

Chapter 7

Adolf Eichmann

*From my childhood, obedience was something I could not get out of my system. When I entered the armed service at the age of twenty-seven, I found being obedient not a bit more difficult than it had been during my life to that point. It was unthinkable that I would not follow orders.*²⁵⁴ – Adolf Eichmann

Ever since people have committed terrible atrocities, questions have arisen as to why. Since World War II, scholars have been fascinated with the reasons behind the brutalities of the Holocaust. Why was it so easy to commit such horrid crimes in a modern society? Millions were involved, directly or indirectly, in the atrocities through a state apparatus turned into a killing machine. The general public often underestimates the full extent of the Final Solution. Understanding how and why the Holocaust was possible raises profound questions about human behavior and the ease with which people can become complicit in human rights violations. Adolf Eichmann is one example where these questions apply, and this chapter will further explore his case.²⁵⁵

Adolf Eichmann, born on March 19, 1906, in Solingen, Germany, led a rather ordinary life until the Great Depression. During World War I, Eichmann's family moved from Germany to Linz, Austria. After doing poorly in school, Eichmann briefly worked for his father's mining company, and as a travelling oil salesman beginning in 1927. In 1932, Eichmann was introduced to join the National Socialist (Nazi) Party by his friend Ernst Kaltenbrunner, who later became the chief of the Reich Main Security Office (RSHA). That same year, Eichmann volunteered for the SS and underwent military training in the Dachau and Lichtenburg camps. He later volunteered to serve in the main RSHA office in Berlin.²⁵⁶ His dedication led to promotions in rank, eventually becoming part of Heinrich Himmler's SS. Eichmann's involvement in Jewish affairs within the SS heightened after assignments in Vienna and Prague, culminating in his transfer to the Reich Security Central Office in Berlin in 1939. With the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union starting on June 22, 1941, their approach towards the Jewish population shifted from forced emigration to extermination. Reinhard Heydrich, Eichmann's superior, orchestrated the Wannsee Conference on January 20, 1942, gathering administrative heads to plan the genocide,

²⁵⁴ Alette Smeulers, "Historical Overview of Perpetrator Studies," in *Perpetrators of International Crimes*, ed. Alette Smeulers (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 11–15.

²⁵⁵ Ibid. See United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "Antisemitism," <https://www.ushmm.org/>.

²⁵⁶ See Hanna Yablonka, *The State of Israel vs. Adolf Eichmann* (New York: Schocken, 2004), p. 13.

termed as the “final solution to the Jewish question”. The conference was held at a lakefront villa in Berlin’s Wannsee district, and Eichmann aided Heydrich by gathering information, attending the conference, and preparing its minutes. He was tasked with overseeing the details, effectively assuming the role of chief executor, even though the widespread knowledge of the “final solution” as mass execution was not yet public. Eichmann orchestrated the identification, gathering, and transportation of Jews from across occupied Europe to their eventual destinations at Auschwitz and other extermination camps where they faced gas chambers in German-occupied Poland.²⁵⁷ After the war, he fled and settled in Argentina, but was captured by Israeli agents near Buenos Aires on May 11, 1960. Nine days later, they clandestinely transported him out of the country to Israel. There, he faced trial before a special three-judge court in Jerusalem, was sentenced to death, and subsequently executed.²⁵⁸

Hanna Yablonka observes that Eichmann appeared to be somewhat of a social misfit, performing poorly in school, struggling to maintain steady employment, and being regarded as a failure by his family. He seemed like an individual who was easily underestimated. Within the Nazi hierarchy, he did not occupy frontline positions alongside figures like Joseph Goebbels, Heinrich Himmler, and Hermann Goering, who were closer to Hitler. Physically, he didn’t fit the Aryan ideal, being of average height, thin, bald, with a narrow and pointed nose. In contrast, his immediate superior, Heydrich, was tall, fair-haired, and blue-eyed, possessing diverse talents as a fencer, musician, and airline pilot. This depiction aligns with perspectives that downplay Eichmann’s central role in the Jewish annihilation, such as Hannah Arendt’s.²⁵⁹ However, it is possible that these circumstances actually drove him to excel in dealing with Jews, ultimately propelling him to the top, as this study will further explore.

Eichmann’s initial role at the main RSHA office in Berlin focused on intelligence. However, his trajectory quickly changed when, after a few months, he transitioned to a new department responsible for handling Jewish affairs. Eichmann delved into studying Jewish topics, including Theodore Herzl’s “The Jewish State” and the fundamentals of Hebrew. This equipped him to read Yiddish newspapers, recognizing many words akin to German.²⁶⁰ As a result, his colleagues perceived him as an expert on Zionism and Jewish matters. Consequently, whenever tasks concerning Jews arose,

²⁵⁷ See <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Adolf-Eichmann>.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ Yablonka, *The State of Israel vs. Adolf Eichmann*, p. 13 & p. 18.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 14. Based on articles in *Haaretz* and other sources, a letter was discovered in which Eichmann requested his superiors to arrange for a rabbi to teach him Hebrew, but this request was denied. It is likely that he instead focused on studying Hebrew letters and the rudiments of the language, a skill that enabled him to read Yiddish newspapers. As Yablonka notes, this was relatively easier for him, especially since Yiddish, a language he was more familiar with, is linguistically close to German.

he was summoned. His first major task arose in March 1938, after Austria's annexation, marking the initiation of forced Jewish emigration. At this point, Eichmann wasn't a policymaker, and the notion of expelling Jews seemed to originate from Reinhard Heydrich. Heydrich also decided to appoint Eichmann to oversee this operation. Eichmann headed Austrian Jewish emigration with unwavering determination. His success was impressive; within 18 months, approximately 110,000 Jews, constituting 60% of the total, were compelled to depart Austria.²⁶¹ Eichmann continued to excel in subsequent missions and later participated in the Wannsee Conference.²⁶² Charles Wighton highlights that Reinhard Heydrich, his superior, was initially entrusted with the overall responsibility for carrying out the Final Solution according to his discretion. However, since Heydrich was occupied with the Czech Protectorate at the time, Eichmann was given the power to oversee most of the plan's implementation.²⁶³

But what were the origins of Eichmann's ability and ambition? In his exploration of these origins, Israeli scholar José Brunner delves deeper into the psychological aspects, as highlighted in his work *Eichmann's Mind*.²⁶⁴ According to Brunner, Eichmann underwent evaluation by a psychiatrist before his trial, revealing a challenging childhood marked by a strict and intimidating father who frequently subjected him to physical punishment.²⁶⁵ This harsh upbringing instilled in Eichmann a profound fear of weakness, compelling him to adopt a relentless pursuit of strength and control. Joining the S.S. provided him with the opportunity to manifest these qualities, and he was determined to excel in the tasks assigned to him.²⁶⁶ One notable accomplishment was his role in orchestrating the evacuation of Austrian Jews, a task that earned him promotions and fueled his ambition to demonstrate

²⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 13–14.

²⁶² As mentioned earlier, in that meeting, held in the Berlin suburb of Wannsee on January 20, 1942, senior government officials of Nazi Germany and SS leaders, aimed to ensure the cooperation of administrative leaders across various government departments in executing the Final Solution to the Jewish Question, involving the annihilation of Jews in Europe.

²⁶³ Ibid., p. 19. Charles Wighton, *Heydrich*, New York, 1962, pp. 233–234.

²⁶⁴ José Brunner, "Eichmann's Mind: Psychological, Philosophical, and Legal Perspectives," *Theoretical Inquiries in Law* 1, no. 2 (2000). Available at <http://www7.tau.ac.il/ojs/index.php/tiil/article/view/193>, and <https://law.bepress.com/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=1055&context=taulwps>.

²⁶⁵ See the documentary on Amazon Prime, "The Devil Confession: The Lost Eichmann Tapes", End of part 1 and part 2. Dr. Brunner discussed it in the 9th minute and other segments of the session.

²⁶⁶ This phenomenon, is depicted in the short film "The Wave," illustrating a similar situation of how one can gain control over class students in America, with the potential to expand. Eichmann seems to resemble a student in that class who initially struggled to find acceptance or status among his peers, often subject to bullying or isolation. However, when a teacher arrived and established stricter discipline, this student rose to prominence, ensuring compliance with the teacher's rules. He grew fond of his newfound power and became fervent in carrying out the teacher's instructions and mission. Here is the link to the film, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ICng-KRxXJ8>.

authority. Eichmann's exceptional dedication to the removal and annihilation of European Jews became a central focus of his career. This unwavering commitment was particularly evident in his approach to the Hungarian Jews in 1944, where he applied special methods to carry out the infamous "final solution." This dedication to his dark task, coupled with a desire to showcase the value of his power, explains why he worked tirelessly and ambitiously. It appears that Eichmann's singular talent lay in meticulously planning and executing the annihilation of European Jews. When he was eventually apprehended by the Israeli Mossad, they were perplexed to find him residing in a modest, dilapidated neighborhood, rather than in affluent surroundings. Initially, they doubted his true identity, but eventually confirmed it. Eichmann had been frequently changing jobs in Argentina, struggling to earn money unlike some of his Nazi counterparts, such as his rival Kurt Becher, who amassed great wealth post-war. This theory suggests why Eichmann may have lost his adeptness in his area of expertise. Furthermore, it sheds light on his motivation for granting the interview with Willem Sassen, a means of reclaiming a sense of importance. Tragically, it was in this particular domain of expertise that he excelled, to the immense misfortune and detriment of his victims.²⁶⁷

Thus, Eichmann's ambition extended beyond his actions on the ground as it also influenced his decision to grant interviews, such as the one with Sassen. Eichmann saw these interviews as an opportunity to assert his dominance and contribute to history. Notably, he insisted that the contents remain unpublished until after his death, a condition Sassen agreed to. However, the breach of trust occurred in 1960 when Sassen, succumbing to financial motivations, published part of the interview in *Life* magazine. Despite its exposure, the Israeli court refrained from using it, acknowledging that it went against Eichmann's will and agreement with Sassen.²⁶⁸

After Heydrich's assassination, Eichmann bore even more responsibility, which increased his power. Charles Wighton added that after Heydrich's death, Eichmann assumed a role akin to a '*mini-dictator*'.²⁶⁹ Gunther Deschner emphasized that Heydrich was not the originator of the Final Solution but rather its architect. The planning and execution were delegated to subordinates like Adolf Eichmann.²⁷⁰ Regarding Yablonka's assertion that he wasn't closely linked to Hitler, it appears that Hitler's preoccupation with winning the war and managing SS personnel granted individuals like Heydrich, and later Eichmann, greater autonomy in handling Jewish affairs. Perhaps this structure within the Nazi regime allowed

²⁶⁷ See the documentary, "The Devil Confession: The Lost Eichmann Tapes", end of part 1 and part 2.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Ibid. See also Wighton, *Heydrich*, New York, 1962, pp. 233–34.

²⁷⁰ Günther Deschner, *Heydrich*, London, 1981, p. 249 & 293.

individuals like Eichmann to wield significant power and make decisions regarding the fate of Jews across Europe. Eichmann's absence from Hitler's inner circle might suggest that Hitler's wartime agenda and SS management granted him increased autonomy in Jewish affairs, particularly following Heydrich's death. Thus, while Eichmann may not have been directly supervised by Hitler, the broader context of Nazi leadership dynamics enabled him to play a pivotal role in the Holocaust.

This dynamic lent further weight to the notion that upon arriving in Hungary, Eichmann held a pivotal role. He possessed extensive experience in overseeing and coordinating numerous plans targeting Jews, which afforded him considerable autonomy in decision-making and strategizing. Gerald Reitlinger, in addition, cites Wisliceny's description of Eichmann as a meticulous bureaucrat. Wisliceny mentioned that Eichmann documented every discussion with his superiors, emphasizing the importance of consistently having one's actions backed by superiors. This highlights Eichmann's careful approach and strategic planning in his endeavors.²⁷¹ Yablonka concludes that Eichmann wasn't a marginal or banal figure; instead, he played a central role in expediting anti-Jewish decrees and was an exceptional bureaucrat.²⁷²

In Hungary, upon his arrival at the end of March 1944, Eichmann operated openly for the first time as the Grand Inquisitor of Europe's Jews. His official record on September 5, 1944, falsely designated him as the Commander of the Security Police of Hungary to facilitate close collaboration with the Hungarian Ministry of the Interior.²⁷³ Skillfully leveraging Hungarian assistance and a Jewish council, Eichmann orchestrated the rapid annihilation of most Hungarian Jews with minimal Nazi presence.²⁷⁴ When Eichmann arrived in Hungary, he brought his entire team, including Alois Brunner, Dieter Wisliceny, Hermann Krumey, and Theodore Dannecker, who assisted him in his endeavors.²⁷⁵ Another crucial figure was Kurt Becher, under Heinrich Himmler. The study will delve into the relationship between Becher and Eichmann, who considered himself the overall administrator. Wisliceny faced capture, trial, and execution after the war, attributing significant responsibility to Eichmann, echoing Rudolf Höss's tactic at Auschwitz.²⁷⁶ However,

²⁷¹ See Yablonka, *The State of Israel vs. Adolf Eichmann*, p. 17.

²⁷² Ibid., p. 25.

²⁷³ See <https://www.holocausthistoricalsociety.org.uk/contents/naziseasternempire/eichmanninhungary.html>. Since he was to keep in close and constant touch with the Hungarian Ministry of the Interior, his service record described him by the fictitious title *BdS Ungarn*, or Commander of the Security Police Hungary.

²⁷⁴ See Heberer, *Children During the Holocaust*, pp. 102–103.

²⁷⁵ Yablonka, *The state of Israel vs. Adolf Eichmann*, p. 25.

²⁷⁶ See the documentary at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_QrCxa8IAFo.

relying solely on their statements made during the trial, especially in Eichmann's absence, may lack reliability. This prompts the need to seek additional sources to accurately ascertain Eichmann's role and establish it as primarily his decision-making. This study has taken that approach.

Eichmann arrived in Hungary with the occupying force on March 19, 1944. The following morning, March 20, he summoned Jewish leaders for an urgent meeting, chaired by Shmuel (Samu) Stern.²⁷⁷ Herman Krumey, a representative, employed Nazi tactics, promising limited restrictions without violating individual rights, property, or marriages. He announced German authority over Jewish affairs, imposing SS control, mandating the formation of a Jewish council within a day, granting council members immunity certificates, enforcing residence confinement, and tasking them to prevent panic among the Jewish population.²⁷⁸

On March 31, Eichmann met again with Jewish representatives. Gideon Hausner, the prosecutor in the Eichmann trial, later summarized this meeting in his closing statement. Eichmann made clear his intent to take full control of all Jewish affairs in Hungary, while offering the Jewish Council limited governing authority. He stressed that it was their duty to lead the Jews, reprimanding them with, "You must command the Jews. Enough with your liberal notions about needing their consent." Eichmann also informed them that Jews would be sent to work, though he could not confirm whether this would take place within Hungary. He warned that it would be preferable for the Jews to volunteer, as those who did not comply would be taken by force.²⁷⁹ From that moment on, Jews were forbidden to relocate without his express permission. The tactic of deception, similar to what had been used in the ghettos, manhunts, and prison cells, persisted. Eichmann reassured them, "This is only for the duration of the war; afterward, everything will return to normal." He then added a chilling remark: "We need cooperation because in places where Jews did not comply, there were deaths." Eichmann emphasized, "We don't have

²⁷⁷ Samu Stern, a prominent figure in Hungary's Neolog Jewish Community, held various roles including businessman, banker, and advisor to the royal court. Following the German occupation in March 1944, Stern served on the German-established Jewish Council (Judenrat) alongside Pinchas Freudiger, an Orthodox Community leader. Their council received the Vrba-Wetzler report, also known as the Auschwitz Protocols, detailing atrocities in Auschwitz. Similar to Rudolf Kasztner, the council members, including Stern, faced criticism for not publicizing these atrocities and warning Hungarian Jews of their impending fate. Despite his support for Jewish causes, Stern drew criticism for his cooperation with the German authorities and their Hungarian collaborators. Rabbi Freudiger testified at the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem, and one survivor yelled at him, accusing him for his actions.

²⁷⁸ See *Daat*, "פרק היסטוריה" (*Pirkei Historia*), <https://www.daat.ac.il/daat/hungary/pirkey/04.htm>, and "תוכן הספר" (*Tohen HaSefer*), <https://www.daat.ac.il/daat/hungary/tohen.htm>.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

the manpower to place many inspectors over you. If there is resistance, we will use force, and people will die. It's in your interest to inform all Jews of this publicly". In compliance, the Jewish Council pursued a policy of appeasement, fostering submission among the Jewish masses. On May 19, as the deportation of Jews from the Field Cities to Auschwitz commenced, the Council requested unwavering trust and understanding from the Jewish public regarding its actions.²⁸⁰

This further underscores Eichmann's pivotal role as the primary orchestrator. He meticulously devised strategies, including the selection, and convening of Jewish leaders, notably the Jewish Council, specifically on the day of his arrival. This timing was deliberate, signaling the seriousness of his intent. Subsequently, he conveyed a message to them, persuading and pressuring them to comply with his directives, showing also it's the best thing for them and all other Jews. Ann Porter describes the discussions and actions taken by several Jewish council leaders on March 22, 1944, upon the Nazis' arrival as they sought a strategy. In one conversation, Kasztner told Samu Stern about the Zionists' previous experience with contacts they had with the Germans in Bratislava, stating that the Germans wished to negotiate with them. Porter also mentions that at that time, FDR issued a statement condemning the Nazis and warning that none of those committing atrocities would go unpunished, but some, including Sztojaj, expressed indifference.²⁸¹

The study will later discuss the broader pattern of Nazi tactics concerning the Jewish Council, highlighting how they targeted and chose the Jewish Council. Non-compliance meant certain death, instilling fear to enforce compliance and secure their representation. In Hungary, Eichmann single-handedly orchestrated these maneuvers, and they were his ideas. Additionally, he planned to oversee the transfer to Auschwitz with minimal German presence.

Following Germany's occupation of Hungary in March 1944, Eichmann oversaw the deportation of a significant portion of the Jewish population. Most victims were sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau, where, upon arrival and after selection, SS functionaries killed the majority of them in gas chambers. This process occurred from May 15 to July 9, 1944. Earlier, on April 5, 1944, Rudolf Kasztner met with S.S. officer, Captain Dieter Wisliceny who was a member of Eichmann's *Sonderkommando*.²⁸² He negotiated and tried to make a deal with him in which deportation of Jews would

²⁸⁰ Ibid. In the section on the Jewish Council (in Hebrew) on that site, quotes from the Council's publications can be found.

²⁸¹ Porter, *Kasztner's Train*, pp. 97–99.

²⁸² See <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/timeline-event/holocaust/1942-1945/deportation-of-hungarian-jews>, and Porter, *Kasztner's Train*, pp. 107–108. See also p. 87 about Captain Wisliceny, and p. 99 for her view why Eichmann preferred to deal with Zionist leaders like Kasztner over other Jewish leaders. Kasztner understood that.

be prevented in exchange for money. Wisliceny suggested the price of \$2 million with a down payment of \$200,000 in pengos (the basic Hungarian currency).²⁸³ By April 21st, that amount was collected and given over to Nazi officers, Herman Krumey and Otto Hunsche. However, the Nazis did not keep their part of the deal. Jewish ghettos were established, and deportations of Jews commenced. When questioned, Krumey responded that whatever deal the *Vaada* (Aid and Rescue Committee) struck with Wisliceny they had failed to discuss it with him. He claimed that at that time he had been in Cluj and not in Budapest.²⁸⁴ They also claimed that Eichmann had never signed off approval for that deal. This highlights Eichmann's commanding authority among fellow Nazi administrators, underscoring their inability to negotiate deals without his explicit involvement.

Despite the appalling failure of his negotiations with the Nazis and their shameful attitude, Kasztner persisted in negotiating another deal with them. During the summer of 1944, he repeatedly met with Adolf Eichmann, who was responsible for overseeing the deportation of more than half of Hungary's approximately 800,000-strong Jewish community to Auschwitz in occupied Poland.²⁸⁵ They reached an agreement that approximately 1,684 Jews would be spared in exchange for a ransom of \$1,000 USD per person. Most of the passengers could not have raised the funds themselves, so Kasztner auctioned off 150 seats to wealthy Jews in order to pay for the others. In addition, S.S. officer Kurt Becher, Heinrich Himmler's envoy, insisted that 50 seats be reserved for the families of individuals who had personally paid him for favors, at an amount of approximately \$25,000 per person. Becher wanted to get the general price per head increased to \$2,000 but Himmler set the price at \$1,000. The total value of the ransom was estimated by the Jewish community to be 8,600,000 Swiss francs, though Becher himself valued it at only 3,000,000 Swiss francs.²⁸⁶ The train left Budapest on June 30, but in complete violation of his agreement with Kasztner, Eichmann had the passengers sent to the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, where they arrived on July 8. Bauer writes that the decision was in Eichmann's hands, but what motivated him to do so remains unclear. However, he claims that the order came, at least in part, from higher up the chain of

²⁸³ It was about 5.5 million pengos.

²⁸⁴ Porter, *Kasztner's Train*, p. 116.

²⁸⁵ Patricia Heberer wrote that the number of Hungary's Jewish population was approximately 825,000, and to accurately assess the total, we must account for regions, like those under Romania's control that later came under Hungary, and consider the Jewish population within these areas. See Heberer, *Children During the Holocaust*, pp. 102–103.

²⁸⁶ Ronald W. Zweig, *The Gold Train: The Destruction of the Jews and the Looting of Hungary*, Harper Collins, New York, 2002, pp. 226–227.

command—possibly from Himmler himself.²⁸⁷ Nevertheless, following additional negotiations with the Germans and the payment of ransom money, the passengers were rescued and transported to neutral Switzerland in two contingents.²⁸⁸ One group was transported in August, and the other followed in December 1944.²⁸⁹

The Nazis, under Eichmann's command in Hungary, did not fulfill their part of the initial deal that Kasztner had negotiated with Wisliceny. Nevertheless, they accepted the funds that were collected by the Jews. This act clearly demonstrated that Eichmann was not to be trusted. Any Jewish individual should have considered this before entering into any negotiations with him, especially by the end of June 1944, after most Hungarian Jews had already been annihilated. Moreover, Anna Porter described Eichmann as being “tough and adversarial as he met with the Jewish leaders, and as one who was zealous to complete his ideological mission.” In contrast to Eichmann, Colonel Kurt Becher presented a more positive impression during negotiations, and it seemed probable that he would fulfill his commitment in any deal for a substantial bribe.²⁹⁰ Kasztner experienced fear every time he met Eichmann, feeling the need to choose his words carefully. In contrast, after multiple encounters, a rapport developed between Becher and Kasztner. Eventually, Becher became amicable enough to casually invite Kasztner to dine at the Wiss Mansion, occasionally visiting the casino for late-night drinks and a brief game of roulette.²⁹¹

A couple of days before Kasztner's train left Budapest, Eichmann had been replaced by Kurt Becher. Eichmann had been told to focus his attention, instead, on the deportations, but Becher oversaw the negotiations and had the power to decide who would not be sent to Auschwitz. Porter writes that Becher said that it was Himmler's decision, “Reich secret”. Kasztner was relieved to be dealing with

²⁸⁷ Bauer, *Jews for Sale? Nazi-Jewish Negotiations, 1933–1945*, p. 199. Eichmann opted to reroute the train to the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in northwest Germany, near Hannover. Some assert that this decision stemmed from Eichmann's escalating demands, which couldn't be promptly fulfilled, effectively keeping his hostages “on ice”.

²⁸⁸ This exchange was facilitated by a ransom paid by the Swiss Orthodox Jew, Isaac Sternbuch.

²⁸⁹ Porter, *Kasztner's Train*, pp. 212–213. Porter discussed the negotiation and the situation in which Kasztner negotiated with Becher. The next page delves into why, for a specific period, Becher was in charge and the differences between him and Eichmann. This may be the likely reason Kasztner was able to secure the release of the train, leveraging the moment when Becher assumed a higher position in negotiations concerning the Jews.

²⁹⁰ See Porter, *Kasztner's Train*, pp. 190–247. Kurt Andreas Ernst Becher (1909–1995) was an SS lieutenant and later a colonel who was at a later time Commissar of all German concentration camps, and Chief of the Economic Department of the SS Command in Hungary during the German occupation in 1944. He is best known for having traded Jewish lives for money during the Holocaust.

²⁹¹ Ibid., p. 213.

the calmer, more personable Becher.²⁹² The train was stopped at Bergen-Belsen, and Eichmann's threat of potential transfer to Auschwitz loomed over them.²⁹³ Kasztner found reassurance from Becher, who assured him that families would remain united. Eventually, the train was directed towards Switzerland.²⁹⁴

A strained relationship existed between Becher, who was under Heinrich Himmler's direct command, and Eichmann, who viewed himself as the superior commander. Most likely, Kasztner's train, carrying 1684 Jews, was eventually released due to the fact that Becher had been in command during that period of time, allowing this part of the deal to go through. It's doubtful whether Eichmann, having previously failed to honor their commitments in the initial deal, would have redirected the train to a neutral country once the majority of Jews had already been annihilated, and deportations had ceased. However, as detailed by Anna Porter, Kasztner managed negotiations even after Eichmann's return to his position, preventing further deportations. This saga underscores Eichmann's authority in overseeing the annihilation of Jews, despite Himmler being his superior. In addition, Eichmann's history of renegeing on deals raises questions about Kasztner's continued negotiations with him. The study will later discuss the Jewish Council's focus on self-preservation, and it aligns with Kasztner's persistence in negotiating, emphasizing the urgency of saving their lives. This also sheds light on why the train departed even after Eichmann had orchestrated significant deportations to Auschwitz, likely influenced by Becher's authority for that period of time.²⁹⁵

When examining the work of Israeli historian Shmuel Ettinger, the focus often centers on Eichmann's pivotal role and decision-making in the annihilation of Jews. According to Ettinger, from May 15, 1944, the transport of Hungarian Jews commenced, only to be halted in July. However, it was Eichmann who advocated for its continuation, although pressure from the West, particularly on Horthy, prevented it. This underscores Eichmann's significant influence. Then, even with the

²⁹² Ibid., pp. 212–213.

²⁹³ Ibid., p. 213.

²⁹⁴ As mentioned previously, the train, consisting of 35 cattle cars, carried notable figures like Rabbi Joel Teitelbaum, Béla Zsolt, Leopold Szondi, Dezső Ernster, and István Israel, along with intellectuals, scientists, religious leaders, and political activists, but also individuals like a group of Polish orphans, who were neither wealthy nor famous.

²⁹⁵ See Porter, Kasztner's Train, p. 288, quoting Becher's testimony at Nuremberg about a conversation in which Himmler, angry at Eichmann, ordered him that whereas until then he had been exterminating Jews, from now on he must follow Himmler's directives; and p. 319, regarding Becher's interview with an Israeli journalist. Kasztner's post-war testimony that spared Becher might suggest a reluctance to raise suspicion and a belief that without Becher, the train and other Jews wouldn't have been saved. However, testifying for Nazis, despite his motives, cast a shadow during his subsequent trial on other issues.

Soviet army advancing towards Budapest, the Germans orchestrated the transfer of 40,000 Jews to Austria, resulting in the tragic loss of most lives.²⁹⁶

In conclusion, this chapter provides a comprehensive analysis that reinforces the argument about Eichmann's pivotal role in the Holocaust of Hungarian Jews. It delves into his childhood, life, and the psychiatric evaluation before his trial, revealing a difficult upbringing under a strict and intimidating father who frequently subjected him to physical punishment. This harsh environment cultivated in Eichmann a profound fear of weakness and a relentless pursuit of strength. His membership in the Nazi Party provided him with a unique opportunity to excel in a single, heinous area—persecuting the Jews—which he eagerly embraced. The chapter delves deeper into Eichmann's position within the S.S., his role in Hungary, and the unfolding events during the Nazi invasion, including his immediate meeting with the Jewish Council and his role in the “blood for trucks” deal. It incorporates testimonies, scholarly works, documentaries, archival materials from Eichmann's trial, and resources from institutions like Yad Vashem, providing a comprehensive analysis of his actions. The next chapter will further examine Eichmann's 1957 interview and court testimony, while subsequent chapters will shed additional light on his involvement in the Holocaust of Hungarian Jewry. Figures 9 and 10 on the following page further depict Adolf Eichmann at his trial, alongside one of the previously discussed witnesses—Abba Kovner. This multifaceted examination, drawing on a wide array of primary and secondary sources, underscores Eichmann's pivotal role in orchestrating the Holocaust in Hungary. Various cases, incidents, and historical events are analyzed throughout this chapter and the book, each reinforcing his central involvement in these atrocities. Eichmann recognized the opportunity, knew how to maneuver it, and executed his plans with chilling efficiency. It is important to emphasize that, after surviving until May 1944, the majority of these Jews were annihilated within just two months. Despite the reduced presence of Nazi personnel, the systematic execution of their gathering and transport by train, along with the necessary coordination, was driven by one person—Eichmann. He recognized the opportunity, meticulously planned the operation, and carried it out with brutal precision.

296 Shmuel Ettinger, *Toldot am Yisrael Baet Hachdashah* [History of the Jews in Modern Time], p. 312.



Figure 9: Defendant Adolf Eichmann takes notes during his trial in Jerusalem in 1961. Credit: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Israel Government Press Office.



Figure 10: Jewish partisan and poet Abba Kovner, a survivor of the Vilna ghetto, testifies during Adolf Eichmann's trial. Jerusalem, Israel, May 4, 1961. Credit: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Israel Government Press Office.