially Jewish citizens – suffered harrowing beatings, torture and ruthless humiliations by SA and SS men, including exhausting slave labour, as documented in eyewitness reports (Konzentrationslager, 1934; see also Zámečník, 1999, p. 73; Reynaud and Graffard, 2001, p. 4).

Since Jehovah's Witnesses refrained from voting in the election of November 1933, many more members were thrown into prisons and the early concentration camps, such as Colditz in Saxony (WTA, Zentralkartei; see also Eberle, 2005, p. 96). On 27 November 1933 the *Bayrische Politische Polizei* (Bavarian Political Police) issued orders 'to take them [Bible Students] into protective custody should the occasion arise', especially if they had failed to participate in the election (Drobisch and Wieland, 1993, p. 202). According to *The Golden Age* (Persecution, 1934, pp. 456, 461)

In Saxony alone more than 500 brethren were in concentration camps. ... [We know that] nearly a thousand of our brethren were imprisoned one time or another and that particularly in Saxony our brethren were beaten and ill-treated in the concentration camps.

Alfred Skoda, from Burgstädt, recalls that in 1933, 'because the concentration camps were overcrowded', he was put in a prison cell together with other Witnesses for some time before his sudden release in January 1934 (WTA, LB Skoda). In November 1933 the German newspaper *Heider Anzeiger* reported that 'Earnest Bible Students held meetings despite the existing ban' in the district and that several members 'were

imprisoned; two of them were given a stern warning and were released after two days in protective custody; another member was transferred to a concentration camp' (WTA, Per 23/11/33). The German-language edition of *The Golden Age* (Verfolgungen, 1934, pp. 10–12) published letters from German believers that mention the names of early camps, such as Sachsenburg, Hohnstein, Colditz (all in Saxony) and Heuberg (in Württemberg). Although most of the imprisoned Witnesses were released after a while, others were taken into custody in increasing numbers and fines were imposed by the courts on other believers. Until the spring of 1934, however, a few courts in Germany, like the Special Court (*Sondergericht*) in Darmstadt on 26 March 1934, even passed decisions in favour of accused Witnesses which resulted in several being acquitted; in some areas no imprisonments took place until 1935 when the National Socialists managed to close the legal loopholes (Garbe, 1999, pp. 136–54; Wrobel, 2003b, pp. 422–25).

How many Jehovah's Witnesses suffered imprisonment in these early months is difficult to assess but there is a reliable indication in a Watchtower office report from Prague, dated 10 April 1934, of the size of the inmate population in Germany: '1000 arrests [have been] made, of which some 400 have been sent to concentration camps' (WTA, Dok 10/04/34).⁸ By March 1934, 40 per cent of all Witness arrests resulted in imprisonment in a concentration camp. Since complete statistical data are not available, this rate of 40 per cent, together with other estimates of 20 to 30 per cent, will be used in the remainder of this article as the benchmark for comparison and analysis. (See also Table 2 below.)

More and more Jehovah's Witnesses were experiencing what Wilhelm Peters, from Hamburg, described about 1934 (Report, 1936, pp. 274–75; German original in WTA, Dok 11/11/35):

I was taken to different concentration camps [e.g. Oranienburg and Lichtenburg], where all prisoners are daily brutalized. ... I was beaten almost to death. In the concentration camp in Dachau we and others were often made to understand that if we did not join the Nazi system we would be shot tomorrow.

On 7 October 1934 Jehovah's Witnesses in Germany and in 50 other countries responded to persecution by sending 20,000 telegrams and hundreds of letters to the Hitler government in which they protested against the brutal treatment (Zürcher, 1938, p. 189; Helmreich, 1979, p. 395). An eyewitness report by Eugen Stark, from Ulm, emphasises that this brave action was undertaken not only for freedom of worship but also 'for the sake of our brothers who *were languishing in prisons and concentration camps*' (WTA, LB Stark; italics added). Letters to Hitler from German Witnesses re-emphasised their obligation to obey God's commands exclusively and stressed their determination to continue with their evangelising work. The telegrams from abroad read: 'Your ill-treatment of Jehovah's witnesses shocks all good people of earth and dishonours God's name. Refrain from further persecuting Jehovah's witnesses; otherwise God will destroy you and your national party' (Standing, 1934, pp. 50–51).

The protests failed to halt the onset of a new wave of arrests. In Hamburg, for example, the Gestapo arrested 142 Jehovah's Witnesses (Yearbook, 1974, p. 139). This was followed one year later by the imprisonment of 67 Witnesses from the same city for terms of two to six months on account of the 'action of October 7, 1934' (Report, 1936, p. 275).⁹ Hitler's hysterical reaction to the telegrams and letters was confirmed

Table 2. Arrested Jehovah's Witnesses Sent to Prisons and Concentration Camps 1933–45

	Total Number in Prisons and Camps – Counted from 1933	In Prisons and Camps – Actual Number	In Concentration Camps – Actual and <i>Estimated</i> Number (<i>in italics</i>)
1933–35/36 Period			
By March 1934	1000		400 (40 per cent)
October 1935		over 1000	
December 1935		about 1500	450–600 (30–40 per cent)
By winter 1935/36	2894		
Summer 1936 (releases; Olympic Games amnesty)	about 4000	about 1200	
1936–39 Period (Before War)			
By Winter 1936/37		nearly 4000	800–1200 (20–30 per cent) 1600? (40 per cent)
Winter 1937/38		6000	1200–1800 (20–30 per cent) 2400? (40 per cent)
1939 (before war) (mass releases for Hitler's 50th birthday)		3000 (‘half’ of the 6000 released)	1400 (46.7 per cent)
1939–45 War Period			
By 1945	11,300 (non-Germans included)		2800? (non-Germans included)
Total for Germany (1933–45)	8800 (registered so far)		2800 (31.8 per cent) (registered so far)
Total for Occupied Countries	2500 (number incomplete)		1400 (56 per cent) (number incomplete)
Total 1933–45	11,300		4200 (37 per cent)

by Karl R. Wittig and attested to by a notary in Frankfurt am Main on 13 November 1947. The report reads as follows:

On October 7, 1934, . . . Dr Frick [Interior Minister Wilhelm Frick] showed Hitler a number of telegrams protesting against the Third Reich's persecution of the Bible Students, saying: 'If the Bible Students do not immediately get in line we will act against them using the strongest means.' After which Hitler jumped to his feet and with clenched fists hysterically screamed: 'This brood will be exterminated in Germany!' Four years after this discussion I was able, by my own observations, to convince myself,

during my seven years in protective custody in the hell of the Nazis' concentration camps at Sachsenhausen, Flossenbürg and Mauthausen – I was in prison until released by the Allies – that Hitler's outburst of anger was not just an idle threat. No other group of prisoners of the named concentration camps was exposed to the sadism of the SS soldiery in such a fashion as the Bible Students were. It was a sadism marked by an unending chain of physical and mental tortures, the likes of which no language in the world can express. (Yearbook, 1974, pp. 138–39; Modern, 1955, p. 462)

The term '*ausrotten*' used by Hitler during his outburst is translated here as 'exterminate'. Alternatives include 'eradicate' and 'wipe out'.¹⁰ Although this kind of language indicates his ultimate intention to wipe out the religious community of Jehovah's Witnesses in Germany, the National Socialists' initial approach was to try and 'persuade' Jehovah's Witnesses taken into 'protective custody' to change their convictions and to support and promote the National Socialist system and goals.¹¹ They wanted to 'rescue' them for the People's Community (*Volksgemeinschaft*) or for the good of National Socialist Germany (see also Pingel, 1978, p. 76). The National Socialist concentration camps, which also bore the grotesque designations *Schulungslager* and *Erziehungslager* (reform camps and re-education camps), were intended to bring about this kind of change in attitude, to break and to re-educate enemies of the state – or to destroy the incorrigible (Zürcher, 1938, p. 151; see also Pingel, 1980, p. 12).¹² Sentencing was left to the civil courts. Although those convicted in the early period were released after prison terms of several weeks or months, some Witnesses were sentenced from two to four times (Wrobel, 2003b, pp. 436–38). In November 1935 the Minister of Justice and his judiciary finally lost any possibility of controlling the treatment or killing of prisoners in concentration camps (Tuchel, 1994, p. 40).

The militant SA took the lead in the implementation of the ban on the Witnesses, 'by organizing boycotts of their stores, laying waste to their homes and workplaces during searches, and beating them unmercifully in SA dungeons' (Johnson, 1999, p. 240; see also Koonz, 1987, p. 331). After the Night of the Long Knives in June 1934 the SA ceased to be a major political force, many of their leaders murdered, and the National Socialist courts and the Gestapo took the lead in the persecution.¹³ In the summer of 1934 Theodor Eicke, appointed inspector for concentration camps by Himmler, selected and reorganised one camp in Saxony (Sachsenburg), two in Prussia (Esterwegen and Lichtenburg; later the *Columbia-Haus* in Berlin was added), and one in Bavaria (Dachau) as the official concentration camps under SS administration (Drobisch and Wieland, 1993, pp. 189–91; Broszat, 1982, pp. 185–86). Whereas the majority of Jehovah's Witnesses arrested were remanded in 'protective custody' in prison cells for some time or served a sentence in prisons (Wachsmann, 2004, pp. 125–28), a number were sent to concentration camps, for example to the two *Straflager* ('penal camps') in Sachsenburg (a majority of German Witnesses lived in Saxony) and in Esterwegen, and experienced the power and extreme brutality of the SS (see Ferocity, 1936). In April 1935, 10 to 15 per cent of the inmates of Sachsenburg camp were Jehovah's Witnesses (Drobisch and Wieland, 1993, p. 204). They were sent at first in lesser numbers to the early Dachau and Lichtenburg concentration camps.

How many Witnesses were incarcerated in concentration camps and prisons? A contemporary letter, which drew attention to new arrests in October 1935, mentions that 'at present more than 1,000 of our people are languishing' there (Report, 1936, p. 275; WTA, Dok 11/11/35). Extrapolating from the 30 to 40 per cent among the 1000 Witnesses who were put into concentration camps, we may estimate that 300 to

400 prisoners were to be found in the early camps in autumn 1935. At any rate, what is clear is that the total number of all Witnesses taken into custody since 1933 had steadily increased. On 16 December a Swiss newspaper reported that ‘at present still about 1500 of these god-fearing and good people are in prisons and concentration camps’ (WTA, Per 16/12/35; see also Table 2 above). A report in *The Watchtower*, referring to the winter of 1935–36, states that ‘In one concentration camp there are 600 Jehovah’s Witnesses. ... In Germany 2,894 of Jehovah’s witnesses have been imprisoned, many of whom are still in prison’ (Obadiah, 1936, p. 182).

Since Jehovah’s Witnesses continued their illegal religious activities (religious meetings, evangelising, duplicating and distributing literature), they were remanded in custody in greater numbers throughout the country in 1935. In Bavaria alone, where fewer Witnesses lived than in Saxony, of the 1791 individuals arrested by the Gestapo for various reasons, 7 per cent were accused of ‘prohibited activity on behalf of the *Ernste Bibelforscher*’ between October 1935 and March 1936 (Broszat, 1982, p. 169). Since in 1935 the authorities launched a new wave of arrests of persons suspected of Marxist activity, as historian Martin Broszat (1982, p. 168) states: ‘It may be assumed that a substantial number of the prisoners were, at any rate temporarily, transferred to concentration camps.’ In summary, although overall figures remain unavoidably imprecise, the number of Jehovah’s Witnesses in the concentration camps in the winter of 1935–36 probably ranged from about 600 (20 per cent) to 1000 (40 per cent).

In June 1935 the five concentration camps in Dachau (1800), Lichtenburg (706), Sachsenburg (678), Esterwegen (322) and Moringen (49) held a total of 3500 prisoners; excluding Dachau but including Bad Sulza and Berlin *Columbia-Haus* gives an even smaller total: 3000 prisoners (Königseder, 2005, p. 32; Orth, 1999, p. 32; Tuchel, 1994, p. 34). At that time, the summer of 1935, about 400 Bible Students were among the 678 to 1000 prisoners of the Sachsenburg camp, representing 40 to 58 per cent of the camp population (Zürcher, 1938, p. 150; Drobisch and Wieland, 1993, p. 202; Tuchel, 1991, p. 203). The figures for Jehovah’s Witnesses in the Esterwegen camp fluctuated from 85 (7.7 per cent of the 1100 inmates) to 120 (37 per cent of the 322 inmates) to 300, and for a time they may well have constituted the second largest group after the *Vorbeugehäftlinge* or ‘criminals’ (at least 476 prisoners) (see also Lüerssen, 2002, pp. 163, 171; Tuchel, 1994, p. 34).¹⁴ It is not surprising, then, that other inmates were fully conscious of their presence. In 1935 the communist Wolfgang Langhoff (1935, pp. 311–13) wrote the essay *Die Moorsoldaten* which publicised, mainly outside Germany, the martyrdom of a Bible Student at Lichtenburg camp who refused to give the Hitler greeting. In August 1935 the Swiss newspaper *Nationalzeitung* (WTA, Per 12/08/35) referred to Langhoff’s essay and reported the arrest of a group of Witnesses of which four persons were sent to a concentration camp. Another source, the book *Kreuzzug gegen das Christentum* (Zürcher, 1938, pp. 152–53), printed in May–June 1938 in Switzerland, described how Otto Peters, from Neustadt/Holstein, who, almost deaf and unable to hear a guard’s command, was shot to death in the Esterwegen camp in July 1935 (see also Drobisch and Wieland, 1993, p. 212).

The 1935 Turning-Points

When military service became compulsory in the spring of 1935 the National Socialists had even more reason to resort to the courts not only against male Jehovah’s Witnesses, who generally refused to comply when called up for military service, but also to take action against the whole religious community, including

women and children (for a case study, see Arnold-Liebster, 2000). Before the outbreak of the Second World War convicted conscientious objectors were often sent to a concentration camp after release from prison.

In 1935 Hitler made several decisions to reverse the general fall in the number of prisoners and approved plans to overhaul the concentration camps (Tuchel, 1991, pp. 312–15). Although Witnesses were subjected to extreme intimidation in the early camps, they were not yet a special, or indeed the main, focus of attention for the SS. This is apparent from a Witness report (Report, 1936, p. 276, italics added) from the Sachsenburg camp: 'The *political prisoners and Jews are treated even more cruelly* [than Jehovah's Witnesses], and many Jews have already been tortured to death. The warden of the camp himself stated he would like to crush the face of each prisoner with his heel.' However, Witness prisoners soon found themselves the target of SS brutality. From 1935 onward, Himmler's Gestapo and SS presented Jehovah's Witnesses in 'protective custody' with a special declaration, later called the 'Declaration of Commitment' (*Verpflichtungserklärung*), which they tried to force them into signing. The Declaration required them to pledge their willingness to give up their faith and to collaborate with the Nazi system. R. Arthur Winkler, from Bonn, imprisoned in Esterwegen camp during the late summer of 1935, reported:¹⁵

Attempts were made, with every possible and impossible means, to force them to sign a sworn statement, declaring that they no longer want to be Witnesses, that they will never again resume contact and association with the Witnesses, and that they will no longer read any literature from the Witnesses . . . Those who do not capitulate and remain unwavering in their faith . . . were assigned to a punishment company. In the opinion of the SS, the Witnesses were the worst traitors, incorrigible, and the scum of humankind. . . Even prisoners were incited to threaten recalcitrant Witnesses, in order to instill fear from every possible side. (Winkler, 1938, 1 March, p. 13; English quote in Hesse, 2001, p. 157)

Conditions worsened for all Jehovah's Witnesses in that concentration camp. Placing them in the 'punishment company' (*Strafkompanie*) was a SS reaction to the supposed 'stubbornness' of the Witnesses who refused to sign the Declaration. One survivor, Karl Kirscht, describes what followed: 'More than anyone else Jehovah's Witnesses were the victims of chicanery in the concentration camps. It was thought that in this way they could be persuaded to sign the Declaration. We were repeatedly asked to do so' (Yearbook, 1974, p. 177). Since not many signed the paper, the SS constantly mocked Jehovah's Witnesses in the concentration camps and invented reasons for executing extra camp penalties on them.¹⁶

The prison administration and National Socialist institutions (for example local party offices) also started to pressurise the Jehovah's Witnesses into signing a 'Declaration', whose wording did not, however, follow a standard format (Garbe, 1999, pp. 302–10; Zipfel, 1965, p. 193).¹⁷ The believers were not unwilling to sign certain statements, such as promising not to undertake 'subversive activity against the state', as one Declaration still read before December 1937 at the women's concentration camp at Moringen. However, a change to the Declaration, which made it incumbent on the Witness women to renounce their faith, altered the situation radically (Hesse and Harder, 2001, pp. 60, 66; Harder and Hesse, 2001, pp. 48–49). On 24 December 1938 Himmler, *Reichsführer-SS* and chief of police, decreed that the text of the Declaration should be along the same lines in all prisons and concentration

camps (Garbe, 1999, p. 306). Survivor Nanda Herbermann (quote in Daxelmüller, 2001, p. 30) recalls in her memoirs about the Ravensbrück camp: ‘Hundreds of these pre-printed forms were in the senior guard’s office, but the stack of them never decreased in size. Hardly any female Witness signed such a form.’¹⁸ Even though additional pressure was exerted by members of other groups of prisoners to persuade or even force Witnesses to sign the paper (WTA, LB Emter, p. 5; Garbe, 1999, pp. 426, 463; Kater, 1969, p. 216; see also Wrobel, 2003a, pp. 127–28), on 15 June 1943 the chief of the Security Police and the SD (*Sicherheitsdienst*, Security Service), Ernst Kaltenbrunner, admitted in a letter to his chief Himmler that

Also according to the latest statements of the State Security Main Office (*Reichssicherheitshauptamt*) and of the offices of the Secret State Police (*Staatspolizei-Leit-Stellen*), the arrested or newly recognised *Bibelforscher* are not willing – except in very rare cases – to obtain their release by signing a copy of the ‘Declaration of Commitment’ now in use. (Hesse and Harder, 2001, pp. 446–47)

That Jehovah’s Witnesses as a prisoner group became a ‘particular object of SS hatred’ (Garbe, 2002, p. 96) can be attributed to their steadfast refusal to renounce their faith, their spirit of resistance to commands and activities inconsistent with their religious or personal convictions, and their illegal evangelising in the camps. Hence the Witnesses were continually exposed to even greater cruelty by the SS and *Kapo* prisoners (foremen) and were sent to the ‘punishment company’ (Garbe, 1999, pp. 407–20). Between 1935 and 1937 Himmler’s Gestapo began to set up Political Departments (*Politische Abteilungen*) in the concentration camps. These offices kept the prisoners’ records and conducted regular interrogations (Broszat, 1982, pp. 183–85). The Gestapo’s ‘battle against the Witnesses’ (Johnson, 1999, p. 240) continued on the concentration camp level. On 9 September 1935 a Gestapo decree from Berlin regularised the procedure throughout Germany for taking Bible Students into ‘protective custody’.¹⁹ For example, should a person, after release, or after serving a prison term, be convicted again for activities on behalf of his faith, he was to be reported and taken into ‘protective custody’ once more. The order explicitly states: ‘apply to send such persons *to concentration camp, as has already been the practice*’ (WTA, Dok 09/09/35, italics added). The decree also mentions that a Jehovah’s Witness should be left in a concentration camp when he had been active for his faith or ‘has committed gross offences against camp rules’.²⁰

The New ‘Modern’ Concentration Camps, 1936–45

Hitler’s decisions in favour of the concentration camps in 1935 opened the way for the SS leaders and bureaucrats to reorganise the terror-camp system and to plan new and larger *Konzentrationslager* (KL). Their goal was the removal from the National Socialist *Volksgemeinschaft* (People’s Community) on a greater scale than hitherto of all persons, including Jehovah’s Witnesses, whom they viewed as ‘enemies of the state’, criminals and morally and racially inferior. The new ‘modern’ concentration camp construction programme, starting with the KL Sachsenhausen in the summer of 1936, created the preconditions for the mass arrests that the National Socialists were already planning before the outbreak of war (Tuchel, 1994, pp. 34, 40, 44). The Gestapo was ordered, on 5 February 1936, to put on the black list (*A-Kartei*) the names of ‘all enemies of the state’, among them ‘well-known Bible Students’, so that

such persons could immediately be arrested in case of war or in times of tension (Drobisch and Wieland, 1993, pp. 252–53).

In subsequent years, a new SS administration centre was established in Oranienburg, a town not far from Berlin (Tuchel, 1994, pp. 16, 50). In addition, in the summer of 1936 prisoners from Esterwegen camp began work on the construction of the new 'model' concentration camp of Sachsenhausen close to the SS administration office in Oranienburg (Drobisch and Wieland, 1993, p. 262). Jehovah's Witnesses, who were probably among the prisoners commandeered as forced labour for the new camp, were used primarily for camp construction work, as at Buchenwald in 1937, at Mauthausen in 1938–39 and at Ravensbrück in 1939 (Wrobel, 2001a, pp. 124, 128; Garbe, 1999, p. 453). After the Esterwegen camp was dissolved, with that of Sachsenburg following in 1937, the prisoners were moved to Sachsenhausen. By 1945 over 1000 male and 20 female Jehovah's Witnesses had passed through the Sachsenhausen camp (WTA, Zentralkartei), including a number of brethren from the Netherlands (for a case study, see Van Der Bijl, 1998, p. 27).

The Sachsenhausen camp was designed in the shape of an isosceles triangle. This model, probably created by SS architect Bernhard Kuiper, representing a symbolic geometry of total control and terror (Endlich, 2005, pp. 215–18),²¹ resembled the triangle-shaped prisoner badges that were designed at the same time. Hence the reorganisation of the camp system coincided with the standardisation of insignia, a new system of classification, 'the taxonomy of colors, triangles, and insignia' (Sofsky, 1999, p. 118). The purple triangle for Jehovah's Witnesses was introduced in July 1936 (Eberle, 2005, p. 92).²² With other concentration camps, such as those of Dachau and Buchenwald, following in 1937 and 1938, the 'purple triangles' of Jehovah's Witness prisoners were in general use in the National Socialist camp system from the latter year onwards (Pingel, 1978, pp. 76, 90; Orth, 1999, p. 57; Garbe, 1999, p. 405). Concentration camp commanders later received a blackboard (see Marsálek, 1995, p. 40) which listed the main groups of prisoners and depicted the different forms and colours of the *Kennzeichen* (marks) for the groups which were, besides the Jews (yellow), as follows: '*Politisch*' ('political'): red; '*Berufsverbrecher*' ('professional criminal'): green; '*Emigrant*' ('emigrant'): blue; '*Bibelforscher*' ('Bible Student'): purple or violet; '*Homosexuell*' ('homosexual'): pink; and '*Asozial*' ('asocial'): black (for these main prisoner groups, see also Broszat, 1982, p. 196; Kogon, 1950, p. 44; Hoess, 1959, pp. 75, 99; Hackett, 1995, p. 30). From the beginning the Bible Students or Jehovah's Witnesses were listed among the main concentration camp prisoner groups.

The system of insignia took some time to be standardised. Different forms of coloured prisoner patches, stripes and dots had been in use in the early camps and Jehovah's Witnesses were distinguished by black dots in the Esterwegen camp and by blue stripes in the Lichtenburg camp (Drobisch and Wieland, 1993, p. 206). Himmler's order of 3 March 1936 required that prisoners in the 'special (punishment) battalions' be identified 'by putting some kind of special mark on their suit' (quote in Rürup, 1987, p. 99). In Sachsenhausen, where the purple triangle originated, the Witnesses seem to have first received a blue identification patch for a short time in 1936, and then the purple triangle in July; in 1937 the Witnesses in Buchenwald were at first given a blue and then in 1938 a purple mark (Eberle, 2005, pp. 92–94; Garbe, 1999, p. 405; see also Pingel, 1978, p. 76).

The purple triangle was but one of the means whereby

The Bible Students were set apart as a completely separate category. The fact that the SS separated them in that way was designed to make Jehovah's

Witnesses easily discernible from the other groups of prisoners. . . . With the category ‘Bible Students,’ the SS had selected a classification which applied specifically and exclusively to members of this ideological religious denomination. (Garbe, 1999, pp. 405–6; English translation in Garbe, 2006)

The newly-designed badge also enabled SS guards to stop Jehovah’s Witnesses from attempting to communicate with other prisoners. This was a crucial development as Jehovah’s Witnesses usually seek out other people to talk about their faith; furthermore, the spirit of evangelising and speaking about Bible prophecy and God’s Kingdom at any opportunity was, and still is, a characteristic of the believers. Shortly before the new coloured badges were introduced, the camp commander in Sachsenburg issued SS guards with the following instruction: ‘Most of all the guards have to pay attention to the Bible Students and that they are at no time allowed in their free time to start conversations with other prisoners, in order to prevent the dissemination of Bible Student teachings’ (Garbe, 1999, p. 405; English translation in Garbe, 2006).

According to camp instructions, the guards at some penal institutions used by the legal authorities immediately undertook similar measures if they suspected that Jehovah’s Witnesses were organising missionary activities. Not only were such activities a reason for the design of a separate badge in 1936 but the initiative was also prompted by the sheer number of Witnesses in ‘protective custody’ in the prisons and camps by 1935. As Martin Broszat (1982, p. 195) points out, Jehovah’s Witnesses were a ‘further category of protective custody prisoners who after 1935 formed a substantial group of concentration camp inmates’. As a matter of fact, in the Gestapo records and decrees of that time the *Ernstes Bibelforscher* or ‘Earnest Bible Students’ appear as a distinct and well-known category of persons to be taken into *Schutzhaft* or ‘protective custody’ (StA Munich, LRA 30754, p. 6).²³

The Numerical Significance of the Witness Group in 1936–37

In the years prior to the war, Jehovah’s Witnesses as a proportion of the total number of concentration camp prisoners ranged between 5 and 10 per cent, albeit with local exceptions such as the 28.2 per cent in Fuhlsbüttel prison and over 40 per cent in the Lichtenburg camp for women. Buchenwald camp, too, had an above-average number of Witnesses (12 per cent) (Garbe, 1999, p. 403; 2002, p. 91). Although these estimates are probably valid for the whole pre-war period, there were significant fluctuations, with the years 1936–37 seeing a dramatic increase in Witness prisoners. A recent study (Hesse and Harder, 2001, pp. 34, 45) of the first central concentration camp for women in Moringen, where female Witnesses were imprisoned from 1935 to 1937, has traced a sharp increase in 1936 and has shown that Witnesses constituted the largest prisoner group (45.9 per cent). According to the authors (Harder and Hesse, 2001, p. 53), the Witnesses ‘constituted more than 70 percent of all woman prisoners’ at Moringen camp after autumn 1937.

On 15 August 1936 a ‘report of the actual situation of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Germany as far as this could be secured from reliable communications’ was written by Willi Ruhnau, from Danzig, an underground leader in Germany (WTA, Dok 15/08/36 (2)). This contemporary assessment, which was transmitted to the Watchtower office in Switzerland, mentions the low number of ‘about 1200 held prisoners’ from a total of ‘about 4000 Witnesses’ who have been taken into custody so far. If this is correct,

then the number of Witness prisoners must have fallen. This may have been the result of the amnesty ordered by the regime on 23 April 1936 in view of the approaching Berlin Olympic Games in August of that year (see also Drobisch and Wieland, 1993, p. 217).

However, the underground report correctly anticipated that this would be a brief respite. Willi Ruhnau writes (WTA, Dok 15/08/36 (2)):

These persecutions have now lasted more than three years and are increasing in severity week by week. Unbelievable are the sufferings of these earnest Christians. In every way possible the government has sought to prevent them from fulfilling their duty. Nevertheless the German authorities must admit that they are powerless in breaking the will of Jehovah's Witnesses and therefore are taking sharper and more violent measures. ... The destruction of Jehovah's Witnesses has long ago been decided upon. An official himself declared that the government will not spare money or men in making the Witnesses of Jehovah harmless, and another expressed hopes that they would *succeed within three months or so* [italics added] in exterminating them. According to a low estimate there have been about 4000 Witnesses of Jehovah arrested, imprisoned or put in concentration camps. Many of these have had to go through this experience from 2 to 4 times. At present there are about 1200 held prisoners, while from week to week further arrests are made in great numbers.

At that time, in August and September 1936, the number of custody cases was already beginning to rise dramatically, as is shown below, a development driven by what Eric Johnson (1999, p. 240) has described as the assignment by the Gestapo of a particularly zealous officer to lead the battle against the Witnesses. When the Witnesses took no part in the Reichstag election of 29 March 1936 the Gestapo from the Dortmund Special Court district set up a 'Special Command' (*Sonderkommando*), arrested 120 Witnesses, and sent 90 of them to the court for punishment. The public prosecutor opened a special department (*Sonderdezernat*) to assist in the 'battle', as reported on 24 June 1936 (WTA, Dok 24/06/36).²⁴ One year before, on 26 June 1935, the Political Police in Bavaria had instructed its agents to take into 'protective custody' all Bible Students who had already had one conviction for religious activity, and more orders followed (23 September 1935 and 1 February 1936), to send leaders and believers to the Dachau camp and to keep them there when they had preached to others (StA Munich, LRA 30754; see also Helmreich, 1979, p. 396). As a result, the number of Witnesses in the Dachau camp began to rise. At the moment we have the names of 600 Jehovah's Witnesses who are registered (WTA, Zentralkartei) as having been through the Dachau camp up until its liberation, which 85 Witnesses experienced, in 1945 (Zámečník, 2004, p. 218).

In the winter of 1936–37 the concentration camp population was 7500, a figure given by the SS and regarded by Martin Broszat (1982, p. 188) as the minimum figure, of which, according to Detlef Garbe (2002, p. 91), 'the Jehovah's Witnesses comprised numerically a not insignificant group'. A contemporary Watchtower paper from Switzerland on the situation in the winter of 1936–37 concluded 'that at present nearly 4000 Bible Students, or Jehovah's Witnesses, are languishing in prisons and concentration camps in Germany and Danzig' (Zürcher, 1938, p. 66).²⁵ Comparing this figure with the above-mentioned percentages would result in 800 (20 per cent), 1200 (30 per cent), or even as many as 1600 (40 per cent) Jehovah's Witnesses held

prisoner in concentration camps during the winter of 1936–37. In relation to the total of 7500 inmates this would mean that the Witness group made up 10.7 per cent, or, at least for a short time, from 16 to even 21.3 per cent of the whole camp population. Besides the figure ‘7500’, which is a calculation by the SS for economic purposes,²⁶ we know that the National Socialists reported a total of 4761 concentration camp prisoners for Germany in November 1936. The number was actually 4522, arrived at by adding up the inmate numbers of the five large concentration camps (Drobisch and Wieland, 1993, pp. 288–89; Tuchel, 1991, p. 203). Comparing a total of 4600 prisoners with two of the numerical estimates of imprisoned Witnesses for the winter of 1936–37, we obtain rates of 17.4 per cent (800) and of 26 per cent (1200). Admittedly, these are still provisional figures and further studies are needed to refine and corroborate these statistics. The crucial point, however, is that the SS was confronted by such a numerically significant and ‘troublesome’ religious group that they were forced to take account of the Witness prisoners in their future planning regarding the concentration camp system.

When Zürcher’s (1938, p. 66) book *Kreuzzug gegen das Christentum* went to print in Switzerland and quoted the above-mentioned paper of 1 March 1937, the total figure of ‘4000’ for Jehovah’s Witnesses in prisons *and camps* was adjusted to read ‘now even 6000’, and the number ‘6000’, referring to the winter of 1937–38, was repeated several times in the book (pp. 7, 194). But how many of the 6000 were transferred, albeit temporarily, through one of the concentration camps? In light of existing evidence, it has to be assumed that one of the following percentages is correct: about 600 (10 per cent), 1200 (20 per cent), 1800 (30 per cent) or 2400 (40 per cent). (See also Table 2 above.)

How did the sharp increase from 4000 to 6000 individuals arrested (67 per cent) within a year come about? In the spring and summer of 1936 larger waves of arrests took place in Munich, and several groups of Witnesses were later sentenced by a Special Court to terms of up to two years in prison (Detjen, 1998, p. 240). Nationwide mass arrests of Witnesses were launched on 28 August 1936, probably because the Gestapo knew that the Watchtower Society in Switzerland was planning an IBV convention in Lucerne on 4–7 September 1937. The Gestapo units had collected enough names of Witnesses in Germany, and hundreds of them were now sent to prison or to concentration camps to await trial (Yearbook, 1974, pp. 150–54; Garbe, 1999, pp. 245–46, 255; Zipfel, 1965, p. 181). Among the Witnesses in Germany an estimated 6000 still at liberty were religiously active (for example in distributing publications), and more than 300 were able to cross the German–Swiss border to attend the convention in Lucerne (Yearbook, 1937, pp. 151–52).²⁷ The delegates adopted a protest resolution making it clear that they would not give in to the barbarous persecution in Nazi Germany but that they would continue ‘to obey God rather than men’, and hundreds of letters with the resolution enclosed were sent anonymously by regular mail from Switzerland to officials in Germany. Soon afterwards a series of arrests was launched in National Socialist Germany, and among those remanded in ‘protective custody’ were many who had been delegates at the Lucerne convention. According to Detlef Garbe (1999, p. 251), more than 1000 Jehovah’s Witnesses were taken into custody in August–September 1936. At that time the prisons and concentration camps in Germany saw a tremendous influx of male as well as female Witnesses. Despite the mass arrests, German Witnesses were eager to circulate the Lucerne protest resolution in their country, and on 12 December 1936 at least 3450 German Witnesses succeeded in distributing the leaflet in many places in Germany. This spectacular secret underground action took the Gestapo by surprise,²⁸

and there were many more arrests in the following months (Yearbook, 1974, pp. 154–61; Garbe, 1999, pp. 252–56). For example, three weeks after the distribution of the leaflet in Münster and some other cities in the area, the Gestapo reported that 57 Witnesses who had participated in this underground campaign had been arrested (Kuropka, 1992, p. 288). The Dresden Gestapo in Saxony reported for their area of responsibility about 200 arrests of Witnesses in the winter of 1936–37 in connection with the Lucerne resolution campaign (Lahrtz, 2003, pp. 131–32).

When a civil court or the Special Courts which tried most of their cases had previously absolved Witnesses of guilt, or showed leniency in sentencing, the Gestapo 'corrected' the courts' decisions by remanding the Witnesses in concentration camps. This procedure was authorised by a new secret Gestapo decree of 22 April 1937 (Johnson, 1999, p. 240; English translation of decree in Hesse, 2001, pp. 151–52). The courts and police were reminded by leading National Socialist officials to 'use the harshest measures' against Jehovah's Witnesses. Hence sentences grew longer. Whole groups of Witnesses were sentenced at so-called 'Bible Students' trials' (*Bibelforscherprozesse*), which were reported in the newspapers (Wrobel, 2003b, pp. 430–31, 437).

While Jehovah's Witnesses were clearly active in Germany, the size of their community was sometimes overestimated. On 18 June 1937 a leading official in the Ministry of Justice stated: 'I estimate their number at one to two million' (quote in Wrobel, 2003b, p. 371; see also Carsten, 1995, p. 117). The statement lacked any substance, but it seems that the IBV had helped fuel such speculation. The Watchtower Society, commenting on their special convention in Berlin-Wilmersdorf in June 1933, referred to '5000 [in the original letter the figure was corrected in handwriting to '7000'-JW] delegates of Bible Students in Germany (Jehovah's Witnesses) representing several million Germans who have been friends and supporters of the association for many years' (quote in Wrobel, 2003b, p. 371). Obviously, the expression 'several million Germans' was a reference to all readers of and subscribers to Watchtower brochures, tracts and other literature which had been distributed to millions of people who were supposedly in favour of defending freedom of religion. However, since *Das Goldene Zeitalter* magazine had a circulation of 430,000 copies twice a month at the beginning of 1933, it appears that the readership was in the order of half a million or more (Wrobel, 2003b, p. 371).

On 20 June 1937 the Jehovah's Witness community launched a second country-wide campaign, distributing this time the protest circular *Offener Brief* ('open letter') which gave names and details of those who had been persecuted by the Gestapo (Yearbook, 1974, pp. 157–61; Garbe, 1999, pp. 260–63; Carsten, 1995, pp. 117–18). More arrests followed. For example, in 1937 at least 1500 believers were arrested for short or long terms in Saxony, where about 4000 to 5000 Witnesses lived (Lahrtz, 2003, pp. 131–32). In December 1937 the female Jehovah's Witnesses in the Moringen camp made up 88.9 per cent of all inmates (249 Witnesses among 280 women), and the Witnesses were not released as they continued to refuse to comply with Nazi ideology (Harder and Hesse, 2001, p. 43). They were the largest prisoner group, with 45.9 per cent on average while the camp was in operation, and they had their own day-room (Hesse and Harder, 2001, p. 34).

When the overall inmate numbers in the concentration camps declined in the autumn of 1936 and in the winter of 1936–37, the resulting shortages of slave labour prompted a series of countermeasures and a consequent rise in the camp population. Among the actions taken were Himmler's order in March 1937 to send more so-called habitual or professional criminals (*Berufs- und Gewohnheitsverbrecher*) to the concentration camps, and in June 1938 a similar fate for the 'asocial' (*Asoziale*)

men followed, including more male Jews capable of working (Zámečník, 1999, p. 75; Broszat, 1982, pp. 188, 199–201; Tuchel, 1994, p. 54). The ‘asocial’ label covered beggars, prostitutes, pimps, alcoholics and so-called work-shy recipients of social security. ‘Gypsies’, who were viewed as socially inferior, were also given the black (temporarily the brown) and ‘criminals’ the green triangle. From September 1938 onwards prisoners from various groups arrived from annexed Austria; by 1945 the number of Austrian Jehovah’s Witnesses in concentration camp would reach 230 (WTA, Zentralkartei; for Austrian case studies, see Rammerstorfer, 2004, pp. 90–91; Reynaud and Graffard, 2001, pp. 85–97). After the so-called ‘*Kristallnacht*’ pogrom of 9–10 November 1938 and until 16 November over 35,000 male Jews, so-called *Aktionsjuden* (‘operation Jews’), were imprisoned, 26,700 of them for a time in the Buchenwald, Dachau and Sachsenhausen camps (Benz, 2005, pp. 21–22; see also Broszat, 1982, pp. 202–3).²⁹ One consequence of this influx was a fall in purple-triangle prisoners as a proportion of the camp population,³⁰ although their courage, conviction and spirit of resistance continued to impress itself on the SS and other prisoner groups (Wrobel, 2004, p. 34; see also Kogon, 1950, pp. 219, 273; Hoess, 1959, pp. 95–99, 149–51). Indeed, the ‘stubbornness’ of the male and female Witnesses who were held in the concentration camps between 1936 and 1938, their refusal to renounce their faith and their determination to share their convictions with anybody who was prepared to listen caused the SS guards to intensify their efforts to try to break the will of the believers by any means.

Special Punishment Battalions

The aforementioned report by R. Arthur Winkler (in the late summer of 1935) indicates that Jehovah’s Witnesses in the Esterwegen camp were assigned, along with the Jews, to ‘punishment companies’. In March 1936 Himmler ordered the formation of ‘special battalions’ (*besondere Abteilungen*) for prisoners who appeared in a concentration camp for a second time, so-called second offenders, which applied – in the course of time – to many Jehovah’s Witnesses. The prisoners in the penal battalions were entitled to receive and send a letter only every three months. They were not allowed to receive any parcels at all and had to perform particularly heavy work for ten hours every day (Rürup, 1987, p. 99; Garbe, 1999, p. 411). Special ‘punishment battalions’ (*Strafkompanien*) were later created in each of the main camps. (It should be noted that in March 1936 the future main concentration camps, such as Sachsenhausen and Buchenwald, were not yet in operation.)

When the female Witnesses in the Moringen women’s camp refused to work for Winter Welfare (*Winterhilfe*, or *Winterhilfswerk*) at the end of 1936, the commander isolated them from other categories of prisoners, put them in punishment cells and prohibited them from receiving any mail or parcels (Hesse and Harder, 2001, p. 46).

Hugo Krack [camp commander] finally understood the willingness of Jehovah’s Witnesses to resist as a group-phenomenon after they had behaved with solidarity. After this date, Witnesses were no longer punished as individuals, but disciplinary measures were directed against all women in this group. (Harder and Hesse, 2001, pp. 51–52)

However, the Moringen Witness prisoner group remained almost totally united in refusing to work in any way for Winter Welfare. Jehovah’s Witnesses were also sent as a group to the infamous ‘punishment battalion’ at the Buchenwald camp in August

1937, and they were held there as a group until 1944. Generally, the Witnesses had to stay three months, and in some cases even up to nine months, in the 'punishment battalion'. They had to perform the dirtiest and most physically demanding jobs and worked between 10 and 12 hours per day, even on Sundays. Exemption for new Witness prisoners from deployment in the penal company was granted only to a small number of particularly skilled specialists whom the SS intended to use for other tasks (Kogon, 1950, p. 42; Garbe, 1999, p. 411). That Jehovah's Witnesses 'got the most severe work' (Nationale, 1990, pp. 34–35) was confirmed by the Buchenwald camp committee (*Lagerkomitee*) after liberation. With 457 prisoners at the end of 1938, the Witnesses reached their maximum in the Buchenwald camp (Stein, 1999, pp. 70–71). At the moment the names are known of about 670 Jehovah's Witnesses who were imprisoned in the Buchenwald camp by 1945 (WTA, Zentralkartei; for more on this camp, see Rammerstorfer, 2004, pp. 85–110; Hackett, 1995, pp. 178–80).

In the autumn of 1937 all 144 Jehovah's Witnesses in the Dachau camp were assigned to a special *Strafkompanie*, the so-called 'isolation blocks' (*Isolierung*), which consisted of barracks fenced off with barbed wire from the other barracks. Even Witnesses who had completed their term in the 'punishment battalion' and were assigned to different work had to stay in the 'isolation blocks'. A further tightening of regulations occurred in March 1938 when a total ban was imposed in Dachau and other concentration camps on all correspondence by Jehovah's Witnesses (WTA, LB Kunz; WTA, LB Bräuchle; Garbe, 1999, p. 411; see also Zámečník, 2004, pp. 216–18; Reynaud and Graffard, 2001, pp. 81–82).³¹ The Dachau model of 'isolation blocks' was also implemented at the Sachsenhausen camp on 20 March 1938 (WTA, LB Schröer, p. 9). After the mail ban (*Postsperre*) was rescinded in January 1939 (WTA, Dok 01/01/39 (4))³² the restriction on Witnesses of five lines per month to relatives remained in force for about four years. In Buchenwald and some other concentration camps it continued even longer (see also Kogon, 1950, p. 123). The text of a letter was determined in advance and read (in full): 'Habe Euren Brief erhalten, herzlichen Dank dafür. Es geht mir gut. Bin gesund und munter' ('I've received your letter; thank you very much. I am fine. I'm healthy and in good heart'). On the back (or on the empty space on the stationery) the following text was stamped or printed: 'The prisoner remains, as before, a stubborn Bible Student and refuses to reject the Bible Students' false teachings. For this reason the usual privileges of correspondence have been denied him' (Yearbook, 1974, p. 165; Stein, 1999, p. 70).

The 'testing' of Jehovah's Witnesses by the SS in the punishment battalions, bringing them 'to the verge of extermination' according to one eyewitness report (WTA, LB Kunz) and killing a number of them, suddenly came to a stop in autumn 1938 in the Dachau camp. A typhoid epidemic broke out, and the SS men were forbidden to visit the barracks of the Witnesses. As a result, the Witnesses were given respite from hard labour, received additional food rations, and were allowed to buy items in the camp shop. During the winter they stayed in their assigned barrack and were able to conduct illegal Bible meetings (WTA, LB Kunz; WTA, LB Bräuchle). In the Neuengamme camp near Hamburg, which was established in 1940, Jehovah's Witnesses and Jews were isolated together in one barrack or block which also housed prisoners of the 'penal company' and others for certain periods of time. While all prisoners were subjected to harsh treatment, conditions were even worse for the Bible Students. For example, the SS temporarily excluded them from medical treatment and deprived them of food (Garbe, 1999, pp. 411–12, 479; see also Liebster, 2003, pp. 60–62).

Shortly before the war began in September 1939 overall numbers of camp inmates were on the decline. This fall can be attributed to a number of amnesties: for example,

on 10 March 1939 Hitler's 50th birthday was the occasion for the mass release of camp prisoners and numbers subsequently fell to the relatively low level of about 21,300 (Tuchel, 1994, p. 54; Drobisch and Wieland, 1993, p. 308; Broszat, 1982, p. 203). In Sachsenhausen camp a number of Witness prisoners, who had not signed the 'Declaration', were among those released on 20 April (WTA, LB Schröder, p. 10). According to a contemporary Watchtower source, between late 1938 and early 1939 half of the 6000 imprisoned Jehovah's Witnesses were released from prisons and camps (Yearbook, 1940, p. 148). Of the remaining 3000 imprisoned Witnesses almost half remained in the concentration camps, especially in the main camps of Buchenwald (450), Dachau (150),³³ Lichtenburg (387 females) and Sachsenhausen (450).³⁴

The persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses intensified again in early 1939. Witnesses hold their annual Memorial in commemoration of the death of Jesus Christ on 4 April, and the police were ordered to watch the houses of known members: guests were to be searched, arrested and reported to headquarters (Helmreich, 1979, p. 397). Gestapo decrees issued on 8 February and 27 April substantiated and amended an order of 12 May 1937, reminding local officers that Witnesses who were merely under suspicion of being active on behalf of their religion could be sent to concentration camp, and those who served their prison term were then 'automatically' to be sent to a National Socialist terror camp (Kater, 1969, p. 206; Steinberg, 1973, p. 281; Garbe, 1999, p. 296). On 17 April 1939 there were 387 female Witnesses (36.3 per cent) among the 1065 imprisoned women in the Lichtenburg camp. One of the prisoners, Selma Klimaschewski, recalls: 'Every week new sisters arrived from all over Germany' (quote in Hesse and Harder, 2001, p. 95). Releases were handled even more restrictively when the war began, as had been the case in the women's camp Moringen since 1937 (Harder and Hesse, 2001, pp. 52, 54). Himmler's above-mentioned order of 24 December 1938, which standardised the 'Declaration of Commitment' in all concentration camps, made release conditional upon signing the form. The Gestapo in Düsseldorf gave the order to do so on 6 January and the office in Munich on 23 January 1939 (StA Munich, LRA 54952; see also Steinberg, 1973, p. 282). Only those imprisoned Bible Students who had signed the 'Declaration' were to be released.

The Impact of War

With the outbreak of the Second World War the plight of Jehovah's Witnesses inside and outside the prisons and concentration camps deteriorated even further, primarily because they refused to perform military service and all kinds of war-related work (see Philipp, 1999, pp. 44, 64; Morrison, 2000, p. 55). By February 1940 the German judiciary had sentenced to death 55 Jehovah's Witnesses as conscientious objectors, and 112 by August (Garbe, 1999, pp. 372–73, Helmreich, 1979, p. 397). By the end of the war, over 270 conscientious objectors had been executed, among them over 50 Austrian Witnesses (WTA, Zentralkartei; see also Herrberger, 2005, p. 235). Their moving farewell letters to relatives, written shortly before execution, were often duplicated and circulated in the underground, and they encouraged Jehovah's Witnesses to endure persecution (Wrobel, 2005a).

On Himmler's orders August Dickmann was shot in the Sachsenhausen camp, in front of the assembled prisoners, on 15 September 1939, the first conscientious objector of the war to be publicly executed. The news was publicised in broadcasts and press releases in Germany and abroad, including *The New York Times* of 17 September (Execute, 1939).³⁵ Thereafter the abuse of Jehovah's Witnesses in the main

concentration camps Sachsenhausen, Buchenwald and Ravensbrück increased dramatically, and the worst acts of terror against them on the part of the SS occurred in conjunction with efforts to force the Witnesses to sign the 'Declaration of Commitment' and join the army or assist the war effort (Garbe, 1999, pp. 420–23; Yearbook, 1974, pp. 166–68; see also Hackett, 1995, pp. 178–79). During the severe winter of 1939–40 about 100 of the over 400 Witnesses in the Sachsenhausen camp died from maltreatment, hunger or exhaustion (Zeiger, 2001, p. 79; see also Liebster, 2003, p. 63).³⁶ In the spring of 1940 the SS in Sachsenhausen realised that Jehovah's Witnesses could not be forced into line and the barbaric cruelty abated (author's interview with survivor Ernst Wauer, 17 August 1988; see also Wauer, 1991, p. 28).

At Ravensbrück camp in December 1939 the SS tried to force the female Jehovah's Witnesses to perform military-related work, and the women suffered severely for their refusal. Survivor Erna Ludolph gives a moving report about the cruel treatment they experienced in the prison cells of the camp in the Watchtower video documentary *Jehovah's Witnesses Stand Firm Against Nazi Assault* (1996) (see also Hesse and Harder, 2001, pp. 334–36). The women were punished for three weeks and deprived of food in overcrowded, narrow and icy cells. After their release the hunger and inhumane treatment continued, and the other prisoners called Jehovah's Witnesses the 'cemetery column' (Philipp, 1999, pp. 36–37; Harder and Hesse, 2001, p. 239; Wrobel, 2002; see also Morrison, 2000, p. 55).

During the war the concentration camp population increased rapidly with the arrival of transports of Polish and Czech prisoners in the autumn of 1939 and Dutch prisoners by mid-1940. The 'internationalisation' of the composition of the camp population included Jehovah's Witnesses from occupied countries and other lands, such as Poland (500), the Netherlands (348), Austria (230), Czechoslovakia (80), Hungary (62), France (60), the Soviet Union (34), Yugoslavia (19), Belgium (9), Italy (2), Luxembourg (1), Romania (1), the United States (1), and others (30), making a total of almost 1400 non-German prisoners (WTA, Zentralkartei; for previous figures, see Garbe, 1999, p. 496).³⁷

Despite their relatively small numbers, Jehovah's Witnesses formed a significantly large group in some concentration camps. In the Niederhagen camp at Wewelsburg, the castle which Himmler designated for SS ceremonies, the SS replaced the 'criminal prisoners' who made several attempts to escape exclusively with Bible Students in 1940. Jehovah's Witnesses constituted only 7.7 per cent of the 3900 inmates by 1943. The 1285 deaths (1939–45) include 21 Witness prisoners (1.6 per cent). Finally, after the dissolution of the Niederhagen camp, the residual labour crew (*Restkommando*) consisted almost entirely of Witnesses (95 per cent; 40 believers and two political prisoners) who stayed in Wewelsburg from May 1940 until liberation in April 1945 (WTA, Zentralkartei; John, 1996, pp. 73, 225; John-Stucke, 2001; see also Rammerstorfer, 2004, pp. 111–36).

After the Moringen camp was closed in May 1938, Lichtenburg castle replaced it as the central concentration camp for women from December 1937 to May 1939. In May 1939 the Bible Students represented over 40 per cent of the total number of female Lichtenburg prisoners, significantly exceeding the total number of communist and social democratic prisoners (together slightly above 10 per cent) (Garbe, 1999, p. 403). In May 1939 the SS transported 900 women, among them about 400 Witnesses, to Ravensbrück in order to set up a spacious 'modern' women's camp.³⁸ Until 24 June 1939 the female Jehovah's Witnesses made up 39 per cent of the whole camp population at Ravensbrück. When other women from different countries began to

arrive there, the Witness percentage slowly decreased: to 26–28 per cent in July–September, 20–23 per cent in January–March 1940, 16–21 per cent in April–July, 13–15 per cent in August–December and to 8–9 per cent in 1941 and 1942 (Hesse and Harder, 2001, pp. 122, 415–17). By 1945 about 1100 Witnesses (850 women, 250 men) had passed through the Ravensbrück camp (WTA, Zentralkartei; Wrobel, 2002; for more on this camp, see Rammerstorfer, 2004, pp. 137–41; Morrison, 2000, pp. 54–60; Hesse and Harder, 2001).

A New Departure: 1942

In 1942 heavy losses at the war front and the economic burden of war prompted the SS administration to devise a more effective economic exploitation of the concentration camp workforce under the direction of Oswald Pohl. An experienced SS administrator, Pohl had been appointed by Himmler as chief of the newly-constituted SS Main Office of Economic Policy (*Wirtschafts- und Verwaltungshauptamt* (WVHA)) in February 1942, by which time the number of camp inmates had increased to over 95,000 from 25,000 at the start of the war (Broszat, 1982, pp. 203, 242–43; Tuchel, 1994, pp. 86–91). Pohl, who defined the ‘economic task’ for the concentration camp system, ordered all camp commanders to concentrate on labour deployment as their main task (IMT, document R-129).³⁹ Concentration camp prisoners had been used as workers since 1933 and in the armaments industry since the spring of 1941, but the SS now started to utilise their labour in other areas of the economy. Slave labourers were increasingly sent from other countries in order to expand this manpower reservoir in the concentration camps, and they included a large number of Jewish men and women (Tuchel, 1994, p. 87; Broszat, 1982, pp. 204–6).

The new camp policy meant longer working hours, more work on Saturday, a half day on Sunday, and further maltreatment. Within six months about 60 per cent of all prisoners died. In December 1942 the SS administration, with a view to economic production, ordered the camp commanders to reduce the high mortality rate and to improve diet and working conditions (Schnabel, 1957, pp. 215–16, 218, 223; Broszat, 1982, p. 242). The concentration camp prisoners, including Jehovah’s Witnesses, were allowed to receive parcels with food which the brethren shared among themselves (Garbe, 1999, pp. 438, 451–52). The *1974 Yearbook of Jehovah’s Witnesses* reflected on the effect of SS policy on Witness prisoners:

This transformation, of course, required that the prisoners be fed better if they were to be used more for work. This brought further relief for the brothers [Jehovah’s Witnesses]. The officials were also judicious enough, with few exceptions, not to try to place the brothers in armament plants, but to use them in accord with their vocational abilities in the various shops. (Yearbook, 1974, p. 195)

War needs, the failure to break the resistance of the Witnesses in the camps and their industriousness also persuaded Himmler to reassess the ‘Bible Student issue’ and to move towards a more practical and rational rather than exclusively ideological thinking. In January 1943 Himmler wrote to the WVHA:

Of course, since they reject the war, we are not able to allow their teachings without running the risk of causing serious harm to Germany. . . . Nothing is

accomplished by punishing them, since they only talk about it afterward with enthusiasm. . . . Every confinement in the dungeon, every pang of hunger, every period of freezing is a merit, every punishment, every blow is a merit with Jehovah. . . . Now my suggestion is that all of the Bible Students be put in work – for example, farm work, which has nothing to do with war and all its madness. One can leave them unguarded if properly assigned; they will not run away. They can be given uncontrolled jobs, they will prove to be the best administrators and workers. (WTA, Dok 06/01/43; quote also in Garbe, 1999, pp. 462–63; English translation in Garbe, 2006; photo of letter in Hesse and Harder, 2001, pp. 71–72)

Himmler had ‘an opportunity to study the matter of the Earnest Bible Students from all angles’ on his frequent visits to the agricultural estate, Hartzwalde, of his personal physician and masseur, Felix Kersten, who employed a number of imprisoned Bible Students as agricultural assistants and housekeepers (Yearbook, 1974, pp. 195–97; Garbe, 1999, pp. 461–62; Wrobel, 2006). Himmler’s idea was put into practice during 1943. Henceforth, on a large scale, female Witness prisoners were assigned as housekeepers and servants to private SS households with several children, to SS holiday homes and to the SS ‘*Lebensborn*’-*Heime* (‘Fountain of Life’ homes) organisation, which helped unmarried and married Nazi women to give birth anonymously (Garbe, 1999, pp. 459–60; Wrobel, 2005b, pp. 344–47; Wrobel, 2006; see also Klein, 2002, pp. 89–90). In the Ravensbrück women’s camp, and in the Auschwitz camp, where female Witnesses had been used as maids for SS families before 1943,⁴⁰ they received special identity cards allowing them to pass through the main camp gate,⁴¹ to go to the SS families that employed them, and to run errands for them at the camp facilities (Wontor-Cichy, 2003, pp. 23–24, 95–101; see also Garbe, 1999, p. 466). Female and male Witness prisoners were also assigned to Comthurey (the agricultural estate of Oswald Pohl) and to other farms (Rammerstorfer, 2004, pp. 141–42; see also Hoess, 1959, p. 150). At Buchenwald camp male Witnesses served as orderlies in SS homes (Kogon, 1950, p. 51).

As early as 1938, SS commandant Loritz of the Dachau concentration camp had also recognised the practical value of Witnesses as labourers, and each Monday morning an SS bus transported 40 Witnesses from Dachau to Sudelfeld/Bayrischzell in the Bavarian Alps, where the men worked in and around a mountain SS holiday resort. They returned to the main camp on Saturday (Wrobel, 2005b, p. 505; see also Klein, 2001, p. 166; Garbe, 1999, pp. 454–58). In the summer of 1939 more Jehovah’s Witnesses were deployed – including several men from other prisoner groups – for special work assignments on outside labour details, assisting on small farms and in industrial businesses. Erich Kunz recalls: ‘At this time [1939] it was already apparent how our unwavering attitude and the diligence and reliability which characterised our work forced the SS to treat us with a certain respect’ (WTA, LB Kunz). When Loritz was appointed commanding officer of the Sachsenhausen camp in January 1940 similar work arrangements for Jehovah’s Witnesses were put into practice there. Even in the labour details the SS separated the Witnesses from other prisoners. Some labour columns were composed exclusively of Jehovah’s Witnesses, and the number of guards was reduced (Garbe, 1999, pp. 454–55). Although the prisoners were still exposed to the varying moods of their guards and the work was very arduous, the physical condition of the prisoners improved and sometimes opportunities arose for them to smuggle in small portions of food.

Himmler also contemplated a more flexible use of the ‘Declaration of Commitment’ which required Jehovah’s Witnesses to renounce their faith in order to secure their release from imprisonment. Himmler’s preference was for a ‘verbal’ declaration, or a declaration by just shaking hands with the camp commander, in the expectation that this would be more effective than a written commitment in helping to boost the labour productivity of the Witnesses in specific types of work, although not, he informed his officials, in arms production (Garbe, 1999, pp. 463–64; see also Hesse and Harder, 2001, pp. 343–45). His ideas, which were of a theoretical nature, would certainly have caused consternation among officials at the *Sektenreferat* (Department for Sectarian Affairs).

As Detlef Garbe (1999, p. 464) has shown, at the same time as Himmler was contemplating the ‘partial release’ of Jehovah’s Witnesses, Gestapo officials were stepping up their efforts, usually without success, to arrest all activists from IBV circles who had become especially active in the western and southern parts of Germany and to put the Witnesses behind the walls of penitentiaries or the barbed wire fences of concentration camps. Gestapo obstructiveness notwithstanding, however, improvements did take place, as is remembered by survivor Ilse Unterdörfer in her comments on the Ravensbrück camp:

Since we had [now in 1943] considerable freedom where we worked, we succeeded in sending letters to our relatives without having them censored. We were also able to correspond with our brothers who were working outside or had trusted positions working for SS men, thereby enjoying more freedom. Yes, we even succeeded in getting in touch with brothers living in freedom and obtained *Watchtowers*. (Yearbook, 1974, p. 199)

Opportunities increased for secretly bringing illegal Watchtower materials into the Ravensbrück and Sachsenhausen camps or even duplicating them there (Zeiger, 2001, p. 85; Garbe, 1999, p. 447; Hesse and Harder, 2001, pp. 191–96). In the Wewelsburg camp a small underground printing-works of Jehovah’s Witnesses was set up in the winter of 1942–43, and after a major underground printing operation in Oberhausen-Sterkrade was finally discovered and shut down by the National Socialists in April 1943⁴² the brethren imprisoned in Wewelsburg took over and provided the Witnesses in Westfalen and other districts with *The Watchtower* (Yearbook, 1974, pp. 200–1; John-Stucke, 2001, pp. 68–69; see also Reynaud and Graffard, 2001, p. 203).

On 10 September 1943 Oswald Pohl of the WVHA lamented:

Recently, propagandist publications of the sect of the International Bible Students have been confiscated which indicate that Bible Student prisoners at the concentration camps are able to (1) conduct, during the night, unsupervised meetings in the camps (the washing-rooms, etc.), (2) carry on correspondence with Bible Student prisoners at other concentration camps, and (3) even smuggle letters out of the camps to Bible Students who are still living in freedom, as well as smuggle their replies back into the camps. . . . This negligence in supervision and surveillance certainly resulted from the fact that the Bible Students perform reliable and outstanding work wherever they are assigned. Therefore, I give instructions, as an experiment, to change this impossible situation by immediately separating the Bible Student prisoners at the concentration camps from one another. This separation

should be performed in the way that two or three Bible Student prisoners are put into every block of other prisoners. (BA, NS 3/426; see also Garbe, 1999, pp. 447–48; English translation in Garbe, 2006)

The SS immediately completed the 'isolation' of the Witnesses in the main concentration camps and dispersed them to other barracks. By ending the isolation of the Witnesses from other prisoner groups, a practice which had begun in 1937, the SS admitted the failure of this method to break the will and faith of the Witnesses (Kater, 1969, p. 211; Garbe, 1999, p. 449; King, 1982, p. 170; see also Hackett, 1995, pp. 178–80). At Ravensbrück camp 'asocials' were moved into the special barrack of the Bible Students. As this move gave the Witnesses even more opportunities to share their faith with fellow camp inmates and to make converts, the SS resorted once more to isolating Witness prisoners (Pingel, 1978, p. 90; see also Buber, 1950, pp. 237–38). In addition, Himmler ordered surprise police raids in various concentration camps in April–May 1944; large quantities of Watchtower literature were found. Although the SS severely punished the suspected Jehovah's Witness 'leaders' and wanted them executed, this more draconian action was not carried out (Yearbook, 1974, pp. 202–4; Kogon, 1950, p. 43; Hackett, 1995, pp. 178–80; Garbe, 1999, pp. 450–51; Hesse and Harder, 2001, pp. 196–97). The SS actions could not stop the religious life of Jehovah's Witnesses: as Christine King (1982, p. 169) observes, 'Against all odds, Witnesses in the camps met and prayed together, produced literature and made converts.'

Although the SS had modified its policy and methods of exploitation, primarily in order to benefit from the qualities and skills of the prisoner group, this did not mean that the brutal National Socialist system sought an accommodation with Jehovah's Witnesses, whether inside or outside the terror camps. In June and August 1942, during one of his 'Table Talk' sessions, Hitler raised the issue of the conscientious objectors among the Bible Students. Basing his arguments on crude neo-Darwinism, he insisted that they had to be 'exterminated' (*ausrotten*) (Garbe, 1999, p. 372). The RSHA reported new mass arrests of Jehovah's Witnesses on 21 April 1944: a total of 254 believers were taken into custody, among them the Italian Narciso Riet, a leading underground worker who received the death sentence and was executed. The underground work of Jehovah's Witnesses continued to some extent at various places in Germany, and members of the faith received duplicated *Watchtower* articles and organised the sending of parcels with food or other goods to fellow-believers in prisons and concentration camps (Garbe, 1999, pp. 339–43; Detjen, 1998, p. 250; WTA, LB Schmalstieg, pp. 22–23).

The inconsistencies and opportunism of National Socialist policy and attitudes towards Jehovah's Witnesses as the war drew to an end, what Garbe has called 'a peculiar combination of plain pragmatism and ideological insanity' (Garbe, 1999, p. 469; English translation in Garbe, 2006), found expression in Himmler's strange idea of incorporating Jehovah's Witnesses into his postwar geopolitical plans for Russia, as expressed in his letter to Kaltenbrunner of 21 July 1944 (quoted in Zipfel, 1965, pp. 200–1; see also Garbe, 1999, pp. 468–69). Realising that the Witnesses would not engage in any subversive activities against the National Socialist state, Himmler sought to exploit their missionary zeal in order to spread an anti-military attitude among the people of the Soviet Union, thereby paralysing the political threat posed by Soviets, 'a truly grotesque power-fiction' (Garbe, 1999, p. 470; English translation in Garbe, 2006; for further comments on Himmler's curious idea, see Zipfel, 1965, pp. 200–2; Kater, 1969, pp. 190–91; King, 1982, p. 168).

The End of the National Socialist World

In January 1945 German prisoners as a proportion of the international concentration camp population ranged from 5 to 10 per cent (Broszat, 1982, p. 204), a relatively low figure, which was probably similar to that of Jehovah's Witness camp inmates in the pre-war period. As the end of the National Socialist world drew near, the Witnesses had come to form a relatively small but distinct group which the SS and the other prisoners regarded as having a 'special position' (*Sonderstellung*) on account of their behaviour, reputation and presence in labour details (Wrobel, 2004, p. 34). During the chaotic finale of the regime, at least one-third of the more than 700,000 registered concentration camp prisoners perished (Broszat, 1982, p. 249). In contrast, the spiritual solidarity and mutual help for the weak in their group, even under extreme circumstances, was reflected in a very low mortality rate among the Witness prisoners as a whole. This pattern of group cohesiveness applied to Jehovah's Witnesses throughout the entire period of their concentration camp internment.

On 18 January 1945, nine days before Soviet troops captured the Auschwitz and Birkenau concentration and extermination camps, 'death marches' began, that is, the so-called evacuations of prisoners to other camps and destinations; other marches took place elsewhere and more followed (see also Edelheit and Edelheit, 1994, pp. 432–33). Among the 'evacuated' prisoners were groups of female and male Jehovah's Witnesses who moved to the west to Bergen-Belsen, to the south from Dachau camp, to the north from the Sachsenhausen and Ravensbrück camps, or from the Stutthof and Neuengamme camps to the Baltic Sea. In the Buchenwald camp all Jehovah's Witness prisoners were called over the loudspeaker system to gather in Block number 1, and about 180 of them held a Christian meeting when the camp was liberated on 11 April 1945 (Wrobel, 2003b, p. 460).

The 'evacuation' of the concentration camps and the 'death marches' cost many lives and much human suffering. On 14 April 1945 Himmler sent the following order to the commanders of the Dachau and Flossenbürg camps: 'Surrendering is out of the question. The camp is to be evacuated immediately. No prisoner is to fall into enemy hands alive' (Schnabel, 1957, p. 203). In the Stutthof camp, located near Danzig (Gdańsk), the same command was heard on the radio (Grabowska, 1993, p. 67). Prisoners from that camp, among them a group of Jehovah's Witnesses, were forced by the SS to undertake a dangerous trip in a small boat along the Baltic coast. Finally the Stutthof prisoners made it across the sea and landed, sick from exhaustion, on the Danish island of Møn on 5 May 1945. Danish Jehovah's Witnesses cared for their fellow-believers and helped them to recover. The video documentary *Jehovah's Witnesses Stand Firm Against Nazi Assault* tells their story, among other dramatic events of that period, showing most of the 14 survivors (see also Warter, 1987, pp. 23–24). One of them, Hermine Schmidt, published her memories in the book *Unfettered Joy* (Schmidt, 2005b). The liberation of the Bergen-Belsen camp took place on 15 April 1945. At least 150 Jehovah's Witnesses were incarcerated there from 1943 to 1945 (Rahe, 2001, pp. 118, 121), and the names of over 120 prisoners have been identified (WTA, Zentralkartei). The 'death march' of prisoners from the Neuengamme camp from Hamburg to the Baltic Sea began on 21 April 1945. Over 7000 prisoners lost their lives when the ships on which they had been loaded, the *Cap Arcona*, *Thielbek* and *Delmenhorst*, were bombed by British aircraft and sank on 3 May 1945. Of the 45 Jehovah's Witnesses on the ships, 32 died in the sea (WTA, Zentralkartei; WTA, Dok 25/01/46). On 21 April 1945, 33,000 prisoners, grouped by nationality, left the Sachsenhausen camp in columns of 500 prisoners on the 'death

march' to Schwerin. The over 200 Jehovah's Witnesses from different countries insisted on staying as one united group, and the SS finally agreed. They were able to care for their sick and weak, transporting some on carts belonging to the SS, among them the German R. Arthur Winkler, the former Watchtower representative in the Netherlands, and no deaths occurred among this group. When the march stopped in a forest on 26 April 1945 more than 18,000 prisoners camped in the open in desolate conditions. The group of Jehovah's Witnesses were well organised, dug out their own well, and tried to care for physical and spiritual necessities. Upon liberation on 3 May 1945 the 230 Witnesses wrote a memorandum thanking their God for the victorious outcome of their trials (Winkler, 1945; Yearbook, 1974, pp. 208–9). The historian Antje Zeiger comments: 'All the Witnesses survived because of their solidarity and extensive mutual help, although many other prisoners fell victim to the strain and shootings' (Zeiger, 2001, p. 87). One of the last 'death marches' started from Dachau camp on 26 April 1945, when 7000 prisoners were forced to walk south to the Alps, among them a number of Jehovah's Witnesses who were able to survive (Distel and Jakusch, 1978, pp. 190–91; WTA, LB Ropelius, p. 19). More male and female Witnesses who were slave labourers at the numerous subcamps or external labour details of the main concentration camps were also liberated at this time (Wrobel, 2005b).

The German Reich capitulated on 8 May 1945, and the war and 12 years of barbarous persecution and ruthless suppression of basic human rights came to an end. For most Jehovah's Witnesses the persecution was now over, but not for survivors who lived in East Germany and in other communist countries. The government of the German Democratic Republic banned their religion in August 1950, and a total of 5000 Jehovah's Witnesses would be sent to forced labour camps and detention centres.

Summary and Abstract

Jehovah's Witnesses, or 'Earnest Bible Students', were banned and persecuted from the beginning of the National Socialist regime because of their non-compliance with National Socialist ideology and practices. They constituted one of the main categories of 'protective custody prisoners'. By March 1934, 400 Jehovah's Witnesses, or 40 per cent of 1000 arrested, had been sent to early concentration camps in Germany. Between 1933 and 1935 several hundred of the 3000 German believers taken into custody became a distinguishable group of prisoners in the early terror camps of the National Socialists.

In 1935, when military service became compulsory, Jehovah's Witnesses were offered a 'Declaration' in which they were given the 'choice' of leaving the concentration camp and prison in return for renouncing their faith, collaborating with the National Socialist system and joining the army. The Witnesses' successful resistance to signing the paper is a key factor in understanding why the prisoner group became the 'particular object of SS hatred' (Garbe, 2002, p. 96), leading to exposure to even greater cruelty by the SS who sent them to the 'punishment battalions'.

In 1936, in the context of the reorganisation of the terror-camp system, the SS administration assigned Witness prisoners the purple triangle identification badge classifying them as one of the main and distinctive prisoner groups. They also 'formed a substantial group of concentration camp inmates' (Broszat, 1982, p. 195), especially when compared with the low total number of concentration camp inmates during the autumn and winter of 1936 when the Gestapo undertook mass arrests of Jehovah's Witnesses. Several thousand male and female Jehovah's Witnesses suffered in the main

and ‘modern’ National Socialist concentration camps and the subcamps and labour details between 1936 and 1945. The names of 4200 Jehovah’s Witness concentration camp inmates from Germany and other countries, or 37 per cent of over 11,300 believers of different nationalities arrested, have been registered so far. Their uncompromising spirit and courage earned them a certain respect from the SS and other prisoner groups especially from the summer of 1939 onward.

Because they refused to perform any military services or war-related work, the ferocious suppression of Jehovah’s Witnesses by the National Socialists would climax dramatically with the outbreak of the Second World War. In 1942, in view of the heavy war losses being sustained by Germany, the SS leaders shifted their concentration camp policy to a more ‘economic’ orientation, and many Jehovah’s Witnesses, though not all, were assigned to labour outside the camps that would not lead to an irreconcilable clash between National Socialist ideology and their conscience. The SS viewed them as reliable workers and experienced camp inmates who were not subversive, would not flee, and would work diligently. Up until the end of the war, however, the terror regime continued to treat them as ‘enemies of the state’, suppressing them severely, and executing 370 Jehovah’s Witnesses for conscientious objection and underground religious activities. The vast majority of the 1490 registered Witnesses of different nationalities who lost their lives died as concentration camp prisoners – some 950, or 64 per cent.

The existing historical material demonstrates that Jehovah’s Witnesses are a distinctive and distinguishable victim and prisoner group of the National Socialists from the beginning of the regime. Future investigations should seek to provide more detailed and complete statistics on the early camps (1933–35/36) and the main concentration camps (1936–45) and to shed more light on the role and fate of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Hitler’s prisons. Academic research into these and other areas, which must also include oral-history reports from survivors, is crucial for ensuring that the memory of the prisoners with the ‘purple triangle’ in concentration camps and the thousands of other Jehovah’s Witnesses who suffered persecution under National Socialism will not sink into oblivion. The ‘purple triangle’ is both a document of contemporary history and a call to remembrance.

Notes

- 1 For details about the work of WTA, see Wrobel, 1998.
- 2 Himmler’s full title from June 1936 onward was *Reichsführer-SS und Chef der Deutschen Polizei* (‘Reich Chief of the SS and Head of the German Police’) (Broszat, 1982, p. 281).
- 3 The total number (rounded up/down) of male and female Jehovah’s Witnesses in the main concentration camps by 1945, according to the registration of victim names in WTA, Zentralkartei, by November 2005: Auschwitz (410; 180 men, 230 women), Bergen-Belsen (120; 48 men, 72 women), Bor/Serbia (about 65 men), Buchenwald (about 650; 630 men, 19 women), Dachau (about 600; 550 men, 50 women), Emslandlager (219 men), Flossenbürg (85; 80 men, 5 women), Gross-Rosen (88; 64 men, 24 women), Lichtenburg (579; 122 men, 457 women), Majdanek and Lublin (57; 44 men, 13 women), Mauthausen/Gusen (over 400; 370 men, 35 women), Moringen (391; 6 men, 385 women), Natzweiler/Struthof (32; 30 men, 2 women), Neuengamme (194; 193 men, 1 woman), Niederhagen-Wewelsburg (310 men), Nordhausen and Dora-Mittelbau (91; 82 men, 9 women), Ravensbrück (about 1100; 250 men, 850 women), Sachsenburg (121; 116 men, 5 women), Sachsenhausen (over 1020; over 1000 men; 20 women), Stutthof (93; 67 men, 26 women) and Vught (93; 82 men, 11 women).
- 4 Joachim Kuroпка quotes here a National Socialist circular of 14 January 1937 which is based on Gestapo information about Jehovah’s Witnesses. Many also believed that the

- Witnesses 'regarded all government as the devil's handiwork' (Kogon, 1950, p. 41), a view which this writer refutes in Wrobel, 2001b, pp. 311–12, see the subheading 'Do all governments originate with the Devil?'. Kater (1969, p. 187) suggests that the main reason for the deadly animosity between National Socialism and the Bible Student teachings was their allegedly similar totalitarian ideologies (see also King, 1982, p. 176), because both systems demanded the total person and exclusive obedience to the *Führer*, or in the case of the Witnesses, to Jehovah God and his Theocracy. Garbe (1999, pp. 531–32) refutes this thesis and points out that such substantial similarities are unproven and that the structures and objectives of the two ideologies are diametrically opposed in important ways.
- 5 The 19,268 persons active during this campaign have been viewed by Kater (1969, p. 181) and others as the total figure ('about 20,000') of Jehovah's Witnesses in National Socialist Germany. However, 24,843 believers attended the annual Memorial celebration on 9 April 1933 (and in addition 185 persons participated in the Saarland) (Yearbook, 1974, pp. 109–10; see also Garbe, 1999, pp. 81, 492).
 - 6 The historiography of Jehovah's Witnesses in National Socialist concentration camps must thus begin in April 1933, and not in 1935, as many writers have suggested in the past (Wrobel, 2003a, p. 125, see subheading '1933–1945: Bibelforscher im KZ'; Wrobel, 2003b, p. 373, pp. 401–04, see subheading 'Die "Erklärung" vom 25. Juni 1933 und frühe Konzentrationslager'. The historian Annette Eberle (2005, p. 96) starts the concentration camp historiography of Jehovah's Witnesses in November 1933; Henry Friedlander (2001, p. 17) writes: 'A few Jehovah's Witnesses could be found in the concentration camps right from the beginning, but most were committed between 1935 and 1939.'
 - 7 It is not true that this mass meeting in Berlin 'began with the singing of the German national anthem and [that] the hall was decorated with swastika flags' (Carsten, 1995, p. 115). Detlef Garbe (1999, p. 553) corrected this erroneous interpretation of certain sources, provided by former Jehovah's Witnesses, in the third edition of his book. Also, the 'frequently repeated accusation of "having curried favor with" the Nazi regime in connection with the Jehovah's Witness Convention in Berlin on June 25, 1933, . . . cannot be upheld' (Besier and Besier, 2003, p. 279). This accusation, a notion which was originally promoted during the Cold War era by the antagonistic and anti-American East German State Security against Jehovah's Witnesses banned in the GDR (1950–89) with their headquarters in the United States, has been refuted by other writers as well: see Yonan, 1999, pp. 318–21; Wrobel, 2001b, pp. 310–19; 2003a, pp. 120–25; 2003b, pp. 401–10; Chu, 2004, p. 332; <http://info.lilawinkel.de>.
 - 8 Conclusions such as that 'there were relatively few police actions that led to trial and imprisonment in 1933–34' (Helmreich, 1979, p. 395; based on Zipfel, 1965, pp. 181, 188), should thus be reconsidered, although there were fewer police actions against the Witnesses compared with the eventful 1935 and 1936–37 periods.
 - 9 In 1935 a total of 198 Witnesses were imprisoned in Hamburg (Garbe, 1999, pp. 238, 510).
 - 10 Hitler did not use the German terms *Auslöschen* (extinguishing), *ausgemerzt* or *Ausmerzung* (exterminated, extinction), as he did for the Jews (Edelheit and Edelheit, 1994, p. 192). But see Johnson, 1999, p. 240.
 - 11 'Protective custody' was an official euphemism for removal to a concentration camp (see also Edelheit and Edelheit, 1994, p. 419). Before 1938, however, the term could also mean confinement in a prison cell, including awaiting trial (see also Rürup, 1987, pp. 99–100).
 - 12 According to Pohl's letter to Himmler of 30 April 1942 (IMT, document R-129; see note 39 below, italics added here), the detention of prisoners for the 'reasons of security, *education*, or as a preventive measure' was the 'main consideration [or, principal concern]' until 1942; see also Schnabel, 1957, p. 221. In the language of the SS *Erziehung* (education) meant punishment and maltreatment (Pingel, 1978, p. 75).
 - 13 The WTA has court decisions from 1933 on file. Hence before June 1934 courts in Germany were already taking action against Jehovah's Witnesses with fines and prison terms.

- 14 Survivor Erwin Klose (1992, p. 18) mentions 120 Witnesses in Esterwegen camp; Otto Hartstang (1936, p. 6), from Remscheid, who was released on 1 November 1935, counted 85 fellow believers there and a total of 1100 inmates; Report, 1936, p. 275 has the number of 300 Witnesses (as before October 1935).
- 15 Further similar contemporary reports are on record. Survivor Otto Hartstang (1936, p. 6) also mentions the 'Declaration' for the Esterwegen camp. His original concentration camp report (WTA, Dok 21/12/35) was written on 21 December 1935 and refers to autumn 1935.
- 16 Consider the entries in the official prisoner's Sachsenhausen camp record card (photo in Woher, 1946, pp. 6–7) of Ludwig Rachuba, from Datteln, who suffered in the Esterwegen, Sachsenhausen and Wewelsburg camps (Garbe, 1999, p. 416; English translation from Garbe, 2006):

Punishment record: Aug. 13, 1935: Locked in a bent position, because of not following any orders; July 1, 1936: Ten days of severe detention and twenty-five strokes with a stick, because of his refusal to work; Nov. 5, 1936: Ten days of detention and twenty-five strokes with a stick because he propagated Jehovah in the camp; Jan. 11, 1937: Twenty-one days of severe detention because of his repeated refusal to work; May 1, 1937: Eighteen days of severe detention because of his refusal to work and behaving in an undisciplined way; May 3, 1937: Twenty-one days of severe detention and three months of service in the punishment battalion because of inciting the other prisoners and denouncing the government during the reception of a speech; March 7, 1938: Thirty days of severe detention and twenty-five strokes with a stick because of laughing at the first concentration camp commander while he was giving a lecture; April 6, 1938: Five days of severe detention and fifteen strokes with a stick because of his refusal to sign the order for his arrest; Aug. 12, 1938: Eight days of severe detention and fifteen strokes with a stick because he remained seated and did not take off his cap during the singing of the Deutschlandlied; Oct. 12, 1938: Two times for two hours hanging on a stake because of laziness; [The hanging on a stake was an especially cruel form of punishment causing excruciating pain: the prisoner's hands were tied behind his back and he was hung on the stake in a way so that his body hovered over the ground-JW.] Oct. 18, 1938: Eight days of standing at the gate without supper; Sept. 13, 1940: Four hours of punitive drill because of having extensive discussions with other prisoners during working hours without working; Sept. 3, 1942: Passed away as a result of physical weakness.

- 17 See photos of various forms of the 'Declaration' in: Zürcher, 1938, pp. 192–93; Detjen, 1998, p. 249; Hesse and Harder, 2001, pp. 439–45; for Dachau camp in Distel and Jakusch, 1978, p. 58 and for Buchenwald camp with English translation in Rammerstorfer, 2004, pp. 104–5.
- 18 Survivor Margarete Buber (1950, p. 227), not a Jehovah's Witness, gives the following report about the Ravensbrück camp. Her observations are, however, one-sided, and she mixes up time periods (after 1942 the situation for the Witnesses improved rather than getting worse as she remembers).

The Witnesses were, so to speak, 'voluntary prisoners', for all they had to do in order to secure their immediate release was to sign the special Bible Students' form. ... There were piles of these forms in the S.S. office, but up to 1942 very, very few were ever signed. However, later on, when the persecution against them grew more brutal and ruthless, the weaker sisters began to sign, though even then they were the exception.

- 19 The decree was issued by the *Geheimes Staatspolizeiamt* or 'Gestapa', the national headquarters of the Secret State Police in Berlin. This article does not distinguish between the 'Gestapa' and the 'Gestapo'. See also Broszat, 1982, pp. 266–67.

- 20 The Gestapo office in Berlin amended this order on 12 December 1936 and 22 April 1937 and intensified its policy against Jehovah's Witnesses prior to the war.
- 21 The construction of all other concentration camps, such as Buchenwald in 1937, did not follow this initial triangle-shaped model, which obviously had theoretical and symbolic meaning but was less practical for housing prisoners than the rectangular model.
- 22 The use of the red triangle for political prisoners was initiated in Sachsenhausen camp at the end of 1937 (Sofsky, 1999, p. 118).
- 23 The concentration camp prisoner category 'Bible Student' at times apparently included a few members from small Bible Student splinter groups, as well as adherents of other religious groups which played only a secondary role during the time of the National Socialist regime, such as Adventists, Baptists and the New Apostolic community (Garbe 1999, pp. 82, 406; Zeiger, 2001, p. 72). Since their numbers in the camps were quite small compared with the total number of Jehovah's Witness prisoners, I shall not consider them separately in this article. Historian Antje Zeiger (2001, p. 88) writes about Sachsenhausen camp: 'In May 1938, every tenth prisoner was a Jehovah's Witness. Less than one percent of the Witnesses included other religious nonconformists (Adventists, Baptists, pacifists), who were placed in the same prisoner classification.'
- 24 This action was underpinned by planning for a special Gestapo unit in Dresden in June 1937 (Lahrtz, 2003, pp. 142–43). According to Lahrtz (2003, pp. 137–38), the Dresden Gestapo occupied 124 out of their 234 officials (1933–44) with cases of Jehovah's Witnesses (53 per cent); in 1937 as many as 59 out of 70 officials (84 per cent) handled cases of Witnesses.
- 25 The announcement of 1 March 1937 was published by the Watchtower Society in many newspapers in Switzerland. The figure is based on an undated report from Germany, referring to the winter of 1936–37, and reads: 'According to a rough estimate there are now about 4000 of our brethren in jails and concentration camps.'
- 26 Broszat (1982, p. 188) writes: 'In the negotiations for the 1937 concentration camp budget the estimates for the first half of the year were still based on a total of 7,500 prisoners whereas for the second half of the year a total of 10,000 prisoners was budgeted for.'
- 27 With 6000 active Jehovah's Witnesses outside the prisons and concentration camps where about 6000 other believers were kept, we arrive at a total of about 12,000 Witnesses for Germany in 1936–37. Hence, half of the 25,000 members, as of April 1933, obviously withdrew, became inactive or simply kept silent in public about religious matters, in order not to be detected by the authorities.
- 28 The historian Elke Imberger comes to the following conclusion regarding the Witness underground campaigns in 1936–37:

In summary, it should be noted with regard to the leaflet campaigns that the distribution of the 'resolution' and of the 'open letter' were not only a particularly spectacular form of public proclamation by the illegal sect, but also constituted a quite new form. While the Bible Students had worked with leaflets even prior to 1936, . . . the distribution of the 'resolution' and of the 'open letter,' on the other hand, were nationwide campaigns, which were so well coordinated that they took place all over Germany on the same day and at the same time. The careful planning, with almost military precision, which was necessary at both regional and local levels has become clear by the example of the preparation and execution of the campaign in Schleswig-Holstein. In Germany during the whole of the National Socialist period there was no other organisation in opposition that conducted a comparable initiative. In view of the conditions for opposition prevailing at the time, the campaigns of the Bible Students on 12 December 1936 and 20 June 1937 are even more remarkable, particularly when one considers that other underground groupings, such as the illegal workers parties, had all been smashed by this time. More than all other activities of Jehovah's Witnesses, the distribution of the 'resolution' and of the 'open letter' demonstrate the high degree of organisation that the Bible Students sect had in the underground. (Imberger, 1991, p. 345)

- 29 A Jewish survivor of the Buchenwald camp said about the *Bibelforscher*: ‘They were very helpful to other prisoners. When the pogrom sent a massive influx of Jews to the camp on November 10, 1938, the “*Jehovah’s schwein*”, as the guards referred to them, went round with a bread ration for the elderly and famished Jews, going without food themselves for up to four days’ (Wrobel, 1998, p. 287).
- 30 In 1938 approximately 700 Jehovah’s Witnesses were taken in custody (Helmreich, 1979, p. 397). In May 1938 every tenth prisoner in the Sachsenhausen camp was a Jehovah’s Witness (Zeiger, 2001, p. 88).
- 31 On 23 March 1938 Johannes (Hans) Gärtner wrote from Dachau camp to his wife: ‘My mail is restricted from now on. I am neither allowed to write nor to receive mail or money’ (WTA, Dok 23/03/38; photo of postcard in Hesse, 2001, p. 185).
- 32 In his camp letter of 1 January 1939 Adam Kaltwasser mentions that he is now allowed to write a letter once a month (WTA, Dok 01/01/39 (4)).
- 33 On the basis of a report by Austrian survivor Hubert Mattischek, Schaeper-Wimmer (1997, p. 58) mentions ‘about 150 Jehovah’s Witnesses’ in Dachau in May 1939.
- 34 Gustav Auschner (WTA, LB Auschner) arrived in Sachsenhausen camp in January 1939 and later reported on ‘about 450 Jehovah’s Witnesses and 150 [other] prisoners from the big camp’ who were together in the four ‘isolation’ blocks.
- 35 SS leader Rudolph Höss (Hoess, 1959, pp. 95, 99), although an eyewitness of the event, gives an exaggerated and partly incorrect report of the shooting of August Dickmann.
- 36 According to Antje Zeiger (2001, pp. 79, 55), between November 1939 and May 1940, 94 Jehovah’s Witnesses died at Sachsenhausen; nearly every fourth imprisoned Witness. A total of 131 Witnesses died between January 1939 and December 1940.
- 37 The number of active Jehovah’s Witnesses in various countries, mainly based on Resistance, 1999: 600 in Austria (in 1940); 375 in Belgium (in 1940); 345 (?) in Czechoslovakia (in 1939); 1000 in France (in 1939); 1100 in Hungary (in 1940); 120 in Italy (in 1941); 23 in Luxembourg (in 1940); 450 in the Netherlands (in 1940); 1000 in Poland (in 1939); 4800 in the Soviet Union (Russia) (in 1946); Yugoslavia, unknown; stateless and others, 30. See Table 1.
- 38 According to the first Ravensbrück prisoner list, dated 21 May 1939, among the total of 974 women were 388 female Bible Students (39.8 per cent) (Philipp, 1999, p. 27).
- 39 On 30 April 1942 Pohl wrote to Himmler:

1. The war has brought about a marked change in the structure of the concentration camps and has changed their duties fundamentally with regard to the employment of the prisoners. The custody of prisoners for the sole reasons of security, education, or as a preventive measure is no longer the main consideration. The importance now lies in the economic side. The mobilization of all prisoner labor for purposes of the war (increase of armament) now, and for purposes of construction in the forthcoming peace, is coming more and more to the foreground.

2. From this knowledge necessary measures result which require a gradual transformation of the concentration camps from their former one-sided political character into an organization adapted to economic tasks.

3. For this reason I called together all the leaders of the former inspectorate of concentration camps, all camp commanders, and all managers and supervisors of work, on the 23rd and 24th of April 1942 and explained personally to them this new development. I have compiled, in the order attached, the essential points which have to be brought into effect with the utmost urgency if the commencement of work for the purposes of the armament industry is not to be delayed. (IMT, document R-129)

See also, with a different translation, Sofsky, 1999, p. 321, note 7; part of quote in Broszat, 1982, p. 242. Complete German document in Schnabel, 1957, pp. 204–7.

- 40 Rudolf Höss, camp commandant of Auschwitz, issued an order on 30 September 1942 that female Bible Students were to be used as maids for SS families (Wontor-Cichy, 2003, pp. 23, 90–91). Hence Witness women received working assignments in SS households before Himmler’s letter of 6 January 1943. After 1945, before being executed, Höss gave a

report about the working assignments of Witness women in Auschwitz camp (Hoess, 1959, pp. 149–50).

- 41 Charlotte Müller (1997, p. 26), who was assigned to work as a housekeeper for an SS family not far from the main camp, presents a photo of her special Ravensbrück identity card.
- 42 The underground organiser, Julius Engelhardt, was arrested, sentenced to death and beheaded on 14 August 1944. See also Carsten, 1995, p. 119.

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