

FINNISH HOLOCAUST

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New findings document that Finland, too, participated in the mass murder of Jews and Communists, fully contradicting earlier beliefs.

The historical assertion that Finland avoided Nazification despite fighting on the German side against the Soviet Union from 1941-44 is crumbling. Friday this week the Finnish historian Oula Silvennoinen defends his doctoral dissertation *Secret Comrades-in-Arms* at the University of Helsinki. In his dissertation Silvennoinen presents completely new information about the Nazi organization "Einsatzkommando Finnland," that carried out mass murder of Jews and Communists on the northern Eastern Front. This special command was the result of cooperation between the Finnish Security Police, Valpo, and Nazi Germany's Reichssicherheitshauptamt (RSHA).

"This is very different information from what we have had earlier," observes Anton Weiss-Wendt. He is a senior researcher at the Center for Studies of the Holocaust and Religious Minorities (HL-senteret in Oslo). Weiss-Wendt's own research includes Holocaust cooperation and war crimes in the Soviet Union during the Second World War.

GOOD REPUTATION

"According to what we have known about Finland and the Holocaust before, the country mainly protected its own Jews. As in Norway, it was a small minority population, approximately 1000 people. But unlike Norway, the Finnish government refused to turn the Jews over to Germany, despite intense pressure. They did, however, expel seven persons without Finnish citizenship. These were German and Austrian Jews who had come to Finland just before the outbreak of war. They were delivered to the security police in Estonia in 1941-42, and were immediately executed. Compared with other allies of Germany, the Finnish government nevertheless emerges relatively unsullied according to what we have known until now. Finland was, interestingly enough, the only one of the German-allied countries that allowed Jews to serve as officers in the army. This didn't amount to very many people, but many of the Jewish officers served on the Eastern Front. The Finnish units often fought side-by-side with the Germans, and the presence of Jews among the Finns surprised the Germans. The Germans who participated in Operation Barbarossa [Hitler's attack on the Soviet Union] were used to a very different treatment of Jews.

"That there existed an Einsatzkommando Finnland, and that Finland participated actively in the Holocaust, is completely new information," says Anton Weiss-Wendt, who believes that this is extremely important new research.

Finnish historians give the same summary. In Finland the revelations have fallen like a bomb.

“This is really a revolutionary research result. We had no idea that anything called Einsatzkommando Finnland even existed,” says Markku Jokisipilä to the Swedish *Dagens Nyheter*. Jokisipilä is a historian at Åbo University [in Finland], and an expert on the cooperation between Nazi Germany and Finland during the Second World War.

LENGTHY COOPERATION

Oula Silvennoinen’s dissertation is based on new source material from previously un-studied archives. He was especially thorough in his study of the Finnish Security Police archives, but Silvennoinen has also found new information in archives in Germany, Estonia, Latvia, Sweden, and the USA.

The Finnish Security Police was founded in 1919 to protect the young republic from Communists, both within Finland and in the Soviet Union. Professional police cooperation was maintained with German colleagues throughout the 1920s, and quickly re-established after the Nazis came to power in 1933. That cooperation was concentrated around the hunt for Communists nationally and internationally.

“The common enemy proved to be a powerful unifying concept,” writes Silvennoinen in the abstract of his dissertation.

Through the 1930s the forms of cooperation developed from regular, routine exchanges of information to personal friendships between Valpo and the highest SS leadership.

The critical period of the German-Finnish security cooperation began in 1941, when Finland participated with Germany in the attack on the Soviet Union. It was then that Einsatzkommando Finnland was created, to exterminate ideological enemies as well as race-enemies of Nazi Germany on the northerly Eastern Front.

“Joint actions in northern Finland led also members of the Finnish Security Police to become participants in mass murders of Communists and Jews,” Silvennoinen writes.

After the war investigations of war crimes conducted by Valpo were consistently hindered, since it was usually impossible to find both suspects and evidence for the crimes.

The dissertation *Secret Comrades-in-Arms* takes up Finnish-German police cooperation throughout the period from Hitler’s seizure of power in 1933 until the alliance between Finland and Germany was broken in 1944.

Translated by Troy Storfjell