



ADOLF HITLER

BERLIN d. 1. Sept. 1939.

Reichsleiter B o u h l e r u n d
Dr. med. B r a n d t

sind unter Verantwortung beauftragt, die Befugnisse namentlich zu bestimmender Ärzte so zu erweitern, dass nach menschlichem Ermessen unheilbar Kranken bei kritischster Beurteilung ihres Krankheitszustandes der Gnadentod gewährt werden kann.

*Dem Doehler mit
übergeben am 27. 8. 40
Dr. Gietzmann*

Adolf Hitler's authorization for the euthanasia killing operation, signed in October 1939 but dated 1 September 1939.

...spectator of all concentration camps and commander of the SS death head
... a job he retained until he advanced to the command of a Waffen SS di-
... n at the start of the war.²⁴

Eicke in turn advanced Heyde's career. Although he had served during the
mediate post-World War I years with the counterrevolutionary Free Corps
... me and in the Baltic, Heyde had joined no political party before he met
... e.²⁵ But in May 1933 he joined the Nazi party, and in June 1936 he entered
... S as a captain.²⁶

Hereafter, Heyde advanced rapidly. In 1934 he became senior physician
... (Arzt) at the Würzburg clinic, in part because his Jewish predecessor
... forced to leave.²⁷ At the same time, he delivered lectures on hereditary
... uses, provided court testimony as an expert witness, served on the local
... lization court, and was chief of the Würzburg Nazi party race office.²⁸
... her, through Eicke's intervention, Heyde became an adviser in psychiatry
... e Gestapo; he was also appointed to Eicke's concentration camp adminis-
... on to investigate hereditary diseases among the camp prisoners.²⁹ Finally,
... e political connections led to his appointment to the chair of psychiatry
... Würzburg.

All other physicians invited to collaborate in the planning of adult eutha-
... a were recommended to the KdF by Linden and by Ernst Robert Grawitz,
... SS Reich physician.³⁰ The list of medical planning advisers, about ten to
... en physicians, included, in addition to Heyde and Linden, the physicians
... t Wentzler and Hellmuth Unger, already involved in children's eutha-
... a. Further, the KdF invited the psychiatry professors Max de Crinis from
... in, Carl Schneider from Heidelberg, and Berthold Kihn from Jena and the
... ctors of large public institutions Valentin Falthäuser from Kaufbeuren,
... s Heinze from Görden, Paul Nitsche from Sonnenstein, Hermann Pfann-
... ler from Eglfing-Haar, and Bender from the Buch state hospital in Berlin.³¹

The KdF invited these medical advisers to a meeting, probably set for early
... ust 1939, chaired by Bouhler. Conti, who thereafter took no active part,
... attended.³² At this meeting, Bouhler outlined the proposed undertaking,
... ussed the legal basis, and asked for cooperation. Although it was made
... ectly clear that no one would be coerced, all attending physicians pledged
... r support.³³ The KdF followed up this introductory meeting with smaller
... ning sessions involving fewer persons. From these sessions emerged the
... me on how to proceed with the killings and how to obscure KdF partici-
... on.³⁴

Brandt, Bouhler, and their associates faced one problem: they had to con-
... ce the cooperating professionals, especially physicians, that they would
... be prosecuted for killing patients. Killing a human being, except enemy

... crime in Nazi Germany, the pro-...
... articles 211 and 212 prohibiting the intentional killing of a human being re-
... mained in full force and effect.³⁵ In the earliest discussions about adult eutha-
... nasia, Lammers suggested the promulgation of a law authorizing the killings,
... but Hitler absolutely refused to consider such a law during wartime.³⁶ In the
... same way, later attempts by the euthanasia physicians to draft such a law
... failed because Hitler continued to oppose the enactment, and thus publica-
... tion, of a law authorizing the killings.³⁷

One of the professed benefits of centrally directed euthanasia killings was
... decriminalization, that is, the removal of the threat of prosecution from
... physicians who killed their patients.³⁸ Hitler's refusal to promulgate a law
... prevented public decriminalization. Although almost everyone accepted the
... principle that the Führer's word was law, the KdF functionaries had difficulty
... convincing physicians and civil servants that they would not be criminally
... liable for murder in the absence of a duly enacted law clearly authorizing the
... killing of handicapped patients. To convince their collaborators, and possibly
... to cover themselves as well, they decided to ask Hitler for written orders.

In October 1939, Hitler signed a document, more an authorization than an
... order, that had been prepared by the KdF.³⁹ But to emphasize that war would
... not only alter the international status of the Reich but also herald "domes-
... tic purification," he predated it to 1 September 1939, the day World War II
... began.⁴⁰ Prepared on Hitler's personal stationery, as if mass murder was his
... "private affair," but never promulgated or published in any legal gazette, this
... authorization did not actually have the force of law.⁴¹ It was to serve, how-
... ever, as the legal basis for the killing operation, and it was used to convince
... physicians to collaborate in the killings.⁴²

Typed on white stationery, with the German eagle and swastika as well as
... the name "Adolf Hitler" printed on the top left, the authorization read as fol-
... lows:

Berlin, 1 Sept. 1939

Reich Leader Bouhler and Dr. med. Brandt are charged with the respon-
... sibility of enlarging the competence of certain physicians, designated by
... name, so that patients who, on the basis of human judgment, are consid-
... ered incurable, can be granted mercy death after a discerning diagnosis.

(signed) A. Hitler

The original was kept in a safe at the KdF; copies were shown to various pro-
... spective collaborators. One copy was later sent to the Reich minister of justice,
... Franz Gürtner. The original and all but one copy were destroyed when the war
... ended. The photocopy sent to Gürtner survived, with a handwritten notation: