



HITLER'S EXECUTIVE CU TIVE

*The Austrian
Police and
National Socialism*

HITLER'S EXECUTIVE

Martina Zerovnik

Translated from the German by Lisa Rosenblatt

HITLER EXECUTIVE CULTURE

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TIVE

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FOREWORD

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This exhibition sheds light on a chapter of national socialist history that has been given far too little scholarly attention until now: the everyday work of the police from 1938 to 1945. What role did the executive play in the Nazi regime? How did it act? Was it a victim or (co-)perpetrator?

The Federal Ministry of the Interior is the first ministry in Austria to openly confront its national socialist past. Through rigorous academic research conducted by an external consortium consisting of the University of Graz / Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for Research on Consequences of War, the Documentation Centre of Austrian Resistance, and the Federal Mauthausen Memorial, and supported by a project team in the Federal Ministry of the Interior, a comprehensive picture of the Austrian police with all its ruptures and continuities from the Nazi era through to the Second Republic has been compiled.

For this project, the archives of the Federal Ministry of the Interior and the provincial police directorates were opened to researchers for the first time, yielding key insights of lasting relevance. These findings not only inform the police's basic and advanced training, but also form the foundation of this traveling exhibition.

I would like to thank all involved for their impressive and thorough examination of national socialist police history, and I wish all visitors to the exhibition an engaging and thought-provoking confrontation with this important topic.

*Yours sincerely,
Gerhard Karner
Federal Minister of the Interior*

FOREWORD

With the research project “The Police in Austria: Ruptures and Continuities 1938–1945,” the Federal Ministry of the Interior initiated a thorough, scholarly engagement with the past of Austria’s executive branch under the national socialist regime of terror. The exhibition Hitler’s Executive and the present catalogue make the most important findings of this research accessible to an interested public. The opening of the archives of the Ministry of the Interior enabled a first direct look into the Exekutive der Gewalt (executive of violence), which is also the title of the extensive edited volume published together with Andreas Kranebitter and Gregor Holzinger that arose as one of the outcomes of this research: from the transformation of security structures after the “Anschluss,” to ideological training, to participation in the regime of terror in Austria and the occupied territories. The police were deeply implicated in war crimes and the Holocaust. At the same time, examples of resistance within the police point to the question of individual options for action. How national socialist crimes were dealt with after the end of the war in 1945 remains relevant until today. Precisely because the police force of the Second Republic is anchored in democracy, coming to terms with this past is of far-reaching significance.

The exhibition Hitler’s Executive fulfills the democratic mandate of the Federal Ministry as a public institution to promote a critical and informed engagement with its own past—not only in the training of police officers, but also vis-à-vis the public at large. The success of this endeavor is due to the collaboration of a team of scholars, police officers, and civil servants. The research project carried out by the University of Graz and the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for Research on Consequences of War together with the Documentation Centre of Austrian Resistance, and the Mauthausen Memorial provided the essential groundwork.

I would like to express special thanks to Martina Zerovnik for her thoughtful curatorship and successful conceptualization of the exhibition, and for the excellent collaboration. Heartfelt thanks also go to the members of the scientific advisory board, who ensured the quality of the exhibition through both their profound expertise on the subject and stimulating discussions. Support from the Fachzirkel on executive history and the staff of the competent departments in the Federal Ministry was also an important foundation that we greatly appreciate. On behalf of the team at the Ministry of the Interior, I would like to thank Gerald Hesztera, Stephan Mlczoch, Nicole Antal, Ulrike Landmann, and Eva-Marina Strauß for the rewarding cooperation. Funding from the Ministry of the Interior and the Future Fund of the Republic of Austria made it possible to realize both the exhibition and the catalogue, which has been included in Böhlau's publishing program.

Warm thanks for tireless intellectual curiosity and successful organization go to my team members at the University of Graz and at the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for Research on Consequences of War, where Kurt Bauer, with his profound knowledge, and Nadjeschda Stoffers, with her exceptional commitment, contributed significantly to the success of the exhibition. The outstanding graphics and compelling design were created by BUERO41A, the meticulous copyediting was done by Gudrun Likar, and thoughtful translation by Lisa Rosenblatt. Many others were involved with the exhibition behind the scenes in a wide variety of ways, whether through professional exchange or by providing information and materials, and we extend our sincere thanks also to them.

The richly illustrated catalogue, which is now available also in English, documents the central contents of the exhibition Hitler's Executive. Designed as a traveling exhibition, it has been touring the individual federal states throughout Austria since its opening at the Ministry of the Interior in March 2024 in Vienna and is being continuously expanded. Against the backdrop of the current "turning point," engaging with the dark chapters of contemporary history and the search for individual options for action seem particularly relevant. I wish you an enlightening read that raises questions, invites dialogue, and encourages personal reflection!

Yours sincerely,

Barbara Stelzl-Marx

*Professor of Contemporary European History at the University of Graz
and Director of the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for Research on Consequences of War, Graz – Vienna – Raabs*

INTRODUCTION

THE AUSTRIAN POLICE IN THE PAST AND PRESENT

In 2022, the Federal Ministry of the Interior opened its archives for academic research. As part of the research project “The Police in Austria: Ruptures and Continuities 1938–1945,” a team from the University Graz/Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for Research on Consequences of War, the Documentation Centre of Austrian Resistance, and the Mauthausen Memorial explored key aspects of the Austrian police’s national socialist past. In addition to symposia and a

scientific publication, the project also resulted in the exhibition *Hitler's Executive: The Austrian Police and National Socialism* accompanied by the present catalogue. Unlike the other forms of mediation, the exhibition is aimed specifically at a non-academic audience and aspires to bring science to the public without presupposing fundamental prior knowledge or a background in history. The catalogue, in particular, is conceived as a teaching and learning tool that offers

a basic introduction to the topic and makes selected exhibition content available for use in schools or individual study. The scholarly publication, which is published as *Exekutive der Gewalt. Die österreichische Polizei und der Nationalsozialismus*, offers more in-depth analyses.

Due to its limited time frame, the project is to be seen as merely a beginning for more comprehensive research. Many questions will be answered only with further investigation and analysis, and some we can approach only through discussion: How many Austrian police officers and gendarme were (already before the "Anschluss") staunch National Socialists? How many resisted? What happened when orders were refused? Where were Austrians deployed? What role did women play? What Nazi crimes did police officers and gendarmes commit? What happened to the offenders after the war?

As mediator between past and present, the exhibition pursues the educational and democratic mission of fostering critical awareness and gaining insights relevant for contemporary life. Examining ruptures and continuities in the history of the police inevitably raises the question of how the Austrian police (and Austrian society, in general) became what it is today, which history it invokes, and

how that history influences its current self-image and actions. This dimension is also addressed by the exhibition's concept and design.

The aim is to provide points of reference for further research and discussion rather than a seamless or exhaustive depiction. The exhibition works consciously with ruptures that demand the audience's active engagement, deliberately avoiding smooth, easily digestible forms of mediation. Like in the research process, not everything is apparent at first glance. Blanks highlight both the difficulties of the search for meaning as well as the fragmentary nature of available sources. The graphic design points to gaps in the current knowledge, while also symbolizing the obscuring, suppressing, forgetting, and silence that long characterized the writing of our own history. In this way, the contents resist a form of instrumentalizing memory work driven by attribution—with the aim of opening critical confrontation and dialogue.

The exhibition and catalogue are an invitation to the public—especially employees and trainees of the police force, as well as teachers and students—to engage with the topic, recognize the problem areas, ask their own questions, search for answers, and thereby actively participate in (their own) history.

HITLER'S EXECUTIVE

After World War II, mainly the victims of National Socialism in the police and gendarmerie were commemorated. Their own acts as perpetrators were long neglected. Today we know that the police played a central role in enforcing and maintaining national socialist rule. Its “order and security” was based on surveillance, repression, and terror. The police persecuted, imprisoned, and killed people whom the regime considered “opponents.” Among these

people were also colleagues who belonged to other political camps, who resisted, or helped people in danger. Austrian police officers and gendarmes were significantly involved in the Holocaust — and frequently, they were not held accountable after the war. The exhibition offers an overview of the organization, tasks, and ethos of the executive branch in National Socialism including the breaks and continuities before and after national socialist rule. Based on biographies, it shows the fates that befell Austrian police officers and gendarmes and how they acted — from the fight for freedom to tyranny and murder.

CRISES,
PRO *Austria
before the
"Anschluss"*
TESTS,
VIOLENCE

The 1920s and 1930s were characterized by profound uncertainty. World War I had changed the old order in Europe. Due to the global economic crisis, high inflation, and unemployment, large portions of the population had slipped into poverty. Authoritarian and right-wing extremist organizations tried to destroy democracy. The National Socialist German Worker's Party (NSDAP/Nazi Party) overran the country with terrorist attacks.

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JULY 1927—POLICE ARE ORDERED TO SHOOT

On 30 January 1927 in Schattendorf, right-wing radical Front Fighters killed a boy and a war invalid in a clash with the Social Democratic Republican Protection League. Three Front Fighters were charged, and on 14 July 1927, acquitted. The following day, protests broke out in Vienna and the Palace of Justice was set on fire. Chief of Police Johann Schober ordered the riots to be stopped by armed force. Eighty-four protesters and five police officers were killed. Hundreds were injured on both sides.



Arming of policemen at the Marokkaner Barracks in Vienna, July 1927; BMI/LPD Wien

MARCH 1933—POLICE GAIN POWER OF THE DICTATORSHIP

After a parliamentary crisis on 4 March 1933, the Christian-Social Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuß seized control of the state and transformed Austria into an authoritarian police country. Parties and assemblies were banned, censorship and capital punishment introduced, and the united Fatherland Front party was founded. Political dissidents were persecuted and imprisoned in detention camps. The police's centralized power and progressive build-up of arms allowed it to practice random violence.



Patriotic declaration by policemen in the presence of authoritarian Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuß and Minister of Security Emil Fey in Vienna, 1933; BMI/LPD Wien

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FEBRUARY 1934—POLICE PERSECUTE SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

Minister of Security Emil Fey, a leader in the Home Guard and militant opponent of Social Democracy, was in charge of the police. On 12 February 1934, when the police searched a party office in Linz for weapons belonging to the recently forbidden Republican Protection Force, the latter fought back. Further fighting broke out in Vienna and Styria. The police and the army crushed the revolts. In the course of this, roughly 360 people were killed, of whom 38 percent were uninvolved bystanders. Nine rebels were executed, the Social Democratic Workers Party and all of its organizations were dissolved.



Arrest of rebels and resistance fighters in Vienna, February 1934; BMI/LPD Wien

JULY 1934—THE POLICE FIGHT FOR AND AGAINST DOLLFUSS

Following Adolf Hitler's appointment as Chancellor of the German Reich in January 1933, national socialist terror reached its peak in Austria with acts of sabotage and bomb attacks. In June 1933, the NSDAP (Nazi Party) was banned, and its members were henceforth "illegal." In July 1934, under orders from Hitler, the SS (Protection Squad) carried out an attempted coup during which Dollfuß died of a gunshot wound. Police officers were also involved. The majority of the police remained loyal to the chancellor dictatorship, whereby a national socialist seizure of power could be averted.



Clearing the "RAVAG" broadcasting corporation building in Vienna occupied by National Socialists, July Putsch 1934; BMI/LPD Wien

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MARCH 1938—POLICE IMPLEMENT THE “ANSCHLUSS”

After the ban, members of the Nazi Party fled to the German Reich and organized attacks from there, while “illegals” infiltrated the institutions in Austria. Among them were police officers and gendarmes who passed on information and helped prisoners escape. In February 1938, Dollfuß's successor Kurt Schuschnigg appointed the National Socialist Arthur Seyß-Inquart as Minister of the Interior and Security. On 12 March 1938, the German Reich marched into Austria with military and police units, unimpeded, amid cheers.



German Reich and Austrian policemen raising a boom barrier at the border to Austria accomplishing the “Anschluss,” 12 March 1938; ÖNB/Bildarchiv



**Das nationalsozialistische Deutsch-
land grüßt sein nationalsozialistisches
Oesterreich und die neue national-
sozialistische Regierung.**

In treuer, unlösbarer Verbundenheit!

Heil Hitler!

Bundes-Polizei Wien
Archiv

SAMMLUNG
LEO SCHRIFNER

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FRANZ EMIL WALCH

31 Oct 1896 Innerbraz, Vorarlberg–
14 Feb 1969 Bludenz, Vorarlberg

1934 joined Fatherland Front
1938 joined Nazi Party

The laborer Franz Emil Walch joined the gendarmerie in Bregenz in 1919. In the following years, he was transferred several times, probably because of his national socialist leanings, even though he belonged to the Fatherland Front—the united party of the Dollfuß-Schuschnigg dictatorship—until 1938. At the same time, he also worked for the SS on the infiltration of the police. After the “Anschluss,” he was therefore allowed to wear the honor chevron of the “Old Fighters” as well as the “Sig runes” of the SS. He drew up a list with the names of twenty-four colleagues who were to be “transferred or retired as a result of their political actions or for other reasons.” Walch was involved in the arrest of his former Dornbirn commander, Hugo Lunardon, and had his wife and children thrown out onto the street. Lunardon was deported to the Dachau concentration camp and ultimately died in the Mauthausen concentration camp. Walch was dismissed from the gendarmerie as an “Offender” in 1946, however, in 1952 he was reclassified as a “Lesser Offender,” reinstated, and retired.



District Captain of the gendarmerie Franz Walch, personal file, 1938, at this time Senior NCO (non-commissioned officer) of the gendarmerie; BMI/LPD Vorarlberg

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St./B.

A b s c h r i f t !

706-

Andie
Geheime Staatspolizei
- Staatspolizeistelle -
I n n s b r u c k .

Betr.: Franz W a l c h , Gend. Rev. Insp. Inspektor,
geb. am 31.10.1896 in Braz, verh., röm. kath.,
wohnhaft: Dornbirn I, Kreuzgasse 6.

Vorg.: Dort. Schr. II G 22/38 v. 25.4.1938 .

Anlg.: - o -

W a l c h war einer der wenigen Gendarmerie-
beamten, auf die sich die Nationalsozialisten wirklich
100 prozentig verlassen konnten. Er wurde wegen seiner
Gesinnung von einem Ort an den anderen geschoben, in die
hintersten Gebirgspesten versetzt und doch tat er für die
nationalsozialistische Bewegung was er nur tun konnte.

In erster Linie hat er die SS mit Nachrichten, die sie
von ihm verlangten versorgt, dann sind Fälle bekannt,
in denen er Parteigenossen oder Anhänger der Partei
aufmerksam machte, dass eine Hausdurchsuchung bevorstehe,
oder sonst irgend eine Amtshandlung gegen sie eingeleitet
sei, wodurch meistens eine Verabredung möglich wurde. W.
hat bei der Einrichtung des SD bzw. nach dessen Errich-
tung in Vorarlberg die ersten und auch besten und genaue-
sten Nachrichten geliefert.

W. ist eine ruhige, aufrichtige Natur, lässt
sich durch nichts aus der Fassung bringen, weiss sich
schnell zu helfen und ist doch nicht unüberlegt.

Durch strenge Disziplin und Gerechtigkeit er-
warb sich W. die Achtung seiner Untergebenen. Er hat
einen fließenden, stilvollen Aufsatz und arbeitet dabei
gründlich und flink.

F.d.R.d.A.:

