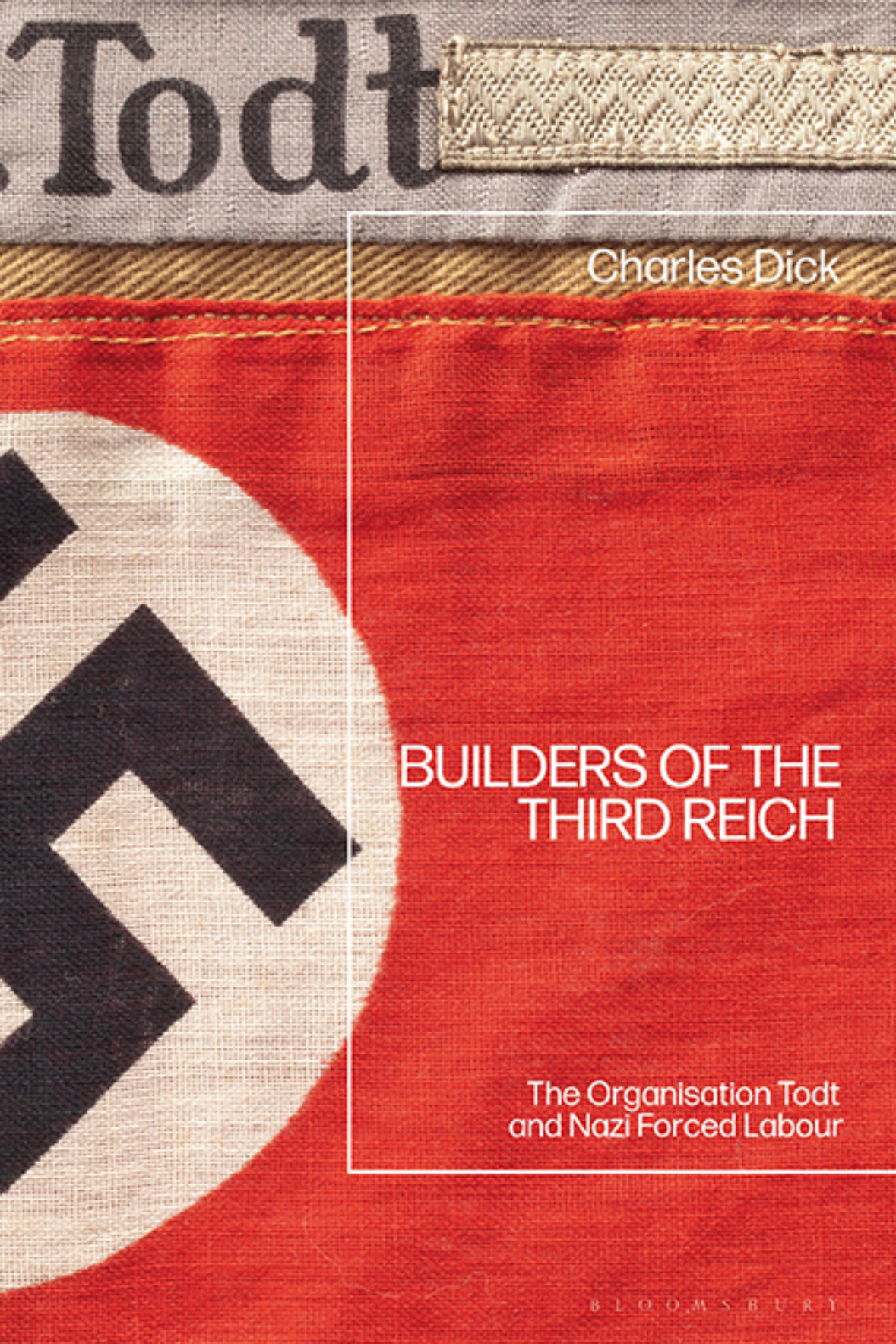
Todt
Charles Dick
BUILDERS OF THE THIRD REICH
The Organisation Todt and Nazi Forced Labour
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Abbreviations

AEL	Arbeitserziehungslager (work education camp)
Baltöl	Baltische Öl GmbH (Baltic Oil Company)
BA/MA	Bundesarchiv/Militärarchiv, Freiburg
BArchB	Bundesarchiv Berlin
BArchL	Bundesarchiv Ludwigsburg
DAF	Deutsche Arbeitsfront (German Labour Front)
DESt	Deutsche Erd- und Steinwerke GmbH (German Earth and Stone Works)
Dipl. Ing.	Diplomingenieur (qualified engineer)
Dr. Ing.	Doktor Ingenieur (doctor of engineering)
GBBau	Generalbevollmächtigter für die Regelung der Bauwirtschaft (general plenipotentiary for the regulation of the construction industry)
Gestapo	Geheime Staatspolizei (Secret State Police)
HLSL	Harvard Law School Library, Nuremberg Trials Project
HSSPF	Höhere SS und Polizeiführer (Higher SS and police leader)
IfZ	Institut für Zeitgeschichte, Munich
IKL	Inspektion der Konzentrationslager (Inspectorate of Concentration Camps)
IMT	Trial of the Major War Criminals before the International Military Tribunal
ITS	International Tracing Service
IWM	Imperial War Museum, London
KDAI	Kampfbund deutscher Architekten und Ingenieure (Action Group of German Architects and Engineers)

NMT	Trials of War Criminals before the Nuernberg Military Tribunals
Nordag	Nordische Aluminium AG (Nordic Aluminium Company)
NSBDT	Nationalsozialistischer Bund deutscher Technik (National Socialist League of German Technology)
NSDAP	Nationalsozialistische deutsche Arbeiterpartei (National Socialist German Workers' Party)
NSKK	Nationalsozialistisches Kraftfahrkorps (National Socialist Motor Corps)
OT	Organisation Todt
POW	prisoner of war
RAD	Reichsarbeitsdienst (Reich Labour Service)
RM	Reichsmark
RSHA	Reichssicherheitshauptamt (Reich Security Head Office)
SA	Sturmabteilung (Storm Detachment)
SD	Sicherheitsdienst (Security Service)
SS	Schutzstaffel (Protection Squadron)
TNA	The National Archives of the UK
WVHA	Wirtschafts-Verwaltungshauptamt (SS Economic and Administrative Head Office)

Introduction

Uroš Majstorović arrived by ship in Nazi-occupied Norway in 1942 in time for winter. He was one of more than 116,000 foreign slave labourers transported there during the Second World War, of whom more than 18,000 died.[1] He endured extreme hard labour, innumerable beatings and near-starvation under a regime he later described as 'pure terror'.[2]

Majstorović, a Serb from Croatia then aged 22, reached Ørlandet labour camp around the end of November.[3] Here he and other prisoners worked day and night in appalling conditions to build a big underground complex and coastal battery to guard the sea approaches to Trondheim. This city was to have been grandly redesigned as a home for 250,000 Germans and act as the most northerly naval base in Hitler's empire.[4] Situated about 500 km below the Arctic Circle on Norway's west coast, Majstorović's camp was one of at least 460 set up throughout the country.[5]

Exhaustion, illness, starvation and fatal beatings and shootings were common causes of death among the foreign prisoners across Norway. Slave labourers infested with lice died in typhus epidemics. Pitifully insufficient rations led to cases of cannibalism.[6] Freezing to death and amputations due to frostbite were most frequent in the Arctic north, where temperatures in winter fell to minus 30 degrees C or below.[7] In summer the Nazi occupiers took advantage of the polar 'midnight sun' and forced prisoners to work in shifts around the clock.

In Majstorović's camp, just like elsewhere in the country, prisoners wore wooden clogs and clothes that were utterly inadequate for the bitter winter weather and subzero temperatures. Majstorović said the first six months were the worst.[8] He estimated the camp held up to 500 prisoners, and a post-war investigation reported that 160 of these inmates had died.[9] Among the victims were three hanged for escape attempts.[10] 'They were hanged and we had to march by them, so that all could see what might happen to them,' recalled Majstorović.[11]

After the German defeat, the organisation that first guarded and ran the camp was condemned by a British investigation into war crimes in Norway for its 'inhuman use of slave labour'.[12] But the name of this organisation was not among those that gained global notoriety after the war as Nazi enforcers of terror under the Third Reich, such as the SS, the SA and the Gestapo. It was the Organisation Todt.

The brutal role played by this paramilitary force in the Third Reich's exploitation of millions of foreign workers has received scant attention. It has either been concealed by apologists for the Nazi (National Socialist German Workers' Party – NSDAP) slave-labour programme,[13] treated marginally in scholarly works on the Third Reich or otherwise confined to studies in German of specific camps.[14] As for works in English, no in-depth history of the Organisation Todt (OT) exists.

Yet Hitler enlisted the OT's brightest stars – the leading lights of the nation's engineers and architects – to build the empire of his dreams. Whether it was military fortifications in wartime or grand imperial cities in peacetime after the imagined final victory, the dictator turned to his loyal favourites in the organisation to design and create them. Specialising in large-scale construction tasks, the Organisation Todt was formed in 1938 and grew to command a labour force of around 1.5 million.[15] It was headed by two successive armaments ministers: the first was its founder, Fritz Todt, and the second was Albert Speer. The Organisation Todt was therefore at the heart of the Nazi system and a power ranking alongside the SS (Schutzstaffel – Protection Squadron), the Wehrmacht and the Nazi Party. Its uniform included swastika armbands, although it was not a party organisation and answered directly to Hitler. High-ranking SS and SA (Sturmabteilung – Storm Detachment) officers, including Todt himself, held key positions. OT construction experts oversaw vast building programmes throughout German-occupied Europe, being deployed from the Arctic Circle to the Balkans and deep into what the Third Reich termed its eastern *Lebensraum* (living space). In the final year of the war the OT gained control of all military construction in the Reich, and played a big part in gargantuan projects like the relocation of vital German industries underground to protect them from Allied bombing.

Hitler called the OT 'the greatest construction organisation of all time', commissioning it directly to oversee works he considered vital to the Third Reich's war effort.[16] Germany's dictator was not the only one to express such praise. British intelligence credited the OT in 1945 with having carried out in little over five years 'the most impressive building programme since Roman times'.[17] OT operations mainly relied in wartime on Germany's slave-labour system, which was the largest such exploitation of foreign labour since the end of the transatlantic African slave trade in the nineteenth century.[18]

In the conflicts of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, prisoners of war (POWs) and civilians were not put to work by their captors on a large scale until the First World War but the extent of this practice in the Second World War was

unprecedented. Both Germany and its Axis ally, Japan, flouted international law with their establishment of huge forced-labour systems.[19] Japan put millions of civilians to work in Korea, China and occupied areas of Southeast Asia. One million Korean men and women and at least 40,000 Chinese were deported to Japan.[20] The Japanese forced both POWs and civilians to work on tasks like transport links, similar to those the OT undertook in Europe for Hitler's regime. Of the 60,000 predominantly British, Australian and Dutch POWs who worked under abysmal conditions on the 420 km Burma–Thailand railway between November 1942 and October 1943, more than 12,000 died. About 60,000 also perished out of 300,000 Asian labourers conscripted by the Japanese for the 'death railway'.[21]

Under the German slave-labour programme in Europe, millions of civilians, POWs, Jews, *Ostarbeiter* (eastern workers) and other workers from Nazi-occupied territories lost their lives.[22] While no exact figures exist for deaths of foreign workers, an estimated 2.7 million died in the Greater Reich alone out of more than 13.5 million.[23] Yet this was only part of the story, since these calculations excluded millions of slave labourers in German-occupied territories like the former Soviet Union. Hundreds of thousands were deported to third countries, where they worked above all for the OT.[24]

Nazi dependence on foreign workers

Hitler's Third Reich became so reliant on its foreign workforce that by autumn 1941, after the Wehrmacht's invasion of the Soviet Union, there was no turning back. Many millions of foreigners were harnessed into what became an increasingly violent and lethal system. The vast scale of the Nazi programme contrasted with Germany's more limited use of forced labour in the First World War:[25] Foreign workers probably never made up more than 10 per cent of all employees in Germany during the 1914–18 conflict. In the next global conflagration, though, more than a quarter of all workers in the Reich consisted of foreigners by mid-1944.[26] Up to half the workforce in the country's munitions factories were foreign nationals, and they constituted about one-third of all employees in the metal, chemical, construction and mining industries. Nearly half of all employees in agriculture were foreigners.[27]

This foreign labour force fell into three main categories: civilians, POWs and concentration-camp inmates. The biggest group was civilians, numbering about 8.4 million in the Greater Reich from 1939 to 1945. The next largest was

prisoners of war, totalling 4.6 million, followed by 1.7 million concentration-camp inmates and *Arbeitsjuden* (working Jews).[28] The sum of these three figures, purged of 'double counting', amounted to more than 13.5 million foreign labourers.[29]

Soviet prisoners of war and concentration-camp prisoners suffered most deaths among foreign slave labourers in the Greater Reich, while death rates among civilians were significantly lower. Estimating death tolls among the three main groups of foreign workers is fraught with difficulties, not least because civilians who were too sick to work were transported back home. West European prisoners of war, such as French and Belgians, ranked relatively highly under the Nazi racist code and were also sent home if unfit to work. Nevertheless, the number of prisoners of war estimated to have died is around 1.1 million, the number of civilians 0.5 million and the number of concentration-camp inmates and *Arbeitsjuden* 1.1 million.[30]

While these figures starkly underline the extent of the Nazi slave-labour system and its murderous nature, they do not convey the breadth of conditions experienced by the foreign workers. At one extreme, a non-Jewish, non-Slavic civilian engineer, working in Germany or elsewhere in West Europe up to around 1942, could benefit from reasonable wages and conditions; at the other, a Jewish ghetto inmate would suffer unrelenting brutality and the torment of hard labour before being murdered in an extermination camp. The complexity and scale of the Nazi slave-labour system meant there were no neat chronological divisions. Although 1942 marked something of a turning point, after which conditions for foreign workers became increasingly harsh, Polish workers were deported to Germany and generally suffered brutal treatment virtually from the start of the war. Poles were vilified under Nazi racist ideology, but the practical application of this ideology was not always uniform. As a rule, the fate of slave labourers depended on their ethnic origin, meaning that Jews and Soviet prisoners of war suffered the harshest of conditions, being ranked lowest on the Nazi racial scale. Others closer to the 'Aryan' ideal, such as West Europeans, could expect more favourable treatment. All the same, there were exceptions. Nazi racist goals were not always ruthlessly pursued in practice as war progressed, displaying what has been termed an 'erosion of the ideological'.[31] Evidence of significantly lower death rates among prisoners on the bottom rung of Nazi racial categories, compared to groups in 'higher' classifications in some satellite camps, has forced an adjustment to established thinking.

Among many other issues related to Nazi slave labour, this book examines how camps were managed and who controlled them. Levels and categories of violence

suffered by camp inmates are also investigated. Further analysis concerns types of labour that prisoners were compelled to perform and treatment of women in the camps.[32]

The role of the Organisation Todt

So how did the Organisation Todt fit into the Nazi system? One way of starting to answer this question is to examine the verdict handed down by the Nuremberg Tribunal on the OT's most prominent war criminal, Albert Speer. Having taken over on Fritz Todt's death in 1942, Speer had been armaments minister and OT chief until Germany's defeat, and was therefore tried at Nuremberg with other major Nazi figures. He was sentenced to twenty years for war crimes and crimes against humanity relating to slave labour. The tribunal referred to Speer's role as head of the OT in its judgment, and one of the counts in the indictment listed the OT as an organisation for which civilians in Nazi-occupied territories were compelled to work.[33] Speer defended himself before the tribunal by saying he saw his job as a 'technical task'.[34] This was an assessment the tribunal rejected with its guilty verdict.

Although the Nuremberg Tribunal referred explicitly to 'slave labor' as a Nazi war crime in its indictment and throughout its proceedings, controversy has surrounded the use of this term by historians after the war. Opponents of the 'slave' label view it as euphemistic, arguing that the fate of concentration-camp prisoners, in particular, was worse than slavery. On the other hand, leading historians have advanced convincing arguments in favour of employing the word 'slave'. The term is valid for most foreign workers or German Jews overseen by the OT. Even opponents of the term 'slave' agree it applied to millions of civilian labourers in the German-occupied eastern territories, large numbers of whom toiled under the OT. Survivors of labour and concentration camps, including those who worked under the OT, have described themselves as having been 'slaves'. There were many shades of grey between slave labourers and voluntary, paid foreign workers within the Nazi system, as already indicated. The term 'forced labourers' is used in this book to describe non-Slavic, non-Jewish foreign labourers who were compelled to work but paid a meaningful wage.[35]

The OT was one of four major German entities exploiting forced and slave labour during the Third Reich; the three others were the SS, the Wehrmacht and industry. Of the four, the OT was most successful at cooperating simultaneously

with all the others. This was largely because the mutual benefits for the OT and its partners in using slave labour were closely matched. Although this collaboration with partners was the hallmark of OT practice in running slave-labour projects, the organisation also ran work camps by itself with its own guards across occupied Europe.

The OT grew out of Fritz Todt's pre-war development of Germany's motorway network and the Westwall defence line. As it expanded, the organisation shifted from an early practice of seeking voluntary paid workers to one of coercion and increasing dependence on prisoners of war and concentration-camp inmates. Its tasks spanned a very wide range, covering the Atlantic Wall coastal defence line stretching from Norway to the Franco–Spanish frontier, road and rail links in occupied territories, armaments production including V1 and V2 rockets, large-scale energy and mining projects to exploit captured sources of raw materials, and a huge operation to move key German armaments factories and industrial plants underground to protect them from Allied bombing. This last task included subterranean factories which Hitler commissioned the OT to build; they were to produce Messerschmitt Me-262 planes, which at the time were the world's first operational jet fighters.

The OT's job of building underground fighter-plane factories, roads and railways required enormous resources. It involved tackling such rugged terrain as the mountains and fjords of Norway and the vast expanses of the Soviet Union. Freight transport across Norway was essential to the Third Reich as a secure land route for Swedish iron ore, which represented more than 80 per cent of German imports of this vital commodity in 1940.[36] In the Soviet Union, the Caucasus oilfields were a principal objective after Hitler's 1941 invasion, and the OT oversaw Jewish and other slave labourers involved in the huge task of building transport links. The OT also took a leading role in an energy project at the SS-run Vaivara concentration camp in the Baltics. The shale-oil project in Estonia, one of the world's richest sources of such fuel, was especially valued by Hitler as he fretted about Germany's vulnerability to Allied air strikes on Romanian oilfields and the failure to win the Caucasus fields in the course of the war. The OT was one of the main employers at the shale-oil plant, together with Baltische Öl GmbH (Baltöl), a subsidiary of Kontinentale Öl AG. Both of these concerns came within the sphere of Carl Krauch, Germany's chemical industry supremo and chief executive of the mammoth chemical combine IG Farben.[37] The OT and Baltöl used Soviet prisoners of war and Jewish and other slave labourers for tasks such as the production of oil from shale, building a railway, construction work, forestry and assembly of cement-clad naval mines.[38]

Prisoners laboured under various overseers, including the SS, the Wehrmacht and the OT, and spoke of high death rates and harsh conditions.[39] The OT was also deeply involved in the Third Reich's exploitation of raw materials in the Balkans, particularly the Bor copper mine in Yugoslavia.[40] In the core of the Reich itself, meanwhile, the OT took over all military construction and a host of major underground and other building projects in the final year of the war as German forces were driven back by the Allies.

Under the Third Reich, conditions and death rates tended to worsen in the labour camps as the war progressed, although there were exceptions. The trend towards a bleaker outlook for prisoners accelerated after Hitler's invasion of Russia in mid-1941 and the OT joined the SS, the Wehrmacht and industry in exploiting Soviet POWs and civilians as slave labourers. In the core of the Reich, Nazi slave-labour policy see-sawed on the use of Jews, up to 6 million of whom died in the Holocaust. German Jewish men and women compelled to work in the Reich reached a peak of 51,000–53,000 in the summer of 1941, but they were subsequently deported to ghettos and extermination camps. After the last expulsions in spring 1943 the Reich was declared 'Jew-free', although Nazi policy on the issue was later reversed.[41] In 1944 Jewish labour was again used in the Reich for projects like the construction of the 'bomb-proof' underground factories for the Messerschmitt jet fighter planes. At Kaufering and the 'Mühldorf ring', two sets of Dachau satellite camps whose prisoners were forced to undertake this task under the SS and OT, around half of more than 38,000 inmates perished.[42]

Foreign workers deported to Norway were predominantly Soviet POWs, but included Serbs like Majstorović, whose fate is outlined at the start of this chapter. Out of more than 116,000 Soviet labourers, Yugoslav prisoners and Poles sent there, at least 18,400 died.[43] The British investigation into war crimes in Norway singled out one notorious Arctic complex of up to thirty camps, known as Strafgefangenenlager Nord (SGL Nord), where treatment of prisoners was especially brutal and death rates were high. Strikingly, the camp inmates were mostly German criminals, although there were some foreigners.[44] SGL Nord was run by the German Justice Ministry, while the OT supervised all work done by the prisoners. West German prosecutors launched a post-war investigation into the camp complex regarding maltreatment of Czechoslovak former inmates, but no trial resulted.[45]

Camp survivors in general tell of acts of murderous brutality by OT guards and of hunger, sickness and torment. Because OT overseers drove slave labourers ever harder at the work sites and often provided pitifully inadequate rations and

shelter, they bear a heavy responsibility for the high prisoner death toll. Most deaths in labour camps, other than those caused by physical violence, typically resulted from abuses for which the OT was responsible.[46] It was the OT which generally set the exhausting pace of work and provided inadequate rations, medical care, shelter and work clothes, thus causing deaths through extreme hard labour, malnutrition, sickness and exposure. These were the biggest killers in the slave-labour and concentration camps, with the important exclusion of the gas chambers in death camps such as Auschwitz-Birkenau and Majdanek.[47]

The Organisation Todt below the radar?

In view of the importance Hitler attached to the Organisation Todt and its prominent part in supervising slave labour, how has it largely escaped the otherwise scrupulously intent gaze of historians of Nazism? One explanation is that, apart from the regime's political and military leaders, the SS attracted much of the attention of post-war prosecutors investigating mass murder and genocide before the major trials at Nuremberg and elsewhere. While OT guards had routinely practised lethal violence against prisoners too, trials were rare.

Another explanation for the OT's low historical profile is the length of time slave labour took to become a focus of debate. Interest within Germany on slave labour using the country's concentration-camp prisoners was barely aroused until the 1980s. Since then, much has been published on the satellite camps that mushroomed from 1942 to place labourers closer to worksites, such as factories producing armaments.[48] Parent concentration camps were often too far away. The OT's role, though, has been marginalised in this literature. Its real level of involvement was further shrouded by tortuous negotiations over the issue of compensation for the victims, which continued for decades after the war because the negotiations specifically excluded any payout to millions of POWs, one of the biggest sources of OT slave labour.[49] But whether overseen by the OT, army engineers or the SS, prisoners of war were routinely subjected to barbarous treatment. Red Army soldiers seized after Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union suffered horribly even before the Führer's decision in October 1941 to use them as workers in the Reich. Two million Soviet prisoners of war had died in captivity by February 1942, out of 3.35 million. Their treatment reflected Nazi racist ideology vilifying Slavs as subhuman (*Untermenschen*). A further 1.3 million had died by the end of the conflict, many of them having been worked to death.[50]

The OT has also evaded attention because historians have tended to focus on slave labour within the Reich, where statistics are more precise and German interest most intense, rather than in the Nazi-occupied territories across Europe. Yet these areas of foreign conquest were precisely where the OT mostly operated. In the former Soviet Union, for instance, the OT's labour force numbered around 400,000 after a major expansion at the start of summer 1942. For short periods it reached 800,000, more than the combined total of inmates in all Germany's concentration camps registered in mid-January 1945.[51] The OT partially withdrew into Germany's core only during the last year of the war, when its workforce in the Reich grew by September 1944 to more than 835,000.[52]

The OT possessed one further quality which was perhaps its most effective camouflage: it defied easy classification. No official decree was ever issued announcing the OT's founding. Instead, the German public first heard the name Organisation Todt from Hitler's lips when he addressed a Nazi Party rally in Nuremberg in 1938.[53] The OT had existed for almost five years before its functions were set out in 1943 in German law.

'Ordinary Men' of the Organisation Todt

For all the reasons listed, public awareness of the part played by the Organisation Todt under the Third Reich has remained minimal decades after the Second World War. The aim of this book is thus to set out the evidence reflecting the OT's true role in the Nazi slave-labour programme. This entails a fundamental reappraisal of the organisation to present a more balanced and complete picture of how it operated and flourished within the Third Reich. Five main themes are explored: firstly, the theme of empire and how the OT participated in Hitler's imperial plans; secondly, the OT's involvement in the plunder of Europe and the organisation's important role in Germany's war economy; thirdly, the OT's cooperation and rivalry with its slave-labour partners, the SS, the Wehrmacht and industry; fourthly, OT violence in the camps; and fifthly, OT perpetrators and how they fitted into the wider group of Nazi war criminals.

The first theme of empire and Hitler's vision of how the OT should help bring some of his imperial notions to life has so far been insufficiently explored. Huge OT operations were conducted across Nazi-occupied Europe to construct defence lines and transport links designed to buttress Hitler's domination of the continent. The dictator's fantasies regarding imperial cities rested on his engineers and personal architects like Todt and Speer, as well as on OT

construction teams in places like Trondheim, in the area where Majstorović worked. The OT's leading figures were therefore among those helping to fashion and realise Hitler's dreams. Was it Hitler's own ambitions to be an architect, expressed in *Mein Kampf*, which made the OT elite his natural choice to create and design infrastructure and cities for his empire?[54]

The second theme, regarding OT participation in securing the spoils of Europe for the Third Reich to drive the country's war economy, has also attracted limited attention from historians. The organisation was, however, a key player in extracting raw materials and exploiting foreign labourers across the continent, to help secure occupied Europe and ensure sufficient resources for the manufacture and operation of Germany's weapons, tanks, ships and warplanes.[55]

Exploration of the third theme of OT cooperation and competition with its slave-labour partners necessitates a major reassessment to reflect the OT's true place in Germany's power structure. The OT was a vital partner in overseeing the Nazi slave-labour programme alongside the SS, the Wehrmacht and industry. Insufficient emphasis has previously been placed by researchers on Speer's role as leader of the OT, which was spelled out in numerous decrees issued by Hitler. The dictator repeatedly chose the OT to carry out projects of the highest priority.[56] Speer himself implemented policy decisions in his capacity as OT chief, a position which also afforded him exceptionally detailed knowledge of how so many were worked to death under the slave-labour programme.[57] Since Speer and the OT worked so closely with the SS, the relationship between the two organisations deserves sharper focus. Comparison between the activities of the OT and the construction arm of the SS Economic and Administrative Head Office (Wirtschafts-Verwaltungshauptamt – WVHA) is especially valuable.[58] Were members of the OT influenced by the culture of violence practised by the SS? Was belief in Nazi ideology as important to OT personnel as it was to the SS?

The fourth theme of OT violence in camps, where the organisation collaborated with the SS, the Wehrmacht and industry, reveals the plight of slave labourers under the Third Reich's yoke. This book's investigation into OT violence gives the organisation's foreign workers a voice, drawing on an extensive collection of often harrowing accounts by former camp inmates. The labour-camp survivors describe how it was not just SS and Wehrmacht guards who routinely practised lethal physical violence; OT staff also shot or beat slave labourers to death. Apart from these killings, though, many prisoners lost their lives through extreme hard labour, lack of food or inadequate shelter and healthcare, which were precisely the areas where the OT bore responsibility. It was the OT which generally drove slave labourers to toil harder at work sites

and failed to provide basic needs for prisoners on projects it supervised, causing high death rates. The apparent breakdown of frontiers between various types of violence in the brutal and chaotic environment of the camps is also scrutinised to evaluate how useful are the terms traditionally employed to define categories of violence.

The fifth theme of OT perpetrators and Nazi war criminals in general explores the important question of what motivated OT personnel. What were the circumstances under which some OT overseers of slave labourers carried out war crimes? Speer's case has come under intense scrutiny, but comparatively little research has been carried out into other perpetrators in the OT. This book investigates how staff operated across occupied Europe, and how much leeway they possessed to act independently. SS officers, as well as leaders of Hitler's regime and the German armed forces, have been extensively analysed by historians,[59] who have frequently sought to discern the motives of perpetrators they saw as 'ordinary' men.[60] OT staff, however, perhaps deserved this label more than any other group of Nazi war criminals. These were not soldiers or policemen, let alone units of the SS or SD (Sicherheitsdienst – SS security service) execution squads formed to commit mass murder. They were builders and engineers, whose ranks included a significant number of SS and SA officers, but whose organisation was created not to kill an enemy or implement Nazi racist policy resulting in genocide, but to perform the everyday work of construction. How did it come about, then, that OT engineers, architects and building-site foremen became Hitler's slave drivers? Why did they kill prisoners by shootings, beatings and murderous hard labour and neglect, when their job was to construct buildings, bridges and bunkers?

Sources

The main sources for historical analysis are OT records and correspondence. While Wehrmacht and Waffen-SS documents were more methodically destroyed, the OT's own records at the German Federal archive in Berlin do still suffer from considerable gaps. Many OT records that have survived can be found in institutions in formerly German-occupied countries, such as Norway's National Archives in Oslo, which have yielded significant material for this study. Some holes in OT records can be bridged by referring to alternatives, such as Allied documents, post-war criminal investigations, German industry files and the accounts of former slave labourers. The German Federal archives in Berlin,

its military section in Freiburg and the records in Ludwigsburg of German legal investigations into suspects from the Nazi era have all proved rich sources for this research. The Institut für Zeitgeschichte (IfZ) in Munich is also an invaluable resource that has provided much material for this book, including details from Nazi Party files and post-war statements to Allied interrogators by Speer and other senior OT personnel.

Other important sources of original documents include the National Archives in London. A very detailed British intelligence report on the OT specifically excludes slave labour provided by Soviet prisoners of war, but is otherwise wide-ranging.[61] Blinkered by the conflicting political interests of the Western Allies and Stalin,[62] it provides an important contemporary insight into the workings of the OT. The intelligence file, dated March 1945 and entitled 'Handbook of the Organisation Todt (OT)', comprises nearly 500 pages.

Several of the OT's slave-labour projects led to a limited number of post-war trials, some of which were held within a few years of the end of the war and provided detailed information on individual defendants. Apart from the trial of Speer, others included the 'Mühldorf ring' case. This involved an architect favoured by Hitler and an intense rival of Speer's, OT regional chief Hermann Giesler, who was initially sentenced to life imprisonment before his term was reduced. Another trial concerned crimes in Norway, including at the Ørlandet camp holding prisoners such as Majstorović.[63] The wider subject of post-war trials is analysed later in this book, with particular reference to the relatively few proceedings involving OT personnel.

For the perspective of slave labourers, the International Tracing Service (ITS) has provided important material on the fate of individuals during the war and its aftermath, including details on Kaufering and OT activities in Nazi-occupied territories.[64] Accounts by former slave labourers are also held in archives such as Zwangsarbeit 1939–1945: Erinnerungen und Geschichte.[65] This is an online database of nearly 600 former forced or slave labourers from twenty-six countries, who were interviewed in 2005–6 as part of a project which grew out of an initiative by Germany's government and industry to pay compensation to victims of National Socialism.[66] Apart from such archives, former slave labourers have described their own experiences in published accounts of life in the labour camps.[67]

Finally there are the books written by Speer himself, which by their nature as a version of events from a convicted war criminal must be treated with extreme caution.[68] His comments in his memoirs reveal the bitterness of his conflict with SA Brigadeführer Xaver Dorsch, his second-in-command in the OT. Their dispute reached a climax when Hitler ignored Speer to commission Dorsch

in 1944 to build underground factories for fighter planes, for which the OT deputy chief was to exploit slave labourers, including 100,000 Hungarian Jews.[69] Evidence of crimes committed at one of the factory sites was heard during the Mühldorf case, when the court in Dachau convicted Giesler and others.[70] Dorsch never faced trial.[71]

Historians have thoroughly analysed Speer's post-war accounts, which can shed some light on the organisation he headed before his imprisonment in Spandau.[72] However, Speer wove a web of deceit in portraying himself at Nuremberg and in his memoirs as disinterested in politics and engrossed in his 'technical' work. The truth about the head of the OT was quite different: Hitler's loyal henchman was a co-enforcer of Nazi racist policy who made pacts with the SS and drove slave labourers to their deaths.[73]

The book's framework around five central ideas, as outlined, allows a thematic rather than rigidly chronological approach to examining the development of the Organisation Todt. A chapter is devoted to each theme before the concluding chapter. The OT grew to become one of Hitler's key agencies, and the dictator turned to the organisation with increasing urgency as military setbacks multiplied during the Second World War. Works he commissioned the OT to undertake culminated in projects to move vital war industries underground to protect them from Allied bombing. The OT had already shown itself to be both efficient and flexible in completing monumental feats of engineering. Like other forces of the Third Reich, though, the OT was transformed by war, and acted ever more ruthlessly to try to fulfil the Führer's commands.

1

The Organisation Todt in Hitler's empire

On the road to war, Hitler entrusted Fritz Todt and Albert Speer with two tasks at the core of his future empire: the dictator chose Todt to mastermind the construction of the Third Reich's motorway network, destined to radiate out into conquered territory, and instructed Speer to begin rebuilding Berlin as an imperial capital, to be renamed 'Germania'.[1] Hitler put Todt in charge of building the *Autobahnen* in 1933, just months after he became chancellor. He then appointed Speer to realise his vision for Germania on 30 January 1937, the fourth anniversary of his accession to power. In both instances he chose men who would go on to serve in succession as his armaments ministers and leaders of what became known as the Organisation Todt (OT). This labour force grew out of Todt's motorway-building concern, and Hitler publicly named it for the first time in 1938. This was while its engineers were building the Westwall, known as the Siegfried Line to Germany's wartime foes, just over a year before the Second World War started with the Wehrmacht's invasion of Poland.

The projects to create the motorways and Germania reflected Hitler's megalomania and craving for all things gargantuan. They also demonstrated his reliance on the workforce of engineers and construction specialists created by Todt, which began on the motorways, largely transferred to the Westwall and then absorbed the builders of Germania during the war.[2] From an improvised group of around 350,000 German workers in the run-up to the twentieth century's bloodiest conflict, the Organisation Todt metamorphosed in wartime into a 1.5-million-strong agency mostly composed of foreign slave labourers,[3] including Jews and Slavs vilified under the Nazi racist code. Germans made up less than a quarter of the force. As Hitler's imperial designs grew following initial military successes, so did the OT's geographical reach. By 1940 the OT had started motorway networks to link Klagenfurt to Trondheim and Calais to Warsaw, with a route later planned as far as Moscow. Development of the railways was to include the introduction of double-decker trains travelling at up to 200 kilometres per hour, taking 600 passengers per carriage from Munich to

Rostov-on-Don. Hitler instructed Munich rail authorities to make the necessary changes to the main station, whose hall was to have required the largest steel-frame structure in the world. As for the city of Germania, Hitler's obsession with buildings which would outdo rival colonial powers was its hallmark. A triumphal arch would dwarf its Parisian counterpart, and the main north–south and east–west roads were to have been more than 100 metres wide. A massive domed hall next to the Führer's palace would accommodate 180,000 people, while a neighbouring square was designed for events attended by a million.[4] On seeing a model of the planned city, Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels commented admiringly: 'Incomparably monumental. The Führer is raising a memorial to himself in stone.'[5]

The imperial capital of Germania was the biggest of five 'leader cities' (*Führerstädte*) to be redeveloped at great cost under plans reaching into peacetime after an imagined Nazi final victory. The other cities in this elite group were Nuremberg, Hamburg, Munich and Linz, earmarked for the grandest rebuilding under plans which, to a lesser extent, included almost all of Germany's major cities. The Baltic seaside spa of Prora, on the island of Rügen, was to have become the world's largest resort, with 75 kilometres of beach and facilities for 14 million German holidaymakers a year. Although German military setbacks from late 1941 onwards meant most of these long-term schemes were never realised, they covered not just the core of the Reich but the occupied territories of Europe. The Norwegian city of Trondheim was to have been turned into a settlement for more than a quarter of a million Germans, protected by a naval base which Hitler claimed would have made Singapore look like 'mere child's play'. In Eastern Europe the dictator instructed that new German urban developments should be modelled on the Fatherland's medieval towns, such as Regensburg or Heidelberg. They would have been ringed at a distance of 30–40 kilometres by model settlements built for the German rural population, with imposing public buildings and fast road links.[6]

The significance of the OT's involvement in this chilling imperial vision, under which the lives of the local East European population counted for virtually nothing, was twofold: building was Hitler's passion, and this was the area where the OT excelled. Hitler's imperial goals were central to the operations of the Organisation Todt, which was deployed almost exclusively in Nazi-occupied territory for most of the war and relied heavily on slave labour. In choosing Todt and Speer to construct the Third Reich's highways and the colossal buildings of metropolitan Berlin, even before he appointed them as successive armaments ministers, Hitler entrusted these two men with components of his imperial

design that he especially prized. What he required were edifices and feats of technology designed to proclaim German power and his own to the world.

The dictator relied on Todt and Speer to fashion these symbols of imperial might, while hundreds of thousands of OT staff and foreign labourers built defence lines and transport links to defend conquered territories up to their furthest frontiers. For Hitler, the OT was an instrument of conquest and occupation. The bonds that developed between himself, Todt and Speer boosted the profile of the organisation, which became tightly woven into his dreams of empire, architecture and German technological prowess. To understand how the OT spread its network through German-occupied Europe and came to dominate all construction in the Reich in the final year of the war, the structure and aims of the organisation itself need to be investigated. Professional and academic qualifications of around 1,400 OT personnel are analysed in this chapter to assess the backgrounds of senior staff. Investigation of the remarkable expansion of the OT should start, though, with an assessment of the contribution of its two successive leaders. Hitler respected Todt, valuing his loyalty and competence; he delighted in discussing architecture with the much younger Speer, who was thirty-one when put in charge of rebuilding Berlin. Hitler's relationships with Todt and Speer are examined in turn, contrasting the two OT chiefs' individual styles of leadership and gauging their separate efforts to realise Hitler's imperial ambitions.

The Organisation Todt under Todt

Todt and his large workforce had been constructing motorways for five years before Hitler named the 'Organisation Todt' in public for the first time. The dictator's decision, proclaimed at the Nazi Party's Nuremberg rally in September 1938, represented an extraordinary honour for a man who had become one of his closest confidants.[7] It recognised Hitler's favourite civil engineer in a way normally reserved for the Führer alone. The leader of the Third Reich was the figurehead of the Hitler Jugend, but Fritz Todt became one of the few in the Nazi elite deemed worthy of having a national organisation bearing his name.[8] This accolade reflected the strength of the bond between the two men, first forged during the building of the *Autobahnen* and the Westwall.

Hitler's impatience with the army led him to choose Todt's labour force to complete the Westwall. Frustrated by the slow pace of army engineers, Hitler ordered Todt to take over building the fortifications facing France's Maginot Line in May 1938. The dictator saw the Westwall as essential to secure Germany's western

flank before his grab for Czechoslovakia, but concluded that the army was not up to the job.[9] He derided army understanding of the required bunker strength and the power of modern weapons as 'shocking'. Hitler later declared that, if he had left it to the army alone, the Westwall would 'still not have been ready in ten years'. It was thanks to the Organisation Todt, he said, that the whole project had got under way and progress had been made.[10] The dictator foresaw two possible outcomes: Europe would either be under German leadership or fall victim to 'Bolshevism'. He would rather not have to build the Westwall, but the more intensely the Third Reich looked to the East, the more it needed to guard itself against the West, where France, its First World War enemy, was viewed as the threat.

Like many OT operations, the Westwall was a massive undertaking, measuring about 600 kilometres in length and up to 50 kilometres in depth.[11] Its construction required 350,000 OT workers, 90,000 of the army's fortification engineers and 100,000 from the Reich Labour Service (Reichsarbeitsdienst – RAD).[12] Todt set up his headquarters in Wiesbaden for what became a round-the-clock operation. He used his excellent contacts with industry to enlist the expertise and manpower of about 1,000 firms,[13] as well as Nazi Party resources such as the National Socialist Motor Corps (Nationalsozialistisches Kraftfahrkorps – NSKK) to provide the fleets of trucks and other transport needed. It was this kind of improvisation and ingenuity that inspired Hitler's faith in Todt and his workforce.

When Hitler came to power, Todt was forty-two and possessed impeccable political credentials for becoming part of the regime. He had joined the Nazi Party as early as January 1923, gaining the very low membership number of 2465, and the SA in 1931. Like Hitler, he had served in the armed forces in the First World War, having been forced to interrupt his engineering studies to do so. He had joined the army in 1914 and transferred to the air force in 1916. He was wounded and received the Iron Cross. After the war he returned to college and gained his engineering diploma in Karlsruhe before eventually going on to obtain the higher qualification of doctor of engineering in Munich in 1931. On acquiring his initial qualification in Karlsruhe, Todt worked in industry, gathering experience which was to prove exceptionally useful in building up contacts with firms which would later be hired by the OT to carry out its gigantic construction and engineering projects. Some of Todt's colleagues from his time with the Munich road-building firm Sager and Woerner from 1921 to 1933 held senior posts under him in the OT, including his deputy, Xaver Dorsch.[14]

It was while he was working for Sager and Woerner that Todt wrote to the NSDAP in Munich in response to an appeal in the party's publication, the