

## Abstract

The dissertation deals with the research of a role played by the SS, respectively *Allgemeine-SS*, in Lower Austria and Reichsgau Lower Danube since its creation in the early 1930s to the end of the Second World War. The dissertation's purpose is to analyse SS activities, structure and staff. Its history showed a number of identical features with the history of the SS in other Austrian Bundesländer and in Germany itself, but at the same time local specifics appeared.

In Lower Austria / Lower Danube, the SS had the second highest or even the highest number of members in entire Austria, depending on a particular year. However, conversion to per capita it was exactly the opposite. In comparison with the situation in "the old empire", the SS also showed below average numbers of SS men. This fact consisted in geographic character and population social structure of the country whose predominantly Catholic-conservative inhabitants living in the lowland countryside showed greater resistance to entry into the SS than Evangelicals or Catholics living in the mountains. The situation was specific in South Moravia and the south-eastern corner of Bohemia which were connected to Lower Danube in October 1938. There were, as in the entire former Czechoslovak borderlands, a number of *Allgemeine-SS* members per capita three times larger than the average.

In the summer of 1933, the Lower Austrian SS carried out terrorist attacks on railways, electric power lines and the possessions of opposing political parties. That was the difference compared to the situation in other parts of Austria where the NSDAP terror was aimed at Jewish citizens and their property or at the Nazi opponents of the ruling regime. Terrorist attacks were executed with approval or on the orders of the NSDAP and the SS in Germany.

With Hitler's approval, there was also made the Nazi attempt to take power in 1934. The Lower Austrian SS, like the SS in other Austrian countries except Vienna, was totally unprepared for the July coup. It did not have enough weapons and ammunition, the military training of men was completely inadequate, lacking links with formations from other Länder, a large number of the Lower Austrian SS commanders were arrested or fled to Germany in the weeks before the coup. There was no coordination with the SA which was in Lower Austria, regarding the superiority in numbers of the loyal units to government, absolutely necessary for the success of the action. Therefore, it was not

surprising that the SS did not stand forth in Lower Austria in the critical days in July 1934.

After the failure of the July coup, the SS in Austria adapted to the new conditions when it was clear that the Nazis would not take power before long. Violent and terrorist actions were banned. The SS in Lower Austria was focused on collecting intelligence information and drawing up lists of people with a hostile attitude to the NSDAP, which were later used for their arrests after March 1938. Furthermore, it provided financial support to its poor and unemployed members, either from their own resources or from money received from Germany. SS members attended ideological trainings and did sports activities. After the Anschluss in March 1938, however, it came to light that they were at the rather low level.

Apparently as a result of terrorist attacks by radical Nazi groups around Fritz Woitsche, the most of the Lower Austrian SS commanders were arrested at the turn of 1936 and 1937. During their investigation, the police even found the track of SS leadership in Austria itself. Some members of the leadership were arrested and some were forced to flee. As a result of these events, Ernst Kaltenbrunner, the future Chief of RSHA, was appointed the new SS leader in Austria. After the Austrian Anschluss, the local units were reorganized and duty standardized in accordance with regulations in effect.

Last but not least, the thesis deals with the question of SS social structure and whether its members fulfilled the traditional idea of SS as an elite and selective organization. Almost all the layers of the society were represented in the *Allgemeine-SS* units in Reichsgau Lower Danube, but most of its members were "ordinary men". Judging by the probes made into the social structure, they were even "more ordinary" than the average. On top of that, there were a lots of alcoholics, thieves, people who did not correspond at all to the SS promoted elite image, especially as a consequence of the insufficient adherence to entrance criteria before the Anschluss.

Key words: *Allgemeine-SS*, Lower Austria, Lower Danube, Germany, South Moravia, Nazism, illegal activity, terrorism, 1930s, Second World War