

WESTERN EUROPE 1939-1945: OCCUPATION

Report on Gestapo methods of interrogation used in Norway, 17th March 1941

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They work by listening to rumours; when a rumour is connected with an individual, they look up his history and shadow him. They do not wait to produce a case against him before taking action, but satisfied that suspicions may be founded, they will make a domiciliary visit, examine all his rooms and effects and remove him at once.

They do not disclose where they are taking him or why he is being taken, and they allow no one to speak to him after he has been apprehended. If he has money it is confiscated and all papers, letters and books are impounded for examination. It is common practice when a case is incomplete to leave a prisoner in prison for many weeks, perhaps months. This is done deliberately to create fear in his mind and to weaken his resistance. Suddenly and unexpectedly they will examine him for from twelve to twenty hours without food or rest.

The interrogators work in shifts. They may arrest all the contacts which a suspect may have made during his daily life, and examine the suspect and a selected contact in an endeavour to confound one or the other. For instance, each may be asked what was the subject of conversation between them. "A" replies they talked about fishing. "B" that they talked about sport. The Gestapo compare the answers and tell the prisoners they are both lying and must remain in prison to think things over. Each, individually, becomes uncertain what the other has said and finally, the weaker may give up and confess what they were really talking about.

In interrogations, the pressure is usually more mental than physical. The examiner threatens, coerces and often appears to lose his temper. They rely more on this mental form of violence and on a continuous bombardment of questions with a prisoner who is becoming physically and mentally weakened.

The following is the case of a Norwegian who withstood successfully a Gestapo examination.

Arrested at 06.00 hours at his home, placed in prison and completely isolated. Some days passed and one evening he was informed he was not to go to bed as he would be examined at 11 p.m. He waited until 2 a.m. when he was told that it was postponed. Two days later the same thing happened. The day after, he was examined without warning.

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What is this source?

This is an extract from a report on interrogation methods used by the Gestapo in Norway. Officials who worked for the British intelligence services wrote it.

It was probably compiled after interviews with members of the Norwegian resistance movement who had been interrogated by the Gestapo.

What's the background to this source?

After invading Poland, Hitler's forces invaded Denmark and Norway. Norway was especially important to Hitler. In the First World War Germany had been starved of food and supplies by the British Royal Navy. Hitler wanted to avoid this happening again. Norway had ports and airfields that his submarines and aircraft could use to attack the Royal Navy and also Britain's supply lines from the USA.

The Norwegians resisted with British help when Germany invaded in April 1940. However, the British were defeated and Norway surrendered in June 1940. Despite this, there was an important underground resistance movement in Norway. This movement had strong links with British intelligence and received supplies and equipment throughout the war.

It's worth knowing that...

Norway's experiences during the war are still being debated and are a sensitive issue. There is no doubt that there was heroic resistance by Norwegians but there was also collaboration as well.

The report states that the Gestapo relied heavily on rumours. Recent research by historians shows that there were relatively few Gestapo officers compared to the numbers of people they watched over. They did rely heavily on gossip and rumours from Dutch informers.

Does this source support the drawing by T. Cuneo?

1. Why were rumours so important to the Gestapo?
2. Explain how the Gestapo used "mental pressure" on their suspects.
3. Why did they tend to use this over physical torture?
4. What are the strengths and weaknesses of this document as evidence of what it was like to live under Nazi rule?

Use the table to record your views.

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