**Abstract**

Hitler’s Germany during World War II arguably created the worst atrocity that civilization had ever seen: the Holocaust. The Holocaust was not simply a static event, however. It was characterized by many elements and evolutions of implementation throughout the course of the war. One of the most important elements was the Einsatzgruppen, a unit within the SS (one of the strongest military organizations within Nazi Germany) that followed the German Army throughout the Soviet campaign. This group was responsible for carrying out the beginning phases of the Holocaust, including mass shootings and the use and operation of gas vans throughout the Soviet Union. Their most important contribution to the evolution of the Holocaust, however, was not their actions but their responses. After carrying out many mass shootings in which men, women, and children were the victims, the Nazi commanders started to worry about the impact on psychological health that these operations were causing, especially Heinrich Himmler. The concern over psychological health was not focused on the victims of the Nazis, but rather it was focused on the soldiers who carried out the killings: the Einsatzgruppen. Himmler especially became obsessed with this potentially harmful factor and it drove him to continuously search for alternative methods of murder that could reduce this perceived problem. Looking at each stage of the Holocaust in chronological order, the impact of psychological health is evaluated to determine its role in changing the course of Nazi extermination from the start of the mass shooting campaigns to the use of extermination camps. In the end, the factor of psychological health appears to be an influential element in deciding the various steps and methods of implementation regarding the Holocaust.

**Bibliographical Note**

The research for the information being presented comes from a variety of sources both primary and secondary. The primary sources used are mainly firsthand accounts of the actions of the Einsatzgruppen including recollections by civilians and ranking Nazi officials such as Heinrich Himmler and his Chief of Staff, Karl Wolff. These sources not only give information about the
atrocities committed by the Nazis but they also provide insight into the twisted minds of the perpetrators of the Holocaust. Also included in the primary sources are government documents such as the many reports of the Einsatzgruppen as well as transcripts from the Nuremberg Trials after the war. The secondary sources used include many studies by leading historians on the Holocaust that both observe the larger picture of the Holocaust and focus on the individuals such as Heinrich Himmler and Reinhard Heydrich who helped to develop the methods of murder used during WWII.