

Eicke, Theodor

(1892--1943), SS Lieutenant General, commandant of Concentration Camps, and commander of the SS Death's Head Units (*Totenkopfverbände*), an armed SS troop that guarded the concentration camps.

Eicke was born in Huddington, Germany. He served in the German army from 1909 until the end of World War I. He then became a police officer. In 1928 he joined the Nazi Party and the Storm Troopers (SA), at that time led by Ernst Rohm. In 1930 Eicke switched over from the SA to the SS. He had a very good relationship with SS chief Heinrich Himmler, and despite his sometimes difficult personality, he quickly advanced through the SS's chain of command.

In June 1933 Eicke was made commandant of the first concentration camp, Dachau, and was awarded the rank of *Oberführer*. His personal motto was "Tolerance is a sign of weakness." His brutal style of command at Dachau was soon to become a model for other camp administrators. This included the torture of prisoners and encouragement of the Death Head Units' barbarous behavior.

On June 30, 1934, nicknamed "The Night of the Long Knives," Himmler's SS men destroyed the leadership of the SA. It was Eicke who actually shot Ernst Rohm in his cell. His involvement in that purge earned Eicke a promotion to Inspector for Concentration Camps and Commander of the Death's Head Units. He was also advanced to the rank of *Brigadeführer*.

In November 1939 Eicke was made commander of the *Waffen-SS*, which were the SS's military units. Under his leadership, they took part in the fighting in France and on the Russian front. Eicke's brutal style extended to the *Waffen-SS*; their first war crime was the murder of about 100 British prisoners of war in France on May 26, 1940. At the end of the war the Allies labeled the *Waffen-SS* a "criminal organization."

Eicke was killed on the Russian front on February 16, 1943 when his plane was shot down. At that time, he was serving as an *SS-Obergruppenführer* in the *Waffen-SS*.