# Chapter 2.2: How did the Nazis rule Germany?

**Resource sheet 2.2.1**

The Gestapo and the German people

Are you surprised that the German people willingly gave information about each other to the Gestapo? Why might people have done this?

Our 2016 student research showed that most students believe that those who supported Hitler and the Nazis did so because they were ‘brainwashed’ or ‘scared’. Fewer than 10% of students surveyed suggested that the wider German public and society were responsible for persecution of individuals and groups within Nazi Germany.

The Gestapo (see p.26) were often believed to be an all-powerful organisation of whom most Germans lived in fear. More recent historical research suggests that this is a myth and that the reality is far more complex. In reality the Gestapo were seriously under resourced and local studies have shown that most, and in some cases over 80%, of their investigations began as a result of information given voluntarily by the German people. Gellately (1992) has shown that many people volunteered information, not necessarily because they supported that Nazis, but because of personal motivations such as suspicion, greed and spite.

Case study

**Ilse Totzke**



Photographs of Totzke taken by the Gestapo after her 1943 attempt to flee Germany.

Wurzburg is a town in South West Germany and it is one of only three towns in Europe where the Gestapo records were not destroyed by the Nazis before the end of the war. Professor Gellately discovered a lot about how the Gestapo operated and the collaboration of ordinary Germans through his research into these files.

Ilse Sonja Totzke moved to the town of Wurzburg as a music student in the 1930s. Her Gestapo file reveals that she became an object of suspicion, being denounced by those around her to the Gestapo. The Gestapo asked her neighbours to keep an eye on her. Isle Totzke was accused by different people of being too friendly with Jews and on occasion of failing to give the ‘Heil Hitler’ salute as a greeting. There were also hints that she may have been a lesbian. On 28th October 1941, Ilse Totzke was interrogated by the Gestapo and warned about her attitude. In 1943, after a failed attempt to flee Germany and cross the border into Switzerland she was interrogated by the Gestapo a second time and sent to the women’s concentration camp at Ravensbruck.

One denunciation, dated 29 July 1940, came from a 20 year old neighbour of Ilse Totzke, Maria Kraus. The statement reads:

‘Ilse Sonja Totzke is a resident next door to us in a garden cottage. I noticed the above-named because she is of Jewish appearance…I should like to mention that Miss Totzke never responds to the German greeting (Heil Hitler). I gathered from what she was saying that her attitude was anti-German. On the contrary she always favoured France and the Jews. Among other things, she told me that the German Army was not as well equipped as the French…Now and then a woman of about 36 years old comes and she is of Jewish appearance…To my mind, Miss Totzke is behaving suspiciously.’

Gellately, R. (1992) The Gestapo and German Society: Enforcing Racial Policy 1933-1945. Clarendon.

Reece, L. (2012) The Nazis: A warning from History. BBC Books.