

Emil Kjerte

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Kjerte is the recipient of the Louis and Ann Kulin Fellowship, which fosters cooperation with Danish and other Scandinavian scholars and institutions dedicated to Holocaust and Genocide research. Kjerte holds a BA in history from the University of Copenhagen and an MA in Holocaust and Genocide Studies from Uppsala University. His dissertation examines the camp personnel in Jasenovac, established by the fascist Ustaša regime and the largest concentration camp in the fascist Independent State of Croatia. During the Second World War, the Ustaša was the only regime that organized and ran concentration camps independently of the Nazis. Compared to the rich and nuanced historiography on the German perpetrators of the Holocaust, the perpetrators who implemented the destructive policies of this regime remain much less explored. By examining the men and women who worked in the Jasenovac concentration camp, Kjerte's dissertation contributes to filling this gap.

Breaking new ground, Kjerte explores the lifepaths and prior careers of the camp personnel, their activities in Jasenovac, as well as their postwar trajectories. A key focus of his research are the group dynamics and sense of community that existed among the guards, but he also pays attention to conflicts and tensions between them. Another research goal is to shed light on the guards' general conduct towards the prisoners. Inspired by micro-sociological approaches, Kjerte zeroes in on the situational dynamics of perpetrator-prisoner interactions within Jasenovac and examines which situations tended to generate or amplify physical violence. While violence was an integral part of the perpetrators' activities, Kjerte's research seeks to answer the question if some of the guards acted less cruel when not under the prying eyes of peers and superiors.

Having passed his comprehensive exams and defended his dissertation prospectus, Kjerte turned to full-time research. Throughout the summer, he worked at the Croatian State Archive in Zagreb where he uncovered statements that former Jasenovac officers and guards made in response to questioning by the Yugoslav security service in the post-war period. Although these statements differ in length and amount of details, some of them shed valuable light on intergroup relations among the camp guards, and they often contain surprisingly candid self-incriminating confessions. In addition, Kjerte located important contemporary records pertaining to the Jasenovac camp. An interesting example is internal

investigating records revolving around an officer who collaborated with the Yugoslav partisans. The cases of Jasenovac staff members who worked in cooperation with the partisans or deserted and joined them are particularly interesting in the sense that they demonstrate the problems the leadership of the camp had in maintaining group cohesion.