**Transcript**

Topic: Documentation Center Nazi Party Rally Grounds

Interviewer: Mary Joens

Respondent: Ingo Eigen, certified tour guide for the Nuremberg Historical Society, *Geschichte für Alle, e.V.*

Date: August 8, 2011

Location: Documentation Center Nazi Party Rallying Grounds, Bayernstraße 110, Nuremberg, Germany

Duration: 30 minutes for the interview, which followed a two-hour private guided tour of the Documentation Center

Background: The Documentation Center Nazi Party Rallying Grounds (*Dokumentations­zentrum Reichsparteitagsgelände*) is located in the north wing of the unfinished remains of the congress hall of the former Nazi party rallies. Extensive exhibits are designed to review in-depth the causes, context and consequences of the National Socialist regime.

*AUTHOR: One of the questions I have is about the Treaty of Versailles. I have seen it being referenced as being humiliating for the Germans. What is it, how was it so humiliating?*

MR. EIGEN: The Germans thought it’s – first of all it was really humiliating because they were the only ones who had to take blame for the war. – It’s complicated. If you have a look at media discourses back then, every nation thought of war still as an honorable thing because they all underestimated the impact of modern weapons. Most nations underestimated the change in the peace treaty, in the treaty system of Europe. The imperial nations – that there was a significant change, from Bismark’s strategy where everybody was connected to each other, making big wars impossible, to what happened after William II isolated Germany and Austria, surrounded by the Entente [cordiale], by France, Great Britain and Russia. I would say a lot of other nations also underestimated that this would not just be another local war on the Balkan, but involved a big catastrophe. But in the end it was the Germans who backed up Austria at all costs. Technically, they are the ones responsible. What the Nazis used for propaganda was this; we’re the only ones to take blame. They also used a peace treaty attack of course, the democratic government, because Germany – the war hadn’t been fought on German territory, so they claimed the *Dolchstoß* – the German army was stabbed in the back by those filthy democrats who signed a peace treaty, while the German soldiers were still in the trenches, fighting back the other nations. The German army would’ve collapsed half a year later anyway. But they could push it aside in the propaganda, because at the time you weren’t fighting a German territory and it forced us to lose the war. The Germans had to pay all the reparations for the damage done in France and in Belgium and so on. They had lost territories. Poland was founded again, and the Polish corridor was established. So this was also a way for the Nazis to use it for propaganda. What’s interesting, if you compare it to the German conditions that the Germans imposed upon the Russians in 1917, where Lenin had to get out of the war to get his resolution, these conditions were as harsh as what the allies forced to Germans to sign. So, technically they had no reason to complain, but it was a good way for the Nazis for propaganda.

*AUTHOR: Also, about the Nazi propaganda: I’ve seen a term used of the “Nazi cult of the dead.” What was that, how do they use that for propaganda? Was that just the people who died in Munich?*

MR. EIGEN: It was mainly this Munich thing that I mentioned earlier, so getting people ready to the point of – what later on ended up that the Nazis were still defending the last two streets in Berlin; instead of just surrendering, they kept on fighting.

*AUTHOR: Did the recognition of the dead expand with the war, as Nazi soldiers started die in the war?*

MR. EIGEN: Well, not really. They tried to keep their own losses in this case low and hidden. There’s not much research done, but I think a lot of people started to distance themselves over the course of the war. So, for example when you take obituaries in the first few years, you may have gotten terms like “died for *Führer, Volk* and *Vaterland*” - Hitler, our people, and the state – and later on they said “was taken from us.” Which might imply, under the Nazi censorship, a kind of criticism. Or, he just died for “*Volk* and *Vaterland*,” so taking Hitler out of the problem. The Nazis used it to rally the people prior to the war, but not really that much during the war. Of course, whenever these big battles like Stalingrad took place, they gave their lives for the German cause, but that’s always just peaking your propaganda for a short moment and was not the main theme of propaganda. During the war, propaganda turned over to the point of making films like “*Quax der Bruchpilot*” or the ”*Feuerzangenbowle*” – there’s not a single swastika and not a single Nazi symbol in them. So, even if these films are not communicating Nazi ideology, they are communicating the gender role models and other German principles about society.

*AUTHOR: What was the Reich labor service?*

MR. EIGEN: The *Reichsarbeitsdienst* was quite a large Nazi organization used for providing jobs, so after high school everyone had join it for one year, to work for the community, which meant constructing motorways, railroads, bridges, public buildings. It was in some way a reaction to the economic crisis. Just to get people into an organization – they were not counted as unemployed. So the unemployment numbers dropped immediately – a statistical trick: create an organization, draft everyone into it, and they’re not counted as unemployed anymore. Sometimes when I tell that - I get a lot of groups from the US - they often compare it to FDR’s WPA [Works Progress Administration] in the new deal, for example. Which is definitely not a straight comparison, because the other function of the Reichs labor service was – you have seen the guys with the shovels in their hands so you could easily imagine them with rifles, so that was again providing paramilitary training. Now, getting them – these kids shoveling, digging in the dirt, they should build up some muscles, build up strength, get used to the paramilitary drills, before they get drafted for three years to the army, from 1935 on. So the Reichs labor service and other organizations always had this double function, providing paramilitary training. When we go back to what we talked about on Monday, this is one of the counts of the Nuremberg indictment: commit conspiracy against peace, preparing for a war of aggression.

*AUTHOR: It seems pretty clear that from early on, war was the plan. From before Hitler seized power, his plan was to go to war. It’s –*

MR. EIGEN: The critical question is: can you prove it?

*AUTHOR: It seems that from the start war was planned. But was that part of the platform he ran for office on, to take land back from Poland?*

MR. EIGEN: He ran his election campaign with “we want to renegotiate or break the peace treaty of Versailles, we don’t care.” He didn’t use the term “war” that openly, because in the 1920s, World War I had really sobered up people a lot. It was the first war where you got people with half their face shot off, no limbs anymore due to artillery shelling, surviving this because of the progress in modern medicine, so all these veterans with amputated limbs were a warning to the average people all the time. So, the Nazis had to make people interested in war again, and that took a bit. So they didn’t really say openly “we want a war” in 1933. They covered the effort as well as possible. For them it was a way of politics, to start a war if they can’t do diplomacy anymore, they would take their guns, and started to get as many guns as possible from ‘33 on. But they didn’t use war as a propaganda vehicle. Look at the way, how the Nazi version of the war – they took 20 inmates from a concentration camp, put them in fake Polish uniforms, shot them, and presented them as evidence to the German people that Poland was attacking. Because then they could rally everyone up by saying “we are attacked, we are under threat, follow us.”

*AUTHOR: I know that the war technically is viewed as having started with the invasion of Poland in 1939. Didn’t the Nazis invade Czechoslovakia earlier that year?*

MR. EIGEN: No, Czechoslovakia was handed over without Czech consent by Chamberlain, so that’s the Munich agreement. It was tried in Nuremberg. Starting the war, it was part of the *Anschluß* and the annexation of the *Sudetenland*, so that was seen as part of the last step towards the war and it wasn’t just a propaganda thing. When it came to the actual war campaigns, these two annexations were very important because the border area on the Czech side was where the Czechs had the antitank obstacles, so that Czech fortifications were in that area that Hitler took over, and they significantly shortened the Eastern flank with the *Anschluß* of Austria in the Czech Republic, and taking over the rest of the Czech Republic as well. So, it wasn’t just a propaganda thing, but it was also necessary from a military and strategic point of view.

*AUTHOR: Total jump in topic – what was the definition used for “asocial” in concentration camps, was that just Communists?*

MR. EIGEN: No, Communists were political prisoners. I didn’t really point it out in the fourth room, the different kinds of stars, the triangles and so on, that were defining these categories. The Nazi concept of asocial especially referred to – the Nazis had the two or three strike system, so after the first crime you committed your were sent to prison, if you get the second or third crime, then you were sent to a concentration camp instead, for lifelong. Of course it’s a very vague term, so they also used to send people with alcohol problems to hospitals in order to kill them. In German I would say it’s a “*Gummibegriff”* – you could use it, and stretch it, and bend it as you need. If you get a new category of victims you want to kill and the term didn’t fit under any existing category, you would use the term asocial. Basically it’s everybody else for whom you don’t have a proper definition, but mainly it affected criminals in the two or three strike system.

*AUTHOR: What was the “blood flag” that Hitler had with him at the rallies?*

MR. EIGEN: According to the Nazi propaganda, that was the flag they had with them in the first row at Munich, and onto which splattered the blood of some of these 50 or so Nazis, so they used this flag to touch every new banner of the movement as a memorial of the dead parade. The Nazis used it similar to a religious rite.

*AUTHOR: I don’t really have any other questions.*

MR. EIGEN: Those are all the questions you had?

*AUTHOR: Yes, because most of the questions got answered during the tour. I have a couple questions about the resistance efforts that were mentioned in the temporary exhibition about the Jews in Nazi German, attempted assassinations, and things like that. I know those were not common, but what were the major ones that happened?*

MR. EIGEN: In general, there were more or less two or three different groups of resistance. The first were the resistance attempts by the Communist groups, by leftist groups, to stop the dictatorship in the early years. These were smashed in ’35 / ‘36. They had a minor revival around ’43 / ‘44, in the area of Cologne, the red chapel, for example, so there were still a few communist groups, but not really doing that much. We got individual resistance, like Georg Elser trying to blow up Hitler in 1939 at the annual of the – where Hitler had this speech for the members of the Munich *Putsch*, where just by coincidence Hitler left the room about 10 minutes earlier, prior to when he was expected to leave, so when the bomb went off it killed a few people but not Hitler. And that’s really a rather unorganized individual resistance. Then, especially after Stalingrad, the army starts, the Stauffenberg group – starts to organize resistance because they really didn’t like the idea of the war. So especially when you go through these scenarios they developed, what one could do after taking Hitler out. For example, they got this idea of having a peace treaty with the western allies, sending all their troops then to the east, or just doing that without killing Hitler, just sending one division, without notice, to the east, and then another and another, so that the western allies could take over part of Germany. But that plan would have meant that all the Nazi death camps, like Auschwitz, would have been in an operation, fully functional for another few months. So, that was no concern for these Army sergeants and generals. They just didn’t care about that. There isn’t much for the Germans to identify with; Stauffenberg and the others would’ve rather installed another military dictatorship, like Argentina, instead of a democracy. So, they wouldn’t have given the power to the people and a parliament.

*AUTHOR: Beside the SA and the SS, there were another couple police forces, the Gestapo and others. Were they just all police forces, or did they have different functions?*

MR. EIGEN: They often have the same function, and no clear distinction what their function actually is. So, you got the average Nazi footsoldier, the brown shirts. The SS started as Hitler’s bodyguard within the storm troopers, as the elite of them. Later on, taken over by Himmler, they became a different group and faction. We’ve got the SD, the *Sicherheitsdienst*, the Secret Service of the SS, run Reinhard Heydrich. We have the military intelligence service, run by Admiral Canaris, who was later on executed by the Nazis in Flossenbürg, because he started resistance together with the circle around Stauffenberg. Then you have the Gestapo, which was originally operated by Göring, and later on taken over by Himmler and the SS, and incorporated into the SS. And furthermore, you have the political police departments of the regular police, which dealt with political enemies. So, it’s totally confusing, and Hitler wanted to have it that way, because then everyone would be trying to over-fulfill his duty, before they lost any field of activity, before they got merged with others and they would lose their jobs.

*AUTHOR: There is a term I saw in the exhibit catalog, I think it was room 13, the “night of the long knives.”*

MR. EIGEN: The night of the long knives is the term for – Himmler accused the leadership of the storm troopers of starting a coup against Hitler. So, the problem was that Röhm and the leadership of the storm troopers took this term of national socialism really seriously. So they wanted to have a kind of national communist regime without private property of factories, which of course contradicts the other agreements Nazis had made with Gustav Krupp and others, because Krupp and the steel tycoons didn’t intend to support the Nazis and their campaigns just to lose all their properties and factories after that. Also, the army didn’t like the idea that Ernst Röhm wanted to merge the storm troopers with the army. That would mean that he wanted to over the *Wehrmacht*. The army didn’t want to lose its independence, and so the SS and the army came to the agreement to take out Röhm to stabilize the dictatorship. So, that was kind of the political clan thing of the party compared to what started with Trotsky in the Soviet revolution. So at some point you also have to kill the other factions of your movement if you want to take over government.

*AUTHOR: I don’t want to miss anything, but most of my questions I either asked, or they got answered during the tour. The last question I have noted here: There was mention of the patriotic German fighters league during the early days of Hitler’s grasp for power. Did that organization continue or did it get absorbed into other organizations?*

MR. EIGEN: All these other organizations started to get absorbed. So, in the beginning the Nazis still tolerated a few of them, but gradually started to absorbed them into existing Nazi organizations, like the *Frontkämpferbund*, the steel helmets, these kinds of organizations. They later on were merged either with the SA or other organizations, or had to be dissolved. They didn’t want to have any independent organizations anymore, and they said there was no need for it.

*AUTHOR:That’s all I had.*

MR. EIGEN: Great.

*AUTHOR: Awesome. Thank you very much, I appreciate you answering all my questions.*