

Generalgouvernement

(General Government), territorial unit in Poland with its own administration, created by the Nazis on October 26, 1939. When the Germans invaded Poland in September 1939, they split the country into three parts: the western third was annexed to the Third Reich; the eastern third was occupied by the Soviet Union; and the central third was made into the *Generalgouvernement*, a semi-independent unit which the Nazis intended to use as a place to do all their racial "dirty work." The *Generalgouvernement* was to serve as a "racial dumping ground," an endless supply of slave labor, and ultimately, as a site for the mass extermination of European Jewry.

The *Generalgouvernement* was divided into four districts: Cracow, Warsaw, Radom, and Lublin, with Cracow serving as the administrative center. These areas, which had a total population of 12 million, of which 1.5 million were Jews were further divided into sub-districts. After the Germans attacked the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941, they attached Eastern Galicia to the *Generalgouvernement*, making it the fifth district and adding between three and four million people to the population.

The head of the *Generalgouvernement* was Hans Frank, who held the position of governor-general. However, he was not free to govern as he pleased. The racial policies carried out in the *Generalgouvernement* were the responsibility of the SS and the police, which were first headed by SS-*Obergruppenfuehrer* Friedrich Kruger, and then by Wilhelm Koppe.

The Nazis treated the Poles of the *Generalgouvernement* in a terrible fashion. They only allowed a handful of Polish institutions to continue functioning, including the bank that put out the country's currency; the Polish Police, known as *Granatowa*, meaning Blue; and the Central Relief Committee. These were not allowed to operate however they wanted: they were subject to the strict supervision of the *Generalgouvernement* authorities. The Nazis viewed the Poles living within the *Generalgouvernement* as a cheap labor source, to be taken advantage of at any occasion. Later, the Germans tried to deal with the Poles by distinguishing between those who

were of German origin (*Deutschstammig*) and those who were inferior (see also *Volksdeutsche*).

The Germans tried to make sure that the Poles would obey them by terrorizing the population. If the Polish underground killed a German, 50--100 Poles were executed as a punishment and warning. Two acts of terror that the Nazis inflicted on Polish citizens were particularly barbaric. In November 1939 the Nazis performed *Sonderaktion Krakau* (Special Action Cracow), in which they arrested 183 school and college staff members who were attending a meeting with the German police. These Poles were deported to Sachsenhausen; most never returned. The second act was carried out in Lvov, where 38 Polish professors were executed soon after German troops entered the city.

The Germans also destroyed Polish scientific and cultural institutions, and pillaged artistic and archaeological treasures. In addition, they stripped the Poles of their financial infrastructure, leaving them to support themselves with only small businesses and agriculture. The Poles were made to turn over food to the Germans, and were forbidden to trade foodstuffs. Thus, those Poles living in urban areas were limited to the pitiful food rations provided—a veritable starvation diet. They were forced to smuggle food illegally just to stay alive.

The Jews of the *Generalgouvernement* were subject to terribly harsh decrees. From the very beginning, the Germans confiscated their property and made them perform forced labor. From late 1939, the Jews were put in ghettos, where they were totally isolated from the outside world and severely restricted. In the spring of 1942 the Germans began deporting the Jews from the ghettos to extermination camps located in the Lublin district, and by 1944 all ghettos in the *Generalgouvernement* had been liquidated.

The *Generalgouvernement* was completely liberated by Soviet troops by January 1945.