

ORDINARY MEN

RESERVE POLICE BATTALION 101
AND THE FINAL SOLUTION IN POLAND

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PREFACE

In mid-March 1942 some 75 to 80 percent of all victims of the Holocaust were still alive, while 20 to 25 percent had perished. A mere eleven months later, in mid-February 1943, the percentages were exactly the reverse. At the core of the Holocaust was a short, intense wave of mass murder. The center of gravity of this mass murder was Poland, where in March 1942, despite two and a half years of terrible hardship, deprivation, and persecution, every major Jewish community was still intact, and where eleven months later only the remnants of Polish Jewry survived in a few rump ghettos and labor camps. In short, the German attack on the Jews of Poland was not a gradual or incremental program stretched over a long period of time, but a veritable blitzkrieg, a massive offensive requiring the mobilization of large numbers of shock troops. This offensive, moreover, came just when the German war effort in Russia hung in the balance—a time period that opened with the renewed German thrust

toward the Crimea and the Caucasus and closed with the disastrous defeat at Stalingrad.

If the German military offensive of 1942 was ultimately a failure, the blitzkrieg against the Jews, especially in Poland, was not. We have long known how the Jews in the major ghettos, especially Warsaw and Łódź, were murdered. But most Polish Jews lived in smaller cities and towns whose populations were often more than 30 percent Jewish, and in some cases even 80 or 90 percent. How had the Germans organized and carried out the destruction of this widespread Jewish population? And where had they found the manpower during this pivotal year of the war for such an astounding logistical achievement in mass murder? The personnel of the death camps was quite minimal. But the manpower needed to clear the smaller ghettos—to round up and either deport or shoot the bulk of Polish Jewry—was not.¹

My search for the answers to these questions led me to the town of Ludwigsburg near Stuttgart. Here is located the Central Agency for the State Administrations of Justice (Zentrale Stelle der Landesjustizverwaltungen), the Federal Republic of Germany's office for coordinating the investigation of Nazi crimes. I was working through their extensive collection of indictments and judgments for virtually every German trial of Nazi crimes committed against the Jews of Poland when I first encountered the indictment concerning Reserve Police Battalion 101, a unit of the German Order Police.

Though I had been studying archival documents and court records of the Holocaust for nearly twenty years, the impact this indictment had upon me was singularly powerful and disturbing. Never before had I encountered the issue of choice so dramatically framed by the course of events and so openly discussed by at least some of the perpetrators. Never before had I seen the monstrous deeds of the Holocaust so starkly juxtaposed with the human faces of the killers.

It was immediately clear from the indictment, which contained quite extensive verbatim quotations from pretrial interrogations of battalion members, that the case was based upon an unusually

rich collection of testimonies. Moreover, many of these testimonies had a "feel" of candor and frankness conspicuously absent from the exculpatory, alibi-laden, and mendacious testimony so often encountered in such court records. The investigation and legal prosecution of Reserve Police Battalion 101 had been a decade-long process (1962 to 1972) conducted by the Office of the State Prosecutor (Staatsanwaltschaft) in Hamburg. This office—surely one of the most diligent and committed prosecutors of Nazi crimes in all of the Federal Republic—still had custody of the court records relating to the case, and I successfully applied for permission to see them.

Unlike so many of the Nazi killing units, whose membership can only be partially reconstructed, Reserve Police Battalion 101's roster was available to the investigators. As most of the men came from Hamburg and many still lived there at the time of the investigation, I was able to study the interrogations of 210 men from a unit consisting of slightly less than 500 when it was sent at full strength to Poland in June 1942. This collection of interrogations provided a representative sample for statistical answers to questions about age, Party and SS membership, and social background. Moreover, about 125 of the testimonies were sufficiently substantive to permit both detailed narrative reconstruction and analysis of the internal dynamics of this killing unit.

Ultimately, the Holocaust took place because at the most basic level individual human beings killed other human beings in large numbers over an extended period of time. The grass-roots perpetrators became "professional killers." The historian encounters numerous difficulties in trying to write about a unit of such men, among them the problem of sources. In the case of Reserve Police Battalion 101, in contrast to many of the killing units operating in the Soviet Union, there are few contemporary documents and none that deal explicitly with its killing activities.² The accounts of a handful of Jewish survivors can establish the dates and magnitude of various actions in some of the towns where the battalion operated. But unlike survivor testimony about prominent perpetrators in the ghettos and camps, where

prolonged contact was possible, survivor testimony can tell us little about an itinerant unit like Reserve Police Battalion 101. Unknown men arrived, carried out their murderous task, and left. Seldom, in fact, can the survivors even remember the peculiar green uniforms of the Order Police to identify what kind of unit was involved.

In writing about Reserve Police Battalion 101, therefore, I have depended heavily upon the judicial interrogations of some 125 men conducted in the 1960s. To read about the same events experienced by a single unit as filtered through the memories of 125 different men more than twenty years after the fact is disconcerting to a historian looking for certainties. Each of these men played a different role. He saw and did different things. Each subsequently repressed or forgot certain aspects of the battalion's experiences, or reshaped his memory of them in a different way. Thus the interrogations inevitably present a confusing array of perspectives and memories. Paradoxically, I would have had the illusion of being more certain about what happened to the battalion with one detailed recollection instead of 125.

Beyond the differing perspectives and memories, there is also the interference caused by the circumstances in which the testimony was given. Quite simply, some men deliberately lied, for they feared the judicial consequences of telling the truth as they remembered it. Not only repression and distortion but conscious mendacity shaped the accounts of the witnesses. Furthermore, the interrogators asked questions pertinent to their task of collecting evidence for specific, indictable crimes committed by particular people, but did not systematically investigate the broader, often more impressionistic and subjective facets of the policemen's experience that are important to the historian, if not to the lawyer.

As with any use of multiple sources, the many accounts and perspectives had to be sifted and weighed. The reliability of each witness had to be assessed. Much of the testimony had to be

partially or totally dismissed in favor of conflicting testimony that was accepted. Many of these judgments were both straightforward and obvious, but others were quite difficult. And as self-conscious as I have tried to be, at times I undoubtedly made purely instinctive judgments without even being aware of it. Other historians looking at the same materials would retell these events in somewhat different ways.

In recent decades the historical profession in general has been increasingly concerned with writing history "from the bottom up," with reconstructing the experiences of the bulk of the population ignored in the history of high politics and high culture hitherto so dominant. In Germany in particular, this trend has culminated in the practice of *Alltagsgeschichte*—"the history of everyday life"—achieved through a "thick description" of the common experiences of ordinary people. When such an approach has been applied to the era of the Third Reich, however, some have criticized it as an evasion—a way to shift attention from the unparalleled horrors of the Nazi regime's genocidal policies to those mundane aspects of life that continued relatively undisturbed. Thus, the very attempt to write a case study or microhistory of a single battalion might seem undesirable to some.

As a methodology, however, "the history of everyday life" is neutral. It becomes an evasion, an attempt to "normalize" the Third Reich, only if it fails to confront the degree to which the criminal policies of the regime inescapably permeated everyday existence under the Nazis. Particularly for the German occupiers stationed in the conquered lands of eastern Europe—literally tens of thousands of men from all walks of life—the mass-murder policies of the regime were not aberrational or exceptional events that scarcely ruffled the surface of everyday life. As the story of Reserve Police Battalion 101 demonstrates, mass murder and routine had become one. Normality itself had become exceedingly abnormal.

Another possible objection to this kind of study concerns the

degree of empathy for the perpetrators that is inherent in trying to understand them. Clearly the writing of such a history requires the rejection of demonization. The policemen in the battalion who carried out the massacres and deportations, like the much smaller number who refused or evaded, were human beings. I must recognize that in the same situation, I could have been either a killer or an evader—both were human—if I want to understand and explain the behavior of both as best I can. This recognition does indeed mean an attempt to empathize. What I do not accept, however, are the old clichés that to explain is to excuse, to understand is to forgive. Explaining is not excusing; understanding is not forgiving. Not trying to understand the perpetrators in human terms would make impossible not only this study but any history of Holocaust perpetrators that sought to go beyond one-dimensional caricature. Shortly before his death at the hands of the Nazis, the French Jewish historian Marc Bloch wrote, “When all is said and done, a single word, ‘understanding,’ is the beacon light of our studies.”³ It is in that spirit that I have tried to write this book.

One condition placed upon my access to the judicial interrogations must be made clear. Regulations and laws for the protection of privacy have become increasingly restrictive in Germany, especially in the past decade. The state of Hamburg and its court records are no exception to this trend. Before receiving permission to see the court records of Reserve Police Battalion 101, therefore, I had to promise not to use the men’s real names. The names of the battalion commander, Major Wilhelm Trapp, and the three company commanders, Captain Wolfgang Hoffmann, Captain Julius Wohlauf, and Lieutenant Hartwig Gnade, appear in other documentation in archives outside Germany. I have used their real names, for in their cases there is no confidentiality to breach. However, I have used pseudonyms (designated at first occurrence by an asterisk) for all other battalion members who appear in the text of this book. The notes refer to those giving testimony simply by first name and

last initial. While this promise of confidentiality and use of pseudonyms is, in my opinion, an unfortunate limitation on strict historical accuracy, I do not believe it undermines the integrity or primary usefulness of this study.

A number of people and institutions provided indispensable support during the research and writing of this study. Oberstaatsanwalt (Senior Prosecutor) Alfred Streim made available to me the incomparable collection of German judicial records in Ludwigsburg. Oberstaatsanwältin Helge Grabitz encouraged me to work with the court records in Hamburg, supported my application for access, and generously helped in every way during my stay there. Pacific Lutheran University provided me with financial awards for the two trips to German archives that initiated and concluded my research on this project. The Alexander von Humboldt Foundation likewise aided one research visit in Germany. The bulk of the research and writing was completed during sabbatical leave from Pacific Lutheran University, and with the support of a Fulbright Research Grant to Israel. Daniel Krauskopf, executive secretary of the United States–Israel Educational Foundation, deserves special thanks for facilitating my research in both Israel and Germany.

Peter Hayes of Northwestern University and Saul Friedlander of UCLA offered opportunities to present initial research findings at conferences they organized at their respective institutions. Many friends and colleagues listened patiently, offered suggestions, and provided encouragement along the way. Philip Nordquist, Dennis Martin, Audrey Euyler, Robert Hoyer, Ian Kershaw, Robert Cellately, Yehuda Bauer, Dinah Porat, Michael Marrus, Bettina Birn, George Mosse, Elisabeth Domansky, Gitta Sereny, Carlo Ginzburg, and the late Uwe Adam deserve special mention. To Raul Hilberg I owe a special debt. In 1982 he called attention to the indispensability of the Order Police to the Final Solution, continuing as so often in the past to set the agenda for further Holocaust research.⁴ He then personally interested himself in the publication of this study. For such

help, both now and on earlier occasions in my career, the dedication of this book is an inadequate expression of my esteem and gratitude. For the continued support and understanding of my family, who have patiently endured the gestation period of another book, I am particularly grateful.

Tacoma, November 1991

ORDINARY MEN

1

One Morning in Józefów

IN THE VERY EARLY HOURS OF JULY 13, 1942, THE MEN OF Reserve Police Battalion 101 were roused from their bunks in the large brick school building that served as their barracks in the Polish town of Biłgoraj. They were middle-aged family men of working- and lower-middle-class background from the city of Hamburg. Considered too old to be of use to the German army, they had been drafted instead into the Order Police. Most were raw recruits with no previous experience in German occupied territory. They had arrived in Poland less than three weeks earlier.

It was still quite dark as the men climbed into the waiting trucks. Each policeman had been given extra ammunition, and additional boxes had been loaded onto the trucks as well.¹ They

were headed for their first major action, though the men had not yet been told what to expect.

The convoy of battalion trucks moved out of Biłgoraj in the dark, heading eastward on a jarring washboard gravel road. The pace was slow, and it took an hour and a half to two hours to arrive at the destination—the village of Józefów—a mere thirty kilometers away. Just as the sky was beginning to lighten, the convoy halted outside Józefów. It was a typical Polish village of modest white houses with thatched straw roofs. Among its inhabitants were 1,800 Jews.

The village was totally quiet.² The men of Reserve Police Battalion 101 climbed down from their trucks and assembled in a half-circle around their commander, Major Wilhelm Trapp, a fifty-three-year-old career policeman affectionately known by his men as “Papa Trapp.” The time had come for Trapp to address the men and inform them of the assignment the battalion had received.

Pale and nervous, with choking voice and tears in his eyes, Trapp visibly fought to control himself as he spoke. The battalion, he said plaintively, had to perform a frightfully unpleasant task. This assignment was not to his liking, indeed it was highly regrettable, but the orders came from the highest authorities. If it would make their task any easier, the men should remember that in Germany the bombs were falling on women and children.

He then turned to the matter at hand. The Jews had instigated the American boycott that had damaged Germany, one policeman remembered Trapp saying. There were Jews in the village of Józefów who were involved with the partisans, he explained according to two others. The battalion had now been ordered to round up these Jews. The male Jews of working age were to be separated and taken to a work camp. The remaining Jews—the women, children, and elderly—were to be shot on the spot by the battalion. Having explained what awaited his men, Trapp then made an extraordinary offer: if any of the older men among them did not feel up to the task that lay before him, he could step out.³

2

The Order Police

HOW DID A BATTALION OF MIDDLE-AGED RESERVE POLICEMEN find themselves facing the task of shooting some 1,500 Jews in the Polish village of Józefów in the summer of 1942? Some background is needed, both on the institution of the Order Police (Ordnungspolizei, or Orpo) and on its role in the Nazi policy of murdering the Jews of Europe.

The Order Police resulted from the third attempt in interwar Germany to create large police formations with military training and equipment.¹ In the wake of the German defeat in World War I, revolution broke out in Germany. As the army dissolved, military officers and government officials fearful of being swept away by revolutionary forces organized counterrevolutionary paramilitary units known as the Freikorps. When the domestic

5

Reserve Police Battalion 101

WHEN GERMANY INVADED POLAND IN SEPTEMBER 1939, POLICE Battalion 101, based in Hamburg, was one of the initial battalions attached to a German army group and sent to Poland. Crossing the border from Oppehn in Silesia, the battalion passed through Czechochowa to the Polish city of Kielce. There it was involved in rounding up Polish soldiers and military equipment behind German lines and guarding a prisoner of war camp. On December 17, 1939, the battalion returned to Hamburg, where about a hundred of its career policemen were transferred to form additional units. They were replaced by middle-aged reservists drafted in the fall of 1939.¹

In May 1940, after a period of training, the battalion was

dispatched from Hamburg to the Warthegau, one of the four regions in western Poland annexed to the Third Reich as the incorporated territories. Stationed first in Poznań (Posen) until late June, and then in Łódź (renamed Litzmannstadt by the victorious Germans), it carried out "resettlement actions" for a period of five months. As part of a demographic scheme of Hitler and Himmler's to "germanize" these newly annexed regions, that is, to populate them with "racially pure" Germans, all Poles and other so-called undesirables—Jews and Gypsies—were to be expelled from the incorporated territories into central Poland. In accordance with provisions of an agreement between Germany and the Soviet Union, ethnic Germans living in Soviet territory were to be repatriated and resettled in the recently evacuated farms and apartments of the expelled Poles. The "racial purification" of the incorporated territories desired by Hitler and Himmler was never achieved, but hundreds of thousands of people were shoved around like so many pieces on a chessboard in pursuit of their vision of a racially reorganized eastern Europe. The battalion's summary report boasted of its zealous participation in the "resettlement":

In actions night and day without pause, 100% of the battalion's strength was employed in all of the districts of the Warthegau. On the average some 350 Polish peasant families were evacuated daily. . . . During the peak of the evacuation period they [the men of the battalion] could not return to quarters for eight days and nights. The men had the opportunity to sleep only while traveling at night by truck. . . . In the biggest action, the battalion evacuated about 900 families. . . . on one day with only its own forces and 10 translators.

In all the battalion evacuated 36,972 people out of a targeted 58,628. About 22,000 people escaped the evacuations by fleeing.²

One drafted reservist, Bruno Probst,* recalled the battalion's role in these actions.

In the resettlement of the native population, primarily in the small villages, I experienced the first excesses and killings. It was always thus, that with our arrival in the villages, the resettlement commission was already there. . . . This so-called resettlement commission consisted of members of the black [uniformed] SS and SD as well as civilians. From them we received cards with numbers. The houses of the village were also designated with the same numbers. The cards handed to us designated the houses that we were to evacuate. During the early period we endeavored to fetch all people out of the houses, without regard for whether they were old, sick, or small children. The commission quickly found fault with our procedures. They objected that we struggled under the burden of the old and sick. To be precise, they did not initially give us the order to shoot them on the spot, rather they contented themselves with making it clear to us that nothing could be done with such people. In two cases I remember that such people were shot at the collection point. In the first case it was an old man and in the second case an old woman. . . . both persons were shot not by the men but by noncommissioned officers.³

Others in the battalion also remembered the resettlement actions, but no one else remembered or admitted to such violence.⁴ One policeman did recall that the battalion had provided the Security Police with firing squads for the execution of 100 to 120 Poles during its stay in Poznań.⁵

Following its five-month resettlement campaign, the battalion carried out "pacification actions." Combing villages and woods, they caught 750 Poles who had evaded the earlier evacuations.

* Pseudonyms are designated throughout by an asterisk at first occurrence.



Kuków, probably in the fall of 1942, when the Order Police liquidated the main ghetto there. (Courtesy of Yad Vashem)

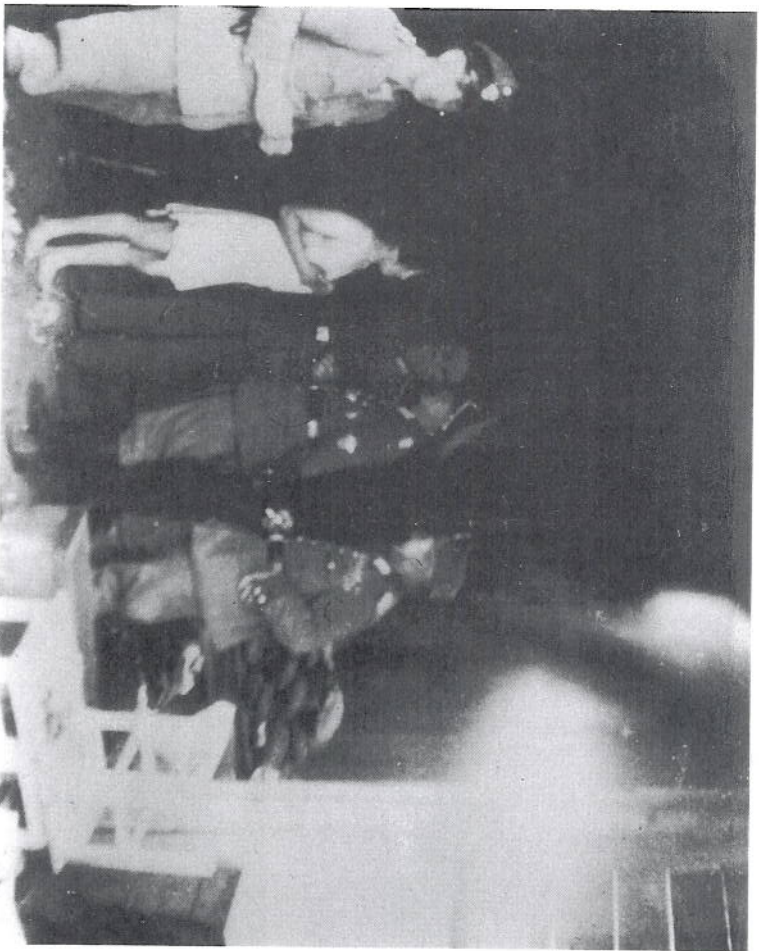
Their task was made more difficult because even the newly arrived ethnic Germans did not always report the unauthorized presence of the Poles they had displaced, wishing to avail themselves of cheap labor.⁶

On November 28, 1940, the battalion took up guard duty around the Łódź ghetto, which had been sealed seven months earlier, at the end of April 1940, when the 160,000 Jews of Łódź were cut off from the rest of the city by a barbed wire fence. Guarding the ghetto now became the major duty of Police Battalion 101, which had a standing order to shoot "without further ado" any Jew who ignored the posted warnings and came too close to the fence. This order was obeyed.⁷

None of Battalion 101's men, however, remembered excesses such as occurred while the First Company of Police Battalion 61 was guarding the Warsaw ghetto. There the company captain openly encouraged shooting at the ghetto wall. The most notorious shooters were not rotated to other duties but were kept permanently on ghetto guard duty. The company recreation room was decorated with racist slogans, and a Star of David hung above the bar. A mark was made on the bar door for each Jew shot, and "victory celebrations" were reportedly held on days when high scores were recorded.⁸

Stationed outside the ghetto wire, the battalion members had more contact with the non-Jewish population than with the incarcerated Jews. Bruno Probst recalled that the guards on the thoroughfare that cut between the two halves of the Łódź ghetto occasionally amused themselves by setting their watches ahead as a pretext for seizing and beating Poles who were allegedly violating the curfew. He also recalled that drunken guards, intending to kill a Pole on New Year's eve, shot an ethnic German by mistake and covered it up by switching the victim's identity card.⁹

In May 1941 the battalion returned to Hamburg and was "practically dissolved." All remaining prewar recruits beneath the rank of noncommissioned officer were distributed to other



After the strip search, the Jews were allowed to put their underclothes back on before being marched to the train station and packed into cattle cars. (Courtesy of Yad Vashem)

units, and the ranks were filled with drafted reservists. The battalion had become, in the words of one policeman, a "pure reserve battalion."¹⁰

During the next year, from May 1941 to June 1942, the battalion was reformed and underwent extensive training. Only a few incidents from this period remained in the memories of the men. One was the bombing of Lübeck in March 1942, for units of the battalion were sent to the damaged city immediately afterward.¹¹ Another involved the deportation of Hamburg Jews.

From mid-October 1941 to late February 1942, 59 transports carried more than 53,000 Jews and 5,000 Gypsies from the Third Reich "to the east," in this case Łódź, Riga, Kovno (Kaunas), and Minsk. The five transports to Kovno and the first transport to Riga were massacred upon arrival.¹² The remaining transports were not "liquidated" immediately. Rather the deportees were initially incarcerated in the ghettos of Łódź (where the 5,000 Austrian Gypsies were sent), Minsk, and Riga.

Four such transports that were spared immediate death came from Hamburg. The first, with 1,034 Jews, departed on October 25, 1941, for Łódź. The second, with 990 Jews, left for Minsk on November 8. The third, with 408 Jews from Hamburg and 500 from Bremen, left for Minsk on November 18. The fourth left Hamburg for Riga with 808 Jews on December 4.¹³

Men from Reserve Police Battalion 101 were involved in various phases of the Hamburg deportations. The collection point for the deportations was the Freemason lodge house on the Moorweide, which had been confiscated by the Security Police. Flanked by the university library and an apartment block, within several hundred yards of the heavily used Dammtor train station, the collection point was scarcely an inconspicuous location out of the sight of Hamburg citizens. Some Order Police of Battalion 101 provided guard duty at the Freemason lodge house, where the Jews were collected, registered, and loaded on trucks to the Sternschanze train station.¹⁴ Other men of Battalion 101 guarded the station, where the Jews were loaded onto the trains.¹⁵ And finally, Battalion 101 provided the escort for at least

three of the four transports—the first, on October 25, to Łódź; the second, on November 8, to Minsk; and the last, on December 4, to Riga.¹⁶ According to Hans Keller,* escort duty on the Jewish transports was "highly coveted" because of the chance to travel, and was assigned only to a "favored" few.¹⁷

Bruno Probst, who accompanied the November 8 transport to Minsk, recalled:

In Hamburg the Jews were told at the time that they would be allocated a whole new settlement territory in the east. The Jews were loaded into normal passenger cars . . . accompanied by two cars of tools, shovels, axes, etc., as well as large kitchen equipment. For the escort commando a second-class carriage was attached. There were no guards in the cars of the Jews themselves. The train had to be guarded on both sides only at stops. After about four days' journey we reached Minsk in the late afternoon. We learned of this destination for the first time only during the journey, after we had already passed Warsaw. In Minsk an SS commando was waiting for our transport. Again without guard, the Jews were then loaded onto the waiting trucks. Only their baggage, which they had been allowed to bring from Hamburg, had to be left behind in the train. They were told it would follow. Then our commando was finally driven to a Russian barracks, in which an active [i.e., not reserve] German police battalion was lodged. There was a Jewish camp nearby. . . . From conversations with members of the above-mentioned police battalion we learned that some weeks ago this unit had already shot Jews in Minsk. We concluded from this fact that our Hamburg Jews were to be shot there also.

Not wanting to be involved, the escort's commander, Lieutenant Hartwig Gnade, did not remain at the barracks. Instead he and his men returned to the station and took a late-night train out of Minsk.¹⁸

We have no description of the escort duty to Riga from Hamburg, but the Salitter report on the Order Police escort of

the December 11 Jewish transport from Düsseldorf to Riga provides graphic evidence that policemen there learned as much as the Hamburg policemen did in Minsk. As Salitter noted:

Riga consisted of some 360,000 inhabitants, including some 35,000 Jews. The Jews were everywhere dominant in the business world. Their businesses were nonetheless immediately closed and confiscated after the entry of German troops. The Jews themselves were lodged in a ghetto on the Dūna [Dvina] that was sealed by barbed wire. At the moment only 2,500 male Jews who are used for labor are said to be in the ghetto. The other Jews have either been sent to similar employment elsewhere or shot by the Latvians. . . . They [the Latvians] hate the Jews in particular. From the time of liberation to the present, they have participated very amply in the extermination of these parasites. It is, however, incomprehensible to them, as I was especially able to discover from Latvian railway personnel, why the Germans bring their Jews to Latvia instead of exterminating them in their own country.¹⁹

In June 1942, Reserve Police Battalion 101 was assigned another tour of duty in Poland. By then, only a few noncommissioned officers who had been on the first Polish action remained, and less than 20 percent of the men had been on the second in the Warthegau. A few of these had witnessed what they called "excesses" in Poznań and Łódź. A few more had accompanied one of the Hamburg Jewish transports to Łódź, Minsk, or Riga. At the latter two destinations, as we have seen, it was difficult not to learn something about the mass murder of Jews in Russia. But for the most part, Reserve Police Battalion 101 was now composed of men without any experience of German occupation methods in eastern Europe, or for that matter—with the exception of the very oldest who were World War I veterans—any kind of military service.

The battalion consisted of 11 officers, 5 administrative officials

(in charge of financial matters relating to pay, provisioning, lodging, etc.), and 486 noncommissioned officers and men.²⁰ To reach full strength, some non-Hamburg contingents were added at the last minute from nearby Wilhelmshaven and Rendsburg (in Schleswig-Holstein), and from distant Luxembourg. Still, the vast majority of the rank and file had been born and reared in Hamburg and its environs. The Hamburg element was so dominant and the ethos of the battalion so provincial that not just the Luxembourgers but also the contingents from Wilhelmshaven and Rendsburg felt themselves to be outsiders.²¹

The battalion was divided into three companies, each of approximately 140 men when at full strength. Two companies were commanded by police captains, the third by the senior reserve lieutenant in the battalion. Each company was divided into three platoons, two of them commanded by reserve lieutenants and the third by the platoon's senior sergeant. Each platoon was divided into four squads, commanded by a sergeant or corporal. The men were equipped with carbines, the non-commissioned officers with submachine guns. Each company also had a heavy machine-gun detachment. Apart from the three companies, there was the personnel of the battalion staff, which included, in addition to the five administrative officials, a doctor and his aide as well as various drivers, clerks, and communications specialists.

The battalion was commanded by fifty-three-year-old Major Wilhelm Trapp, a World War I veteran and recipient of the Iron Cross First Class. After the war he became a career policeman and rose through the ranks. He had recently been promoted from captain of Second Company, and this was his first battalion command. Though Trapp had joined the Nazi Party in December 1932 and thus technically qualified as an "old Party fighter," or *Alter Kämpfer*, he had never been taken into the SS or even given an equivalent SS rank, in spite of the fact that Himmler and Heydrich consciously tried to merge and intertwine the state and Party components of their SS and police empire. Trapp was clearly not considered SS material. He was soon to come into

conflict with his two captains, both young SS men, who even in their testimony more than twenty years later made no attempt to conceal their contempt for their commander as weak, unmilitary, and unduly interfering in the duties of his officers.²²

The two police captains, who also held the equivalent SS rank of Hauptsturmführer, were young men in their late twenties. Wolfgang Hoffmann, born in 1914, had joined the National Socialist Student Union (NS-Schülerbund) in 1930 as a sixteen-year-old, the Hitler Youth in 1932 at eighteen, and the SS one year later, all before he had graduated from *Gymnasium* (a college-preparatory high school) in 1934. He joined the police force in Breslau in 1936 and entered the Nazi Party in 1937, the same year he completed officer training and was commissioned as a lieutenant of the Schutzpolizei. He joined Reserve Police Battalion 101 in the spring of 1942. The following June, at the age of twenty-eight, he was promoted to the rank of captain.²³ He commanded Third Company.

Julius Wohlauf, born in 1913, graduated from *Gymnasium* in 1932. In April 1933 he joined the Nazi Party and SA. In 1936 he joined the SS, and the same year he began his training to become a police officer. He was commissioned a lieutenant of the Schutzpolizei in 1938. He too was assigned to Reserve Police Battalion 101 in early 1942 and was promoted to captain in June 1942, just before the departure for Poland.²⁴ He commanded First Company and served as Trapp's deputy battalion commander. In contrast to the elderly Trapp, Hoffmann and Wohlauf represented precisely the combination of well-educated professional police officer, early enthusiast for National Socialism, and young SS member that was the Himmler-Heydrich ideal for the SS and police.

Trapp's adjutant was First Lieutenant Hagen, * about whom little is known except that he was killed in the spring of 1943. In addition the battalion had seven reserve lieutenants, that is, men who were not career policemen like Hoffmann and Wohlauf but were selected to receive officer training after they were drafted into the Order Police, because of their middle-class status,

education, and success in civilian life. From oldest to youngest, they were:

Hartwig Gnade, born 1894, a forwarding agent and Nazi Party member since 1937, commander of Second Company;

Paul Brand, * born 1902;

Heinz Buchmann, * born 1904, owner of a family lumber business, Party member since 1937;

Oscar Peters, * born 1905;

Walter Hoppner, * born 1908, tea importer, Party member briefly in 1930, rejoined in the spring of 1933;

Hans Scheer, * born 1908, and a Party member since May 1933;

Kurt Drucker, * born 1909, a salesman and party member since 1939.²⁵

Thus, their ages ranged from thirty-three to forty-eight. Five were Party members, but none belonged to the SS.

Of the thirty-two noncommissioned officers on whom we have information, twenty-two were party members and seven were in the SS. They ranged in age from twenty-seven to forty years old; their average age was thirty-three and a half. They were not reservists but rather prewar recruits to the police.

Of the rank and file, the vast majority were from the Hamburg area. About 63 percent were of working-class background, but few were skilled laborers. The majority of them held typical Hamburg working-class jobs: dock workers and truck drivers were most numerous, but there were also many warehouse and construction workers, machine operators, seamen, and waiters. About 35 percent were lower-middle-class, virtually all of them white-collar workers. Three-quarters were in sales of some sort; the other one-quarter performed various office jobs, in both the government and private sector. The number of independent artisans and small businessmen was very small. Only a handful (2 percent) were middle-class professionals, and very modest ones

at that, such as druggists and teachers. The average age of the men was thirty-nine; over half were between thirty-seven and forty-two, a group considered too old for the army but most heavily conscripted for reserve police duty after September 1939.²⁶

Among the rank and file policemen, about 25 percent (43 from a sample of 174) were Party members in 1942. Six were *Alte Kämpfer* who had joined the Party before Hitler came to power; another six joined in 1933. Despite the domestic ban on new Party members from 1933 to 1937, another six men who worked aboard ships were admitted by the Party section for members living overseas. Sixteen joined in 1937, when the ban on new membership was lifted. The remaining nine joined in 1939 or later. The men of lower-middle-class background held Party membership in an only slightly higher proportion (30 percent) than those from the working class (25 percent).²⁷

The men of Reserve Police Battalion 101 were from the lower orders of German society. They had experienced neither social nor geographic mobility. Very few were economically independent. Except for apprenticeship or vocational training, virtually none had any education after leaving *Volksschule* (terminal secondary school) at age fourteen or fifteen. By 1942, a surprisingly high percentage had become Party members. However, because the interrogating officials did not record such information, we do not know how many had been Communists, socialists, and/or labor union members before 1933. Presumably a not insignificant number must have been, given their social origins. By virtue of their age, of course, all went through their formative period in the pre-Nazi era. These were men who had known political standards and moral norms other than those of the Nazis. Most came from Hamburg, by reputation one of the least nazified cities in Germany, and the majority came from a social class that had been anti-Nazi in its political culture. These men would not seem to have been a very promising group from which to recruit mass murderers on behalf of the Nazi vision of a racial utopia free of Jews.

6

Arrival in Poland

SOMETIME IN THE SUMMER OF 1941, AFTER THE ONSLAUGHT against Russian Jewry was under way, Himmler confided to the SS and Police Leader in Lublin, Odilo Globocnik, Hitler's intention to murder the Jews of Europe as well. Moreover, Himmler put Globocnik in charge of the single most important element of this "Final Solution to the Jewish Question in Europe"—the destruction of the Jews of the General Government, who constituted the bulk of Polish Jewry. A method different from the firing squad operations used against Russian Jewry was deemed essential for the murder of European Jews, however—one that was more efficient, less public, and less burdensome psychologically for the killers.

The organizational and technological answer to these needs

to the east the previous fall. It arrived in the Polish town of Zamość in the southern part of the Lublin district on June 25. Five days later the battalion headquarters was shifted to Biłgoraj, and various units of the battalion were quickly stationed in the nearby towns of Frampol, Tarnogród, Ulanów, Turbin, and Wysokie, as well as the more distant Zakrzów.⁷

Despite the temporary lull in the killing, SS and Police Leader Odilo Globocnik and his Operation Reinhard staff were not about to allow the newly arrived police battalion to remain entirely inactive in regard to the Lublin Jews. If the killing could not be resumed, the process of consolidating the victims in transit ghettos and camps could be. For most of the policemen of Reserve Police Battalion 101, the searing memory of the subsequent action in Józefów blotted out lesser events that had occurred during their four-week stay south of Lublin. However, a few did remember taking part in this consolidation process—collecting Jews in smaller settlements and moving them to larger ghettos and camps. In some cases only so-called work Jews were seized, put on trucks, and sent to camps around Lublin. In other cases, the entire Jewish population was rounded up and put on trucks or sent off on foot. Sometimes the Jews from the smaller surrounding villages were then collected and resettled in their place. None of these actions involved mass executions, though Jews who were too old, frail, or sick to be transported were shot in at least some instances. The men were uniformly uncertain about the towns from which they had deported Jews and the places to which the Jews had been relocated. No one recalled the names Izbica and Piaski, though these were the two major “transit” ghettos south of Lublin that were used for collecting Jews.⁸

Apparently, Globocnik lost patience with this consolidation process and decided to experiment with renewed killing. As deportation to the extermination camps was not possible at the time, mass execution through firing squad was the available alternative. Reserve Police Battalion 101 was the unit to be tested.

7

Initiation to Mass Murder: The Józefów Massacre

IT WAS PROBABLY ON JULY 11 THAT GLOBOCNIK OR SOMEONE ON his staff contacted Major Trapp and informed him that Reserve Police Battalion 101 had the task of rounding up the 1,800 Jews in Józefów, a village about thirty kilometers slightly south and east of Biłgoraj. This time, however, most of the Jews were not to be relocated. Only the male Jews of working age were to be sent to one of Globocnik's camps in Lublin. The women, children, and elderly were simply to be shot on the spot.

Trapp recalled the units that were stationed in nearby towns. The battalion reassembled in Biłgoraj on July 12, with two exceptions: the Third Platoon of Third Company, including Captain Hoffmann, stationed in Zakrzów, as well as a few men of First Company already stationed in Józefów. Trapp met with

First and Second Company commanders, Captain Wohlauf and Lieutenant Gnade, and informed them of the next day's task.¹ Trapp's adjutant, First Lieutenant Hagen, must have informed other officers of the battalion, for Lieutenant Heinz Buchmann learned from him the precise details of the pending action that evening.

Buchmann, then thirty-eight years old, was the head of a family lumber business in Hamburg. He had joined the Nazi Party in May 1937. Drafted into the Order Police in 1939, he had served as a driver in Poland. In the summer of 1940 he applied for a discharge. Instead he was sent to officer training and commissioned as a reserve lieutenant in November 1941. He was given command of the First Platoon of First Company in 1942.

Upon learning of the imminent massacre, Buchmann made clear to Hagen that as a Hamburg businessman and reserve lieutenant, he "would in no case participate in such an action, in which defenseless women and children are shot." He asked for another assignment. Hagen arranged for Buchmann to be in charge of the escort for the male "work Jews" who were to be selected out and taken to Lublin.² His company captain, Wohlauf, was informed of Buchmann's assignment but not the reason for it.³

The men were not officially informed, other than that they would be awakened early in the morning for a major action involving the entire battalion. But some had at least a hint of what was to come. Captain Wohlauf told a group of his men that an "extremely interesting task" awaited them the next day.⁴ Another man, who complained that he was being left behind to guard the barracks, was told by his company adjutant, "Be happy that you don't have to come. You'll see what happens."⁵ Sergeant Heinrich Steinmetz* warned his men of Third Platoon, Second Company, that "he didn't want to see any cowards."⁶ Additional ammunition was given out.⁷ One policeman reported that his unit was given whips, which led to rumors of a *Judenaktion*.⁸ No one else, however, remembered whips.

Departing from Biłgoraj around 2:00 a. m., the truck convoy

arrived in Józefów just as the sky was beginning to lighten. Trapp assembled the men in a half-circle and addressed them. After explaining the battalion's murderous assignment, he made his extraordinary offer: any of the older men who did not feel up to the task that lay before them could step out. Trapp paused, and after some moments one man from Third Company, Otto-Julius Schinke,* stepped forward. Captain Hoffmann, who had arrived in Józefów directly from Zakrzów with the Third Platoon of Third Company and had not been part of the officers' meetings in Biłgoraj the day before, was furious that one of his men had been the first to break ranks. Hoffmann began to berate Schinke, but Trapp cut him off. After he had taken Schinke under his protection, some ten or twelve other men stepped forward as well. They turned in their rifles and were told to await a further assignment from the major.⁹

Trapp then summoned the company commanders and gave them their respective assignments. The orders were relayed by the first sergeant, Kammer,* to First Company, and by Gnade and Hoffmann to Second and Third Companies. Two platoons of Third Company were to surround the village.¹⁰ The men were explicitly ordered to shoot anyone trying to escape. The remaining men were to round up the Jews and take them to the marketplace. Those too sick or frail to walk to the marketplace, as well as infants and anyone offering resistance or attempting to hide, were to be shot on the spot. Thereafter, a few men of First Company were to escort the "work Jews" who had been selected at the marketplace, while the rest of First Company was to proceed to the forest to form the firing squads. The Jews were to be loaded onto the battalion trucks by Second Company and Third Platoon of Third Company and shuttled from the marketplace to the forest.¹¹

After making the assignments, Trapp spent most of the day in town, either in a schoolroom converted into his headquarters, at the homes of the Polish mayor and the local priest, at the marketplace, or on the road to the forest.¹² But he did not go to the forest itself or witness the executions; his absence there was

conspicuous. As one policeman bitterly commented, "Major Trapp was never there. Instead he remained in Józefów because he allegedly could not bear the sight. We men were upset about that and said we couldn't bear it either."¹³

Indeed, Trapp's distress was a secret to no one. At the marketplace one policeman remembered hearing Trapp say, "Oh, God, why did I have to be given these orders," as he put his hand on his heart.¹⁴ Another policeman witnessed him at the schoolhouse. "Today I can still see exactly before my eyes Major Trapp there in the room pacing back and forth with his hands behind his back. He made a downcast impression and spoke to me. He said something like, 'Man, . . . such jobs don't suit me. But orders are orders.'¹⁵ Another man remembered vividly "how Trapp, finally alone in our room, sat on a stool and wept bitterly. The tears really flowed."¹⁶ Another also witnessed Trapp at his headquarters. "Major Trapp ran around excitedly and then suddenly stopped dead in front of me, stared, and asked if I agreed with this. I looked him straight in the eye and said, 'No, Herr Major!' He then began to run around again and wept like a child."¹⁷ The doctor's aide encountered Trapp weeping on the path from the marketplace to the forest and asked if he could help. "He answered me only to the effect that everything was very terrible."¹⁸ Concerning Józefów, Trapp later confided to his driver, "If this Jewish business is ever avenged on earth, then have mercy on us Germans."¹⁹

While Trapp complained of his orders and wept, his men proceeded to carry out the battalion's task. The noncommissioned officers divided some of their men into search teams of two, three, or four, and sent them into the Jewish section of Józefów. Other men were assigned as guards along the streets leading to the marketplace or at the marketplace itself. As the Jews were driven out of their houses and the immobile were shot, the air was filled with screams and gunfire. As one policeman noted, it was a small town and they could hear everything.²⁰ Many policemen admitted seeing the corpses of

those who had been shot during the search, but only two admitted having shot.²¹ Again, several policemen admitted having heard that all the patients in the Jewish "hospital" or "old people's home" had been shot on the spot, though no one admitted having actually seen the shooting or taken part.²²

The witnesses were least agreed on the question of how the men initially reacted to the problem of shooting infants. Some claimed that along with the elderly and sick, infants were among those shot and left lying in the houses, doorways, and streets of the town.²³ Others, however, stressed quite specifically that in this initial action the men still shied from shooting infants during the search and clearing operation. One policeman was emphatic "that among the Jews shot in our section of town there were no infants or small children. I would like to say that almost tacitly everyone refrained from shooting infants and small children." In Józefów as later, he observed, "Even in the face of death the Jewish mothers did not separate from their children. Thus we tolerated the mothers taking their small children to the marketplace in Józefów."²⁴ Another policeman likewise noted "that tacitly the shooting of infants and small children was avoided by almost all the men involved. During the entire morning I was able to observe that when being taken away many women carried infants in their arms and led small children by the hand."²⁵ According to both witnesses, none of the officers intervened when infants were brought to the marketplace. Another policeman, however, recalled that after the clearing operation his unit (Third Platoon, Third Company) was reproached by Captain Hoffmann. "We had not proceeded energetically enough."²⁶

As the roundup neared completion, the men of First Company were withdrawn from the search and given a quick lesson in the gruesome task that awaited them. They were instructed by the battalion doctor and the company's first sergeant. One musically inclined policeman who frequently played the violin on social evenings along with the doctor, who played a "wonderful accordion," recalled:

I believe that at this point all officers of the battalion were present, especially our battalion physician, Dr. Schoenfelder.* He now had to explain to us precisely how we had to shoot in order to induce the immediate death of the victim. I remember exactly that for this demonstration he drew or outlined the contour of a human body, at least from the shoulders upward, and then indicated precisely the point on which the fixed bayonet was to be placed as an aiming guide.²⁷

After First Company had received instructions and departed for the woods, Trapp's adjutant, Hagen, presided over the selection of the "work Jews." The head of a nearby sawmill had already approached Trapp with a list of twenty-five Jews who worked for him, and Trapp had permitted their release.²⁸ Through an interpreter Hagen now called for craftsmen and able-bodied male workers. There was unrest as some 300 workers were separated from their families.²⁹ Before they had been marched out of Józefów on foot, the first shots from the woods were heard. "After the first salvos a grave unrest grew among these craftsmen, and some of the men threw themselves upon the ground weeping. . . . It had to have become clear to them at this point that the families they had left behind were being shot."³⁰

Lieutenant Buchmann and the Luxembourgers in First Company marched the workers a few kilometers to a country loading station on the rail line. Several train cars, including a passenger car, were waiting. The work Jews and their guards were then taken by train to Lublin, where Buchmann delivered them to a camp. According to Buchmann, he did not put them in the notorious concentration camp at Majdanek but in another camp instead. The Jews were not expected, he said, but the camp administration was glad to take them. Buchmann and his men returned to Biłgoraj the same day.³¹

Meanwhile, First Sergeant Kammer had taken the initial contingent of shooters in First Company to a forest several kilometers from Józefów. The trucks halted on a dirt road that

ran along the edge, at a point where a pathway led into the woods. The men climbed down from their trucks and waited.

When the first truckload of thirty-five to forty Jews arrived, an equal number of policemen came forward and, *face to face*, were paired off with their victims. Led by Kammer, the policemen and Jews marched down the forest path. They turned off into the woods at a point indicated by Captain Wohlauf, who busied himself throughout the day selecting the execution sites. Kammer then ordered the Jews to lie down in a row. The policemen stepped up behind them, placed their bayonets on the backbone above the shoulder blades as earlier instructed, and on Kammer's orders fired in unison.

In the meantime more policemen of First Company had arrived at the edge of the forest to fill out a second firing squad. As the first firing squad marched out of the woods to the unloading point, the second group took their victims along the same path into the woods. Wohlauf chose a site a few yards farther on so that the next batch of victims would not see the corpses from the earlier execution. These Jews were again forced to lie face down in a row, and the shooting procedure was repeated.

Thereafter, the "pendulum traffic" of the two firing squads in and out of the woods continued throughout the day. Except for a midday break, the shooting proceeded without interruption until nightfall. At some point in the afternoon, someone "organized" a supply of alcohol for the shooters. By the end of a day of nearly continuous shooting, the men had completely lost track of how many Jews they had each killed. In the words of one policeman, it was in any case "a great number."³²

When Trapp first made his offer early in the morning, the real nature of the action had just been announced and time to think and react had been very short. Only a dozen men had instinctively seized the moment to step out, turn in their rifles, and thus excuse themselves from the subsequent killing. For many the reality of what they were about to do, and particularly that they themselves might be chosen for the firing squad, had

probably not sunk in. But when the men of First Company were summoned to the marketplace, instructed in giving a “neck shot,” and sent to the woods to kill Jews, some of them tried to make up for the opportunity they had missed earlier. One policeman approached First Sergeant Kammer, whom he knew well. He confessed that the task was “repugnant” to him and asked for a different assignment. Kammer obliged, assigning him to guard duty on the edge of the forest, where he remained throughout the day.³³ Several other policemen who knew Kammer well were given guard duty along the truck route.³⁴ After shooting for some time, another group of policemen approached Kammer and said they could not continue. He released them from the firing squad and reassigned them to accompany the trucks.³⁵ Two policemen made the mistake of approaching Captain (and SS-Hauptsturmführer) Wohlauf instead of Kammer. They pleaded that they too were fathers with children and could not continue. Wohlauf curtly refused them, indicating that they could lie down alongside the victims. At the midday pause, however, Kammer relieved not only these two men but a number of other older men as well. They were sent back to the marketplace, accompanied by a noncommissioned officer who reported to Trapp. Trapp dismissed them from further duty and permitted them to return early to the barracks in Bitgoraj.³⁶

Some policemen who did not request to be released from the firing squads sought other ways to evade. Noncommissioned officers armed with submachine guns had to be assigned to give so-called mercy shots “because both from excitement *as well as intentionally* [italics mine]” individual policemen “shot past” their victims.³⁷ Others had taken evasive action earlier. During the clearing operation some men of First Company hid in the Catholic priest’s garden until they grew afraid that their absence would be noticed. Returning to the marketplace, they jumped aboard a truck that was going to pick up Jews from a nearby village, in order to have an excuse for their absence.³⁸ Others hung around the marketplace because they did not want to round up Jews during the search.³⁹ Still others spent as much

time as possible searching the houses so as not to be present at the marketplace, where they feared being assigned to a firing squad.⁴⁰ A driver assigned to take Jews to the forest made only one trip before he asked to be relieved. “Presumably his nerves were not strong enough to drive more Jews to the shooting site,” commented the man who took over his truck and his duties of chauffeuring Jews to their death.⁴¹

After the men of First Company departed for the woods, Second Company was left to complete the roundup and load Jews onto the trucks. When the first salvo was heard from the woods, a terrible cry swept the marketplace as the collected Jews realized their fate.⁴² Thereafter, however, a quiet composure—indeed, in the words of German witnesses, an “unbelievable” and “astonishing” composure—settled over the Jews.⁴³

If the victims were composed, the German officers grew increasingly agitated as it became clear that the pace of the executions was much too slow if they were to finish the job in one day. “Comments were repeatedly made, such as, ‘It’s not getting anywhere!’ and ‘It’s not going fast enough!’”⁴⁴ Trapp reached a decision and gave new orders. Third Company was called in from its outposts around the village to take over close guard of the marketplace. The men of Lieutenant Gnade’s Second Company were informed that they too must now go to the woods to join the shooters. Sergeant Steinmetz of Third Platoon once again gave his men the opportunity to report if they did not feel up to it. No one took up his offer.⁴⁵

Lieutenant Gnade divided his company into two groups assigned to different sections of the woods. He then visited Wohlauf’s First Company to witness a demonstration of the executions.⁴⁶ Meanwhile, Lieutenant Scheer and Sergeant Hergert* took the First Platoon of Second Company, along with some men of Third Platoon, to a certain point in the woods. Scheer divided his men into four groups, assigned them each a shooting area, and sent them back to fetch the Jews they were to kill. Lieutenant Gnade arrived and heatedly argued with Scheer that the men were not being sent deep enough into the woods.⁴⁷

By the time each group had made two or three round trips to the collection point and carried out their executions, it was clear to Scheer that the process was too slow. He asked Hergert for advice. "I then made the proposal," Hergert recalled, "that it would suffice if the Jews were brought from the collection point to the place of execution by only two men of each group, while the other shooters of the execution commando would already have moved to the next shooting site. Furthermore, this shooting site was moved somewhat forward from execution to execution and thus always got closer to the collection point on the forest path. We then proceeded accordingly."⁴⁸ Hergert's suggestion speeded the killing process considerably.

In contrast to First Company, the men of Second Company received no instruction on how to carry out the shooting. Initially bayonets were not fixed as an aiming guide, and as Hergert noted, there was a "considerable number of missed shots" that "led to the unnecessary wounding of the victims." One of the policemen in Hergert's unit likewise noted the difficulty the men had in aiming properly. "At first we shot freehand. When one aimed too high, the entire skull exploded. As a consequence, brains and bones flew everywhere. Thus, we were instructed to place the bayonet point on the neck."⁴⁹ According to Hergert, however, using fixed bayonets as an aiming guide was no solution. "Through the point-blank shot that was thus required, the bullet struck the head of the victim at such a trajectory that often the entire skull or at least the entire rear skullcap was torn off, and blood, bone splinters, and brains sprayed everywhere and besmirched the shooters."⁵⁰

Hergert was emphatic that no one in First Platoon was given the option of withdrawing beforehand. But once the executions began and men approached either him or Scheer because they could not shoot women and children, they were given other duties.⁵¹ This was confirmed by one of his men. "During the execution word spread that anyone who could not take it any longer could report." He went on to note, "I myself took part in some ten shootings, in which I had to shoot men and women. I

simply could not shoot at people anymore, which became apparent to my sergeant, Hergert, because at the end I repeatedly shot past. For this reason he relieved me. Other comrades were also relieved sooner or later, because they simply could no longer continue."⁵²

Lieutenant Drucker's Second Platoon and the bulk of Sergeant Steinmetz's Third Platoon were assigned to yet another part of the forest. Like Scheer's men, they were divided into small groups of five to eight each rather than large groups of thirty-five to forty as in Wohlauf's First Company. The men were told to place the end of their carbines on the cervical vertebrae at the base of the neck, but here too the shooting was done initially without fixed bayonets as a guide.⁵³ The results were horrifying. "The shooters were gruesomely besmirched with blood, brains, and bone splinters. It hung on their clothing."⁵⁴

When dividing his men into small groups of shooters, Drucker had kept about a third of them in reserve. Ultimately, everyone was to shoot, but the idea was to allow frequent relief and "cigarette breaks."⁵⁵ With the constant coming and going from the trucks, the wild terrain, and the frequent rotation, the men did not remain in fixed groups.⁵⁶ The confusion created the opportunity for work slowdown and evasion. Some men who hurried at their task shot far more Jews than others who delayed as much as they could.⁵⁷ After two rounds one policeman simply "slipped off" and stayed among the trucks on the edge of the forest.⁵⁸ Another managed to avoid taking his turn with the shooters altogether.

It was in no way the case that those who did not want to or could not carry out the shooting of human beings with their own hands could not keep themselves out of this task. No strict control was being carried out here. I therefore remained by the arriving trucks and kept myself busy at the arrival point. In any case I gave my activity such an appearance. It could not be avoided that one or another of my comrades noticed that I was not going to the executions to fire away at

the victims. They showered me with remarks such as "shit-head" and "weaking" to express their disgust. But I suffered no consequences for my actions. I must mention here that I was not the only one who kept himself out of participating in the executions.⁵⁹

By far the largest number of shooters at Józefów who were interrogated after the war came from the Third Platoon of Second Company. It is from them that we can perhaps get the best impression of the effect of the executions on the men and the dropout rate among them during the course of the action.

Hans Dettelmann,* a forty-year-old barber, was assigned by Drucker to a firing squad. "It was still not possible for me to shoot the first victim at the first execution, and I wandered off and asked . . . Lieutenant Drucker to be relieved." Dettelmann told his lieutenant that he had a "very weak nature," and Drucker let him go.⁶⁰

Walter Niehaus,* a former Reemtsma cigarette sales representative, was paired with an elderly woman for the first round. "After I had shot the elderly woman, I went to Toni [Anton] Bentheim* [his sergeant] and told him that I was not able to carry out further executions. I did not have to participate in the shooting anymore. . . . my nerves were totally finished from this one shooting."⁶¹

For his first victim August Zorn* was given a very old man. Zorn recalled that his elderly victim

could not or would not keep up with his countrymen, because he repeatedly fell and then simply lay there. I regularly had to lift him up and drag him forward. Thus, I only reached the execution site when my comrades had already shot their Jews. At the sight of his countrymen who had been shot, my Jew threw himself on the ground and remained lying there. I then cocked my carbine and shot him through the back of the head. Because I was already very upset from the cruel treatment of the Jews during the clearing of the town and was completely

in turmoil, I shot too high. The entire back of the skull of my Jew was torn off and the brain exposed. Parts of the skull flew into Sergeant Steinmetz's face. This was grounds for me, after returning to the truck, to go to the first sergeant and ask for my release. I had become so sick that I simply couldn't anymore. I was then relieved by the first sergeant.⁶²

Georg Kageler,* a thirty-seven-year-old tailor, made it through the first round before encountering difficulty. "After I had carried out the first shooting and at the unloading point was allotted a mother with daughter as victims for the next shooting, I began a conversation with them and learned that they were Germans from Kassel, and I took the decision not to participate further in the executions. The entire business was now so repugnant to me that I returned to my platoon leader and told him that I was still sick and asked for my release." Kageler was sent to guard the marketplace.⁶³ Neither his pre-execution conversation with his victim nor his discovery that there were German Jews in Józefów was unique. Schimke, the man who had first stepped out, encountered a Jew from Hamburg in the marketplace, as did a second policeman.⁶⁴ Yet another policeman remembered that the first Jew he shot was a decorated World War I veteran from Bremen who begged in vain for mercy.⁶⁵

Franz Kastenbaum,* who during his official interrogation had denied remembering anything about the killing of Jews in Poland, suddenly appeared uninvited at the office of the Hamburg state prosecutor investigating Reserve Police Battalion 101. He told how he had been a member of a firing squad of seven or eight men that had taken its victims into the woods and shot them in the neck at point-blank range. This procedure had been repeated until the fourth victim.

The shooting of the men was so repugnant to me that I missed the fourth man. It was simply no longer possible for me to aim accurately. I suddenly felt nauseous and ran away from the

shooting site. I have expressed myself incorrectly just now. It was not that I could no longer aim accurately, rather that the fourth time I intentionally missed. I then ran into the woods, vomited, and sat down against a tree. To make sure that no one was nearby, I called loudly into the woods, because I wanted to be alone. Today I can say that my nerves were totally finished. I think that I remained alone in the woods for some two to three hours.

Kastenbaum then returned to the edge of the woods and rode an empty truck back to the marketplace. He suffered no consequences; his absence had gone unnoticed because the firing squads had been all mixed up and randomly assigned. He had come to make this statement, he explained to the investigating attorney, because he had had no peace since attempting to conceal the shooting action.⁶⁶

Most of those who found the shooting impossible to bear quit very early.⁶⁷ But not always. The men in one squad had already shot ten to twenty Jews each when they finally asked to be relieved. As one of them explained, "I especially asked to be relieved because the man next to me shot so impressively. Apparently he always aimed his gun too high, producing terrible wounds in his victims. In many cases the entire backs of victims' heads were torn off, so that the brains sprayed all over. I simply couldn't watch it any longer."⁶⁸ At the unloading point, Sergeant Benthaim watched men emerge from the woods covered with blood and brains, morale shaken and nerves finished. Those who asked to be relieved he advised to "slink away" to the marketplace.⁶⁹ As a result, the number of policemen gathered on the marketplace grew constantly.⁷⁰

As with First Company, alcohol was made available to the policemen under Drucker and Steinmetz who stayed in the forest and continued shooting.⁷¹ As darkness approached at the end of a long summer day and the murderous task was still not finished, the shooting became even less organized and more hectic.⁷² The forest was so full of dead bodies that it was difficult to find places

to make the Jews lie down.⁷³ When darkness finally fell about 9:00 p. m.—some seventeen hours after Reserve Police Battalion 101 had first arrived on the outskirts of Józefów—and the last Jews had been killed, the men returned to the marketplace and prepared to depart for Biłgoraj.⁷⁴ No plans had been made for the burial of the bodies, and the dead Jews were simply left lying in the woods. Neither clothing nor valuables had been officially collected, though at least some of the policemen had enriched themselves with watches, jewelry, and money taken from the victims.⁷⁵ The pile of luggage the Jews had been forced to leave at the marketplace was simply burned.⁷⁶ Before the policemen climbed into their trucks and left Józefów, a ten-year-old girl appeared, bleeding from the head. She was brought to Trapp, who took her in his arms and said, "You shall remain alive."⁷⁷

When the men arrived at the barracks in Biłgoraj, they were depressed, angered, embittered, and shaken.⁷⁸ They ate little but drank heavily. Generous quantities of alcohol were provided, and many of the policemen got quite drunk. Major Trapp made the rounds, trying to console and reassure them, and again placing the responsibility on higher authorities.⁷⁹ But neither the drink nor Trapp's consolation could wash away the sense of shame and horror that pervaded the barracks. Trapp asked the men not to talk about it,⁸⁰ but they needed no encouragement in that direction. Those who had not been in the forest did not want to learn more.⁸¹ Those who had been there likewise had no desire to speak, either then or later. By silent consensus within Reserve Police Battalion 101, the Józefów massacre was simply not discussed. "The entire matter was a taboo."⁸² But repression during waking hours could not stop the nightmares. During the first night back from Józefów, one policeman awoke firing his gun into the ceiling of the barracks.⁸³

Several days after Józefów the battalion, it would seem, narrowly missed participation in yet another massacre. Units of First and Second Company, under Trapp and Wohlauf, entered Alekzandrów—a so-called street village composed of houses strung out along the road twelve kilometers west of Józefów. A

small number of Jews was rounded up, and both the policemen and the Jews feared that another massacre was imminent. After some hesitation, however, the action was broken off, and Trapp permitted the Jews to return to their houses. One policeman remembered vividly "how individual Jews fell on their knees before Trapp and tried to kiss his hands and feet. Trapp, however, did not permit this and turned away." The policemen returned to Biłgoraj with no explanation for the strange turn of events.⁸⁴ Then, on July 20, precisely one month after its departure from Hamburg and one week after the Józefów massacre, Reserve Police Battalion 101 left Biłgoraj for redeployment in the northern sector of the Lublin district.

8

Reflections on a Massacre

AT JOZEFÓW A MERE DOZEN MEN OUT OF NEARLY 500 HAD responded instinctively to Major Trapp's offer to step forward and excuse themselves from the impending mass murder. Why was the number of men who from the beginning declared themselves unwilling to shoot so small? In part, it was a matter of the suddenness. There was no forewarning or time to think, as the men were totally "surprised" by the Józefów action.¹ Unless they were able to react to Trapp's offer on the spur of the moment, this first opportunity was lost.²

As important as the lack of time for reflection was the pressure for conformity—the basic identification of men in uniform with their comrades and the strong urge not to separate themselves from the group by stepping out. The battalion had only recently

been brought up to full strength, and many of the men did not yet know each other well; the bonds of military comradeship were not yet fully developed. Nonetheless, the act of stepping out that morning in Józefów meant leaving one's comrades and admitting that one was "too weak" or "cowardly." Who would have "dared," one policeman declared emphatically, to "lose face" before the assembled troops.³ "If the question is posed to me why I shot with the others in the first place," said another who subsequently asked to be excused after several rounds of killing, "I must answer that no one wants to be thought a coward." It was one thing to refuse at the beginning, he added, and quite another to try to shoot but not be able to continue.⁴ Another policeman—more aware of what truly required courage—said quite simply, "I was cowardly."⁵

Most of the interrogated policemen denied that they had any choice. Faced with the testimony of others, many did not contest that Trapp had made the offer but claimed that they had not heard that part of the speech or could not remember it. A few policemen made the attempt to confront the question of choice but failed to find the words. It was a different time and place, as if they had been on another political planet, and the political values and vocabulary of the 1960s were useless in explaining the situation in which they had found themselves in 1942. Quite atypical in describing his state of mind that morning of July 13 was a policeman who admitted to killing as many as twenty Jews before quitting. "I thought that I could master the situation and that without me the Jews were not going to escape their fate anyway. . . . Truthfully I must say that at the time we didn't reflect about it at all. Only years later did any of us become truly conscious of what had happened then. . . . Only later did it first occur to me that had not been right."⁶

In addition to the easy rationalization that not taking part in the shooting was not going to alter the fate of the Jews in any case, the policemen developed other justifications for their behavior. Perhaps the most astonishing rationalization of all was that of a thirty-five-year-old metalworker from Bremerhaven:

I made the effort, and it was possible for me, to shoot only children. It so happened that the mothers led the children by the hand. My neighbor then shot the mother and I shot the child that belonged to her, because I reasoned with myself that after all without its mother the child could not live any longer. It was supposed to be, so to speak, soothing to my conscience to release children unable to live without their mothers.⁷

The full weight of this statement, and the significance of the word choice of the former policeman, cannot be fully appreciated unless one knows that the German word for "release" (*erlösen*) also means to "redeem" or "save" when used in a religious sense. The one who "releases" is the *Erlöser*—the Savior or Redeemer!

In terms of motivation and consciousness, the most glaring omission in the interrogations is any discussion of anti-Semitism. For the most part the interrogators did not pursue this issue. Nor were the men, for understandable reasons as potential defendants, eager to volunteer any illuminating comments. With few exceptions the whole question of anti-Semitism is marked by silence. What is clear is that the men's concern for their standing in the eyes of their comrades was not matched by any sense of human ties with their victims. The Jews stood outside their circle of human obligation and responsibility. Such a polarization between "us" and "them," between one's comrades and the enemy, is of course standard in war.

It would seem that even if the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101 had not consciously adopted the anti-Semitic doctrines of the regime, they had at least accepted the assimilation of the Jews into the image of the enemy. Major Trapp appealed to this generalized notion of the Jews as part of the enemy in his early-morning speech. The men should remember, when shooting Jewish women and children, that the enemy was killing German women and children by bombing Germany.

If only a dozen policemen stepped out at the beginning to extricate themselves from the impending mass murder, a much

larger number either sought to evade the shooting by less conspicuous methods or asked to be released from the firing squads once the shooting had begun. How many policemen belonged to these categories cannot be ascertained with any certainty, but an estimate in the range of 10 to 20 percent of those actually assigned to the firing squads does not seem unreasonable. Sergeant Hergert, for instance, admitted excusing as many as five from his squad of forty or fifty men. In the Drucker-Steinmetz group, from which the greatest number of shooters was interrogated, we can identify six policemen who quit within four rounds and an entire squad of five to eight who were released considerably later. While the number of those who evaded or dropped out was thus not insignificant, it must not obscure the corollary that at least 80 percent of those called upon to shoot continued to do so until 1,500 Jews from Józefów had been killed.

Even twenty or twenty-five years later those who did quit shooting along the way overwhelmingly cited sheer physical revulsion against what they were doing as the prime motive but did not express any ethical or political principles behind this revulsion. Given the educational level of these reserve policemen, one should not expect a sophisticated articulation of abstract principles. The absence of such does not mean that their revulsion did not have its origins in the humane instincts that Nazism radically opposed and sought to overcome. But the men themselves did not seem to be conscious of the contradiction between their feelings and the essence of the regime they served. Being too weak to continue shooting, of course, posed problems for the "productivity" and morale of the battalion, but it did not challenge basic police discipline or the authority of the regime in general. Indeed, Heinrich Himmler himself sanctioned the toleration of this kind of weakness in his notorious Posen speech of October 4, 1943, to the SS leadership. While exalting obedience as one of the key virtues of all SS men, he explicitly noted an exception, namely, "one whose nerves are

finished, one who is weak. Then one can say: Good, go take your pension."⁸

Politically and ethically motivated opposition, explicitly identified by the policemen as such, was relatively rare. One man said he decisively rejected the Jewish measures of the Nazis because he was an active Communist Party member and thus rejected National Socialism in its entirety.⁹ Another said he opposed the shooting of Jews because he had been a Social Democrat for many years.¹⁰ A third said he was known to the Nazis as "politically unreliable" and a "grumbler" but gave no further political identity.¹¹ Several others grounded their attitude on opposition to the regime's anti-Semitism in particular. "This attitude I already had earlier in Hamburg," said one landscape gardener, "because due to the Jewish measures already carried out in Hamburg I had lost the greater part of my business customers."¹² Another policeman merely identified himself as "a great friend of the Jews" without explaining further.¹³

The two men who explained their refusal to take part in the greatest detail both emphasized the fact that they were free to act as they did because they had no careerist ambitions. One policeman accepted the possible disadvantages of his course of action "because I was not a career policeman and also did not want to become one, but rather an independent skilled craftsman, and I had my business back home. . . . thus it was of no consequence that my police career would not prosper."¹⁴

Lieutenant Buchmann had cited an ethical stance for his refusal; as a reserve officer and Hamburg businessman, he could not shoot defenseless women and children. But he too stressed the importance of economic independence when explaining why his situation was not analogous to that of his fellow officers. "I was somewhat older then and moreover a reserve officer, so it was not particularly important to me to be promoted or otherwise to advance, because I had my prosperous business back home. The company chiefs . . . on the other hand were young men and career policemen who wanted to become something." But

Buchmann also admitted to what the Nazis would undoubtedly have condemned as a "cosmopolitan" and pro-Jewish outlook. "Through my business experience, especially because it extended abroad, I had gained a better overview of things. Moreover, through my earlier business activities I already knew many Jews."¹⁵

The resentment and bitterness in the battalion over what they had been asked to do in Józefów was shared by virtually everyone, even those who had shot the entire day. The exclamation of one policeman to First Sergeant Kammer of First Company that "I'd go crazy if I had to do that again" expressed the sentiments of many.¹⁶ But only a few went beyond complaining to extricate themselves from such a possibility. Several of the older men with very large families took advantage of a regulation that required them to sign a release agreeing to duty in a combat area. One who had not yet signed refused to do so; another rescinded his signature. Both were eventually transferred back to Germany.¹⁷ The most dramatic response was again that of Lieutenant Buchmann, who asked Trapp to have him transferred back to Hamburg and declared that short of a direct personal order from Trapp, he would not take part in Jewish actions. In the end he wrote to Hamburg, explicitly requesting a recall because he was not "suited" to certain tasks "alien to the police" that were being carried out by his unit in Poland.¹⁸ Buchmann had to wait until November, but his efforts to be transferred were ultimately successful.

The problem that faced Trapp and his superiors in Lublin, therefore, was not the ethically and politically grounded opposition of a few but the broad demoralization shared both by those who shot to the end and those who had not been able to continue. It was above all a reaction to the sheer horror of the killing process itself. If Reserve Police Battalion 101 was to continue to provide vital manpower for the implementation of the Final Solution in the Lublin district, the psychological burden on the men had to be taken into account and alleviated.

In subsequent actions two vital changes were introduced and

henceforth—with some notable exceptions—adhered to. First, most of the future operations of Reserve Police Battalion 101 involved ghetto clearing and deportation, not outright massacre on the spot. The policemen were thus relieved of the immediate horror of the killing process, which (for deportees from the northern Lublin district) was carried out in the extermination camp at Treblinka. Second, while deportation was a horrifying procedure characterized by the terrible coercive violence needed to drive people onto the death trains as well as the systematic killing of those who could not be marched to the trains, these actions were generally undertaken jointly by units of Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Trawniks, SS-trained auxiliaries from Soviet territories, recruited from the POW camps and usually assigned the very worst parts of the ghetto clearing and deportation.

Concern over the psychological demoralization resulting from Józefów is indeed the most likely explanation of that mysterious incident in Aleksandrów several days later. Probably Trapp had assurance that Trawniki men would carry out the shooting this time, and when they did not show up, he released the Jews his men had rounded up. In short, the psychological alleviation necessary to integrate Reserve Police Battalion 101 into the killing process was to be achieved through a twofold division of labor. The bulk of the killing was to be removed to the extermination camp, and the worst of the on-the-spot "dirty work" was to be assigned to the Trawniks. This change would prove sufficient to allow the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101 to become accustomed to their participation in the Final Solution. When the time came to kill again, the policemen did not "go crazy." Instead they became increasingly efficient and calloused executioners.

was a case of cowardice, as his men and Trapp suspected. Ill he was. Whether his illness was initially caused by the murderous activities of Reserve Police Battalion 101 cannot be established, but he had the symptoms of psychologically induced "irritable colon" or "adaptive colitis." Certainly, Hoffmann's duties aggravated his condition. Moreover, it is clear that rather than using his illness to escape an assignment that involved killing the Jews of Poland, Hoffmann made every effort to hide it from his superiors and to avoid being hospitalized. If mass murder was giving Hoffmann stomach pains, it was a fact he was deeply ashamed of and sought to overcome to the best of his ability.

14

The "Jew Hunt"

By MID-NOVEMBER 1942, FOLLOWING THE MASSACRES AT JÓZEFÓW, Łomazy, Serokomla, Końskowola, and elsewhere, and the liquidation of the ghettos in Międzyrzec, Łuków, Parczew, Radzyń, and Kock, the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101 had participated in the outright execution of at least 6,500 Polish Jews and the deportation of at least 42,000 more to the gas chambers of Treblinka. Still their role in the mass murder campaign was not finished. Once the towns and ghettos of the northern Lublin district had been cleared of Jews, Reserve Police Battalion 101 was assigned to track down and systematically eliminate all those who had escaped the previous roundups and were now in hiding. In short, they were responsible for making their region completely *judenfrei*.

One year earlier, on October 15, 1941, the head of the General Government, Hans Frank, had decreed that any Jew caught outside ghetto boundaries was to be hauled before a special court and sentenced to death. This decree was at least partly in response to the pleas of German public health officials in Poland, who realized that only the most draconian punishment could deter starving Jews from leaving the ghettos to smuggle food and thereby spreading the typhus epidemic that was ravaging the ghettos. For example, the head of public health for the district of Warsaw, Dr. Lambrecht, had argued for a law threatening Jews found outside the ghetto with "fear of death through hanging" that was "greater than fear of death through starvation."¹ Complaints soon arose concerning the implementation of Frank's decree, however. The manpower available to escort captured Jews was too limited, the distances to be covered too great, the judicial procedures of the special courts too cumbersome and time-consuming. The remedy was simple; all judicial procedures would be dispensed with, and Jews found outside the ghettos would be shot on the spot. At a meeting between the district governors and Frank on December 16, 1941, the deputy to the governor of the Warsaw district noted how "gratefully one had welcomed the shooting order of the commander of the Order Police, whereby Jews encountered in the countryside could be shot."²

In short, even before they were systematically deported to the death camps, the Jews of Poland were subject to summary execution outside the ghettos. This "shooting order," however, was loosely applied in the district of Lublin, for there—in comparison to the rest of the General Government—ghettoization was only partial. Jews living in the small towns and villages of northern Lublin were not concentrated in the transit ghettos of Międzyrzec and Łuków until September and October 1942. The predecessor to Trapp's unit in the northern Lublin district, Police Battalion 306, did indeed shoot Jews encountered outside of town on occasion.³ But the

systematic tracking down of Jews did not begin until ghettoization was complete. It truly intensified only after the ghettos were liquidated.

In late August Parczew became the first ghetto in the battalion's security zone to be completely cleared. According to Sergeant Steinmetz, whose Third Platoon of Second Company was stationed there, Jews continued to be found in the area. They were incarcerated in the local prison. Gnade ordered Steinmetz to shoot the imprisoned Jews. "This order of Lieutenant Gnade explicitly extended to all future cases as well. . . . I was given the task of keeping my territory free of Jews."⁴ Lieutenant Drucker likewise remembered receiving orders from battalion headquarters in late August "that Jews wandering freely about the countryside were to be shot on the spot when encountered." But until the final deportations of Jews from the small villages to the transit ghettos, the order was not fully implemented.

By October the order was for real.⁵ Placards announced that all Jews who did not go to the ghettos would be shot.⁶ The "shooting order" was made part of regular company instructions to the men and given repeatedly, especially before they were sent on patrol.⁷ No one could be left in any doubt that not a single Jew was to remain alive in the battalion's security zone. In official jargon, the battalion made "forest patrols" for "suspects."⁸ As the surviving Jews were to be tracked down and shot like animals, however, the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101 unofficially dubbed this phase of the Final Solution the *Judenjagd*, or "Jew hunt."⁹

The "Jew hunt" took many forms. Most spectacular were two battalion sweeps through the Parczew forest in the fall of 1942 and the spring of 1943, the latter alongside army units. Not only Jews but partisans and escaped Russian prisoners of war were the targets of these sweeps, though Jews seem to have been the primary victims of the first one, in October 1942. Georg Leffer* of Third Company recalled:

We were told that there were many Jews hiding in the forest. We therefore searched through the woods in a skirmish line but could find nothing, because the Jews were obviously well hidden. We combed the woods a second time. Only then could we discover individual chimney pipes sticking out of the earth. We discovered that Jews had hidden themselves in underground bunkers here. They were hauled out, with resistance in only one bunker. Some of the comrades climbed down into this bunker and hauled the Jews out. The Jews were then shot on the spot. . . . the Jews had to lie face down on the ground and were killed by a neck shot. Who was in the firing squad I don't remember. I think it was simply a case where the men standing nearby were ordered to shoot them. Some fifty Jews were shot, including men and women of all ages, because entire families had hidden themselves there. . . . the shooting took place quite publicly. No cordon was formed at all, for a number of Poles from Parzew were standing directly by the shooting site. They were then ordered, presumably by Hoffmann, to bury the Jews who had been shot in a half-finished bunker.¹⁰

Other units of the battalion also remembered discovering bunkers and killing Jews in batches of twenty to fifty.¹¹ One policeman estimated the total body count for the October sweep at 500.¹²

By spring the situation had altered somewhat. The few Jews still alive had for the most part been able to join bands of partisans and escaped POWs. The spring sweep uncovered a "forest camp" of escaped Russians and Jews who offered armed resistance. Some 100 to 120 Jews and Russians were killed. The battalion suffered at least one fatality, for Trapp's adjutant, Lieutenant Hagen, was accidentally killed by his own men.¹³

A number of Jews had been sent as workers to various large agricultural estates that the German occupiers had confiscated and now administered. At Gut Jablon, near Parzew, a unit of Steinmetz's platoon loaded the thirty Jewish workers on trucks, drove them to the forest, and killed them with the now routine neck shot. The German administrator, who had not been

informed of the impending liquidation of his work force, complained in vain.¹⁴ The German administrator of Gut Pannwitz, near Putawy, encountered the opposite problem of too many Jewish workers. His estate became a refuge for Jews who had fled the ghettos to the nearby forest and then sought sanctuary and food among his work Jews. Whenever the Jewish worker population swelled noticeably, the estate administration phoned Captain Hoffmann, and a German police commando was sent to shoot the surplus Jews.¹⁵ After Hoffmann's hospitalization, his successor, Lieutenant Messmann, formed a flying squadron that systematically eliminated small batches of Jewish workers in a fifty- to sixty-kilometer radius of Putawy. Messmann's driver, Alfred Sperlich, * recalled the procedure:

In cases where the farmyard and the Jewish lodgings could be reached quickly, I drove into the farmyard at high speed, and the police sprang out and immediately rushed to the Jewish lodgings. Then all the Jews present at that time were driven out and shot in the farmyard near a haystack, potato pit, or dung heap. The victims were almost always naked and were shot in the neck while lying on the ground.

If the road into the farmyard was too visible, however, the police approached stealthily on foot to prevent their victims' escape. Routinely in workplaces near the woods the police found many more Jews than expected.¹⁶

Some Jews had survived by hiding in town rather than in the woods, but they too were tracked down.¹⁷ The most memorable case was in Kook, where a cellar hiding place was reported by a Polish translator working for the Germans. Four Jews were captured. Under "interrogation," they revealed another cellar hiding place in a large house on the edge of town. A single German policeman and the Polish translator went to the second hiding place, expecting no difficulties. But this was a rare instance in which the Jews had arms, and the approaching policeman was fired upon. Reinforcements were summoned, and

a fire fight broke out. In the end four or five Jews were killed in a breakout attempt, and eight to ten others were found dead or badly wounded in the cellar. Only four or five were captured unwounded; they were likewise "interrogated" and shot that evening.¹⁸ The German police then went in search of the owner of the house, a Polish woman who had managed to flee in time. She was tracked to her father's house in a nearby village. Lieutenant Brand presented the father with a stark choice—his life or his daughter's. The man surrendered his daughter, who was shot on the spot.¹⁹

The most common form of the "Jew hunt" was the small patrol into the forest to liquidate an individual bunker that had been reported. The battalion built up a network of informers and "forest runners," or trackers, who searched for and revealed Jewish hiding places. Many other Poles volunteered information about Jews in the woods who had stolen food from nearby fields, farms, and villages in their desperate attempt to stay alive. Upon receiving such reports, the local police commanders dispatched small patrols to locate the hiding Jews. Time and again the same scenario was played out, with only minor variations. The policemen followed their Polish guides directly to the bunker hideouts and tossed grenades in the openings. The Jews who survived the initial grenade attack and emerged from the bunkers were forced to lie face down for the neck shot. The bodies were routinely left to be buried by the nearest Polish villagers.²⁰

These patrols were "too frequent" for most policemen to remember how many they had participated in. "It was more or less our daily bread," said one.²¹ The expression "daily bread" was applied to the "Jew hunts" by another policeman as well.²² From the behavior of the patrol leaders, the men could quickly tell if they faced potential partisan action or were simply searching for reported Jews, who were assumed to be unarmed.²³ According to at least one policeman, the "Jew hunt" patrols predominated. "Such actions were our main task, and in comparison to real partisan actions they were much more numerous."²⁴

With these small patrols hunting down surviving Jews, the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101 came almost full circle back to the experience at Józefów. During the large deportation operations, virtually all the policemen had to perform at least cordon duty. They herded masses of people onto the trains but could distance themselves from the killing at the other end of the trip. Their sense of detachment from the fate of the Jews they deported was unshakable.

But the "Jew hunt" was different. Once again they saw their victims face to face, and the killing was personal. More important, each individual policeman once again had a considerable degree of choice. How each exercised that choice revealed the extent to which the battalion had divided into the "tough" and the "weak." In the months since Józefów many had become numbed, indifferent, and in some cases eager killers; others limited their participation in the killing process, refraining when they could do so without great cost or inconvenience. Only a minority of nonconformists managed to preserve a beleaguered sphere of moral autonomy that emboldened them to employ patterns of behavior and stratagems of evasion that kept them from becoming killers at all.

Concerning the eager killers, the wife of Lieutenant Brand remembered vividly one event during a visit to her husband in Poland.

I was sitting at breakfast one morning with my husband in the garden of our lodgings when an ordinary policeman of my husband's platoon came up to us, stood stiffly at attention, and declared, "Herr Leutnant, I have not yet had breakfast." When my husband looked at him quizzically, he declared further, "I have not yet killed any Jews." It all sounded so cynical that I indignantly reprimanded the man with harsh words and called him—if I remember correctly—a scoundrel. My husband sent the policeman away and then reproached me and told me that I'd get myself in deep trouble talking that way.²⁵

Growing callousness can also be seen in the post-shooting behavior of the policemen. After Józefów and the early shootings, the men had returned to their quarters shaken and embittered, without appetite or desire to talk about what they had just done. With the relentless killing, such sensitivities were dulled. One policeman recalled, "At the lunch table some of the comrades made jokes about the experiences they'd had during an action. From their stories I could gather that they had just finished a shooting action. I remember as especially crass that one of the men said now we eat 'the brains of slaughtered Jews.'"²⁶ Only the witness found this "joke" less than hilarious.

In such an atmosphere it was quite easy for the officers and NCOs to form a "Jew hunt" patrol or firing squad simply by asking for volunteers. Most emphatic in this regard was Adolf Bittner.* "Above all I must categorically say that for the execution commandos basically enough volunteers responded to the request of the officer in charge. . . . I must add further that often there were so many volunteers that some of them had to be turned away."²⁷ Others were less categorical, noting that in addition to asking for volunteers, sometimes officers or NCOs picked from among those standing nearby, usually men whom they knew to be willing shooters. As Sergeant Bekemeier put it, "In summary one could perhaps say that in small actions, when not so many shooters were needed, there were always enough volunteers available. In larger actions, when a great many shooters were needed, there were also many volunteers, but if this did not suffice, others were also assigned."²⁸

Like Bekemeier, Walter Zimmermann* also made a distinction between the large and small executions. Concerning the latter, he noted:

In no case can I remember that anyone was forced to continue participating in the executions when he declared that he was no longer able to. As far as group and platoon actions were concerned, here I must honestly admit that with these smaller executions there were always some comrades who found it

easier to shoot Jews than did others, so that the respective commando leaders never had difficulty finding suitable shooters.²⁹

Those who did not want to go on the "Jew hunts" or participate in firing squads followed three lines of action. They made no secret of their antipathy to the killing, they never volunteered, and they kept their distance from the officers and NCOs when "Jew hunt" patrols and firing squads were being formed. Some were never chosen simply because their attitude was well known. Otto-Julius Schinke, the first man to step out at Józefów, was frequently assigned to partisan actions but never to a "Jew hunt." "It is not to be excluded," he said, "that because of this incident I was freed from other Jewish actions."³⁰ Adolf Bittner likewise credited his early and open opposition to the battalion's Jewish actions with sparing him from further involvement.

I must emphasize that from the first days I left no doubt among my comrades that I disapproved of these measures and never volunteered for them. Thus, on one of the first searches for Jews, one of my comrades clubbed a Jewish woman in my presence, and I hit him in the face. A report was made, and in that way my attitude became known to my superiors. I was never officially punished. But anyone who knows how the system works knows that outside official punishment there is the possibility for chicanery that more than makes up for punishment. Thus I was assigned Sunday duties and special watches.³¹

But Bittner was never assigned to a firing squad.

Gustav Michaelson,* who had lingered among the trucks at Józefów despite his comrades' taunts, also gained a certain immunity due to his reputation. About the frequent "Jew hunts," Michaelson recalled, "No one ever approached me concerning these operations. For these actions the officers took 'men' with them, and in their eyes I was no 'man.' Other

comrades who displayed my attitude and my behavior were also spared from such actions."³²

The tactic of keeping one's distance was invoked by Heinrich Feucht* to explain how he avoided shooting on all but one occasion. "One always had a certain freedom of movement of a few meters, and from experience I noticed very quickly that the platoon leader almost always chose the people standing next to him. I thus always attempted to take a position as far as possible from the center of events."³³ Others likewise sought to avoid shooting by staying in the background.³⁴

Sometimes distance and reputation did not suffice, and outright refusal was required to avoid killing. In Second Platoon of Third Company, Lieutenant Hoppner became one of the most zealous practitioners of the "Jew hunt" and eventually tried to impose the policy that everyone had to shoot. Some men who had never shot before then killed their first Jews.³⁵ But Arthur Rohrbaugh* could not shoot defenseless people. "It was also known to Lieutenant Hoppner that I could not do it. He had already told me on earlier occasions that I must become tougher. In this sense he once said that I too would yet learn the neck shot." On patrol in the woods with Corporal Heiden* and five other policemen, Rohrbaugh encountered three Jewish women and a child. Heiden ordered his men to shoot the Jews, but Rohrbaugh simply walked away. Heiden grabbed his gun and shot the Jews himself. Rohrbaugh credited Trapp for his suffering no negative consequences. "On account of the old man, I think, I had no trouble."³⁶

Others were more cautious and refrained from shooting only when no officer was present and they were among trusted comrades who shared their views. As Martin Detmold* recalled, "In small actions it often occurred that Jews whom we had picked up were let go again. That happened when one was sure that no superior could learn anything of it. Over time one learned how to evaluate one's comrades and if one could risk not shooting captured Jews contrary to standing orders but rather letting them go."³⁷ The battalion communications staff also claimed that

they ignored Jews they encountered in the countryside when they were laying lines on their own.³⁸ When shooting at a distance rather than giving a neck shot, at least one policeman merely fired "into the air."³⁹

How many hundreds of Jews—indeed, probably thousands—did Reserve Police Battalion 101 shoot in the course of the "Jew hunt"? No reports of such figures survive for this unit. However, we can get a sense of how important a component the "Jew hunt" was in the Final Solution from surviving reports of three other units operating in Poland.

From May to October 1943, long after the vast bulk of the Jews who had fled from the ghetto roundups and attempted to hide had already been tracked down and shot, the commander of the Order Police for the Lublin district (KdO)—these figures would therefore include the contributions of Reserve Police Battalion 101—reported to his superior in Kraków (BdO) the monthly body count of Jews shot by his men. For this six-month period, long past the killing peak in the Lublin district, the total was 1,695, or an average of nearly 283 per month. Two months were particularly prominent: August, when another large forest sweep was carried out, and October, when the escapees from the Sobibór death camp breakout were tracked down.⁴⁰

More indicative of the killing rate for the "Jew hunt" during the peak period are the reports of the Gendarmerie platoon of Warsaw. This unit of only 80 men, responsible for patrolling the nearby towns and countryside surrounding the city, was led by Lieutenant Liebscher, a notoriously energetic and eager participant in the Final Solution. His daily reports from March 26 to September 21, 1943, reflect a total of 1,094 Jews killed by his unit, for an average of nearly 14 Jews per policeman. The peak months, not unexpectedly, were April and May, when Jews were desperately seeking to escape the final liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto and had to pass through Liebscher's territory. Liebscher's reports contained detailed descriptions of a variety of daily incidents. They closed with the heading "Proceeded according to existing guidelines," followed simply by a date, place, and

number of Jews, male and female. In the end, even the heading was dropped as superfluous, and only the date, place, and number of Jewish men and women were listed, without further explanation.⁴¹

Perhaps most relevant and most closely parallel to the situation of Reserve Police Battalion 101 was that of a company of Reserve Police Battalion 133 stationed in Rawa Ruska in the neighboring district of Galicia to the east of Lublin. According to six weekly reports for the period November 1 to December 12, 1942, this company executed 481 Jews who had either evaded deportation by hiding or jumped from trains on the way to Bełżec. For this brief six-week period, therefore, the company on average killed nearly three Jews per policeman in an area that had already been cleared by deportation and was being kept *judenfrei* by the "Jew hunt."⁴²

Though the "Jew hunt" has received little attention, it was an important and statistically significant phase of the Final Solution. A not inconsiderable percentage of Jewish victims in the General Government lost their lives in this way. Statistics aside, the "Jew hunt" is a psychologically important key to the mentality of the perpetrators. Many of the German occupiers in Poland may have witnessed or participated in ghetto roundups on several occasions—in a lifetime, a few brief moments that could be easily repressed. But the "Jew hunt" was not a brief episode. It was a tenacious, remorseless, ongoing campaign in which the "hunters" tracked down and killed their "prey" in direct and personal confrontation. It was not a passing phase but an existential condition of constant readiness and intention to kill every last Jew who could be found.

15

The Last Massacres: "Harvest Festival"

ON OCTOBER 28, 1942, THE HSSPF FOR THE GENERAL GOVERNMENT, Wilhelm Krüger, decreed that eight Jewish ghettos could remain in the district of Lublin.¹ Four of the eight sites were within the security zone of Reserve Police Battalion 101: Łuków, Międzyrzec, Parczew, and Końskowola. In fact, only the first two remained as Jewish ghettos after the fall deportations, along with Piaski, Izbica, and Włodawa elsewhere in the Lublin district. Faced with the constant threat of death by starvation and exposure on the one hand, or betrayal and shooting on the other, many Jews who had fled to the forests during the deportations in October and November subsequently returned to the reinstated ghettos of Łuków and Międzyrzec. The winter weather made life in the forests increasingly difficult and precarious; any

confirmed in other accounts and occurred all too often. The Holocaust, after all, is a story with far too few heroes and all too many perpetrators and victims. What is wrong with the German portrayals is a multifaceted distortion in perspective. The policemen were all but silent about Polish help to Jews and German punishment for such help. Almost nothing was said of the German role in inciting the Polish "betrayals" the policemen so hypocritically condemned. Nor was any note made of the fact that large units of murderous auxiliaries—the notorious Hiwis—were not recruited from the Polish population, in stark contrast to other nationalities in pervasively anti-Semitic eastern Europe. In some ways, therefore, the German policemen's comments about Poles reveal as much about the former as the latter.

18

Ordinary Men

WHY DID MOST MEN IN RESERVE POLICE BATTALION 101 become killers, while only a minority of perhaps 10 percent—and certainly no more than 20 percent—did not? A number of explanations have been invoked in the past to explain such behavior: wartime brutalization, racism, segmentation and routinization of the task, special selection of the perpetrators, careerism, obedience to orders, deference to authority, ideological indoctrination, and conformity. These factors are applicable in varying degrees, but none without qualification.

Wars have invariably been accompanied by atrocities. As John Dower has noted in his remarkable book, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War*, "war hates" induce "war crimes."¹ Above all, when deeply embedded negative racial

stereotypes are added to the brutalization inherent in sending armed men to kill one another on a massive scale, the fragile tissue of war conventions and rules of combat is even more frequently and viciously broken on all sides. Hence the difference between more conventional war—between Germany and the Western allies, for example—and the “race wars” of the recent past. From the Nazi “war of destruction” in eastern Europe and “war against the Jews” to the “war without mercy” in the Pacific and most recently Vietnam, soldiers have all too often tortured and slaughtered unarmed civilians and helpless prisoners, and committed numerous other atrocities. Dower’s account of entire American units in the Pacific openly boasting of a “take no prisoners” policy and routinely collecting body parts of Japanese soldiers as battlefield souvenirs is chilling reading for anyone who smugly assumes that war atrocities were a monopoly of the Nazi regime.

War, and especially race war, leads to brutalization, which leads to atrocity. This common thread, it could be argued, runs from Bromberg² and Babi Yar through New Guinea and Manila and on to My Lai. But if war, and especially race war, was a vital context within which Reserve Police Battalion 101 operated (as I shall indeed argue), how much does the notion of wartime brutalization explain the specific behavior of the policemen at Józefów and after? In particular, what distinctions must be made between various kinds of war crimes and the mind-sets of the men who commit them?

Many of the most notorious wartime atrocities—Oradour and Malmédy, the Japanese rampage through Manila, the American slaughter of prisoners and mutilation of corpses on many Pacific islands, and the massacre at My Lai—involved a kind of “battlefield frenzy.” Soldiers who were injured to violence, numbed to the taking of human life, embittered over their own casualties, and frustrated by the tenacity of an insidious and seemingly inhuman enemy sometimes exploded and at other times grimly resolved to have their revenge at the first opportunity. Though atrocities of this kind were too often tolerated, condoned, or

facily (sometimes even explicitly) encouraged by elements of the command structure, they did not represent official government policy.³ Despite the hate-filled propaganda of each nation and the exterminatory rhetoric of many leaders and commanders, such atrocities still represented a breakdown in discipline and the chain of command. They were not “standard operating procedure.”

Other kinds of atrocity, lacking the immediacy of battlefield frenzy and fully expressing official government policy, decidedly were “standard operating procedure.” The fire-bombing of German and Japanese cities, the enslavement and murderous maltreatment of foreign laborers in German camps and factories or along the Siam-Burma railroad, the reprisal shooting of a hundred civilians for every German soldier killed by partisan attack in Yugoslavia or elsewhere in eastern Europe—these were not the spontaneous explosions or cruel revenge of brutalized men but the methodically executed policies of government.

Both kinds of atrocities occur in the brutalizing context of war, but the men who carry out “atrocity by policy” are in a different state of mind. They act not out of frenzy, bitterness, and frustration but with calculation. Clearly the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101, in implementing the systematic Nazi policy of exterminating European Jewry, belong in the second category. Except for a few of the oldest men who were veterans of World War I, and a few NCOs who had been transferred to Poland from Russia, the men of the battalion had not seen battle or encountered a deadly enemy. Most of them had not fired a shot in anger or ever been fired on, much less lost comrades fighting at their side. Thus, wartime brutalization through prior combat was not an immediate experience directly influencing the policemen’s behavior at Józefów. Once the killing began, however, the men became increasingly brutalized. As in combat, the horrors of the initial encounter eventually became routine, and the killing became progressively easier. In this sense, brutalization was not the cause but the effect of these men’s behavior.

The context of war must surely be taken into account in a more

general way than as a cause of combat-induced brutalization and frenzy, however. War, a struggle between "our people" and "the enemy," creates a polarized world in which "the enemy" is easily objectified and removed from the community of human obligation. War is the most conducive environment in which governments can adopt "atrocious by policy" and encounter few difficulties in implementing it. As John Dower has observed, "The Dehumanization of the Other contributed immeasurably to the psychological distancing that facilitated killing."⁴ Distancing, not frenzy and brutalization, is one of the keys to the behavior of Reserve Police Battalion 101. War and negative racial stereotyping were two mutually reinforcing factors in this distancing.

Many scholars of the Holocaust, especially Raul Hilberg, have emphasized the bureaucratic and administrative aspects of the destruction process.⁵ This approach emphasizes the degree to which modern bureaucratic life fosters a functional and physical distancing in the same way that war and negative racial stereotyping promote a psychological distancing between perpetrator and victim. Indeed, many of the perpetrators of the Holocaust were so-called desk murderers whose role in the mass extermination was greatly facilitated by the bureaucratic nature of their participation. Their jobs frequently consisted of tiny steps in the overall killing process, and they performed them in a routine manner, never seeing the victims their actions affected. Segmented, routinized, and depersonalized, the job of the bureaucrat or specialist—whether it involved confiscating property, scheduling trains, drafting legislation, sending telegrams, or compiling lists—could be performed without confronting the reality of mass murder. Such a luxury, of course, was not enjoyed by the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101, who were quite literally saturated in the blood of victims shot at point-blank range. No one confronted the reality of mass murder more directly than the men in the woods at Józefów. Segmentation and routinization, the depersonalizing aspects of bureaucratized killing, cannot explain the battalion's initial behavior there.

The facilitating psychological effect of a division of labor for the

killing process was not totally negligible, however. While members of the battalion did indeed carry out further shootings single-handed at Serokomla, Talcyn, and Kock, and later in the course of innumerable "Jew hunts," the larger actions involved joint ventures and splitting of duties. The policemen always provided the cordon, and many were directly involved in driving the Jews from their homes to the assembly point and then to the death trains. But at the largest mass shootings, "specialists" were brought in to do the killing. At Łomazy, the Hiwis would have done the shooting by themselves if they had not been too drunk to finish the job. At Majdaneck and Poniatowa during *Erntefest*, the Security Police of Lublin furnished the shooters. The deportations to Treblinka had an added advantage psychologically. Not only was the killing done by others, but it was done out of sight of the men who cleared the ghettos and forced the Jews onto the death trains. After the sheer horror of Józefów, the policemen's detachment, their sense of not really participating in or being responsible for their subsequent actions in ghetto clearing and cordon duty, is stark testimony to the desensitizing effects of division of labor.

To what degree, if any, did the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101 represent a process of special selection for the particular task of implementing the Final Solution? According to recent research by the German historian Hans-Heinrich Wilhelm, considerable time and effort was expended by the personnel department of Reinhard Heydrich's Reich Security Main Office to select and assign officers for the Einsatzgruppen.⁶ Himmler, anxious to get the right man for the right job, was also careful in his selection of Higher SS and Police Leaders and others in key positions. Hence his insistence on keeping the unsavory Globocnik in Lublin, despite his past record of corruption and objections to his appointment even within the Nazi Party.⁷ In her book *Into That Darkness*, a classic study of Franz Stangl, the commandant of Treblinka, Gitta Sereny concluded that special care must have been taken to choose just 96 of some 400 people to be transferred from the euthanasia program in

Germany to the death camps in Poland.⁸ Did any similar policy of selection, the careful choosing of personnel particularly suited for mass murder, determine the makeup of Reserve Police Battalion 101?

Concerning the rank and file, the answer is a qualified no. By most criteria, in fact, just the opposite was the case. By age, geographical origin, and social background, the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101 were least likely to be considered apt material out of which to mold future mass killers. On the basis of these criteria, the rank and file—middle-aged, mostly working-class, from Hamburg—did not represent special selection or even random selection but for all practical purposes negative selection for the task at hand.

In one respect, however, an earlier and more general form of selection may have taken place. The high percentage (25 percent) of Party members among the battalion's rank and file, particularly disproportionate for those of working-class origin, suggests that the initial conscription of reservists—long before their use as killers in the Final Solution was envisaged—was not entirely random. If Himmler at first thought of the reservists as a potential internal security force while large numbers of active police were stationed abroad, it is logical that he would have been leery of conscripting men of dubious political reliability. One solution would have been to draft middle-aged Party members for reserve duty in higher proportions than from the population at large. But the existence of such a policy is merely a suspicion, for no documents have been found to prove that Party members were deliberately drafted into the reserve units of the Order Police.

The case for special selection of officers is even more difficult to make. By SS standards, Major Trapp was a patriotic German but traditional and overly sentimental—what in Nazi Germany was scornfully considered both “weak” and “reactionary.” It is certainly revealing that despite the conscious effort of Himmler and Heydrich to amalgamate the SS and the police, and despite the fact that Trapp was a decorated World War I veteran, career

policeman, and *Alter Kämpfer* who joined the Party in 1932, he was never taken into the SS. He was certainly not given command of Reserve Police Battalion 101 and specifically assigned to the Lublin district because of his presumed suitability as a mass killer.

The remaining officers of the battalion scarcely evidence a policy of careful selection either. Despite their impeccable Party credentials, both Hoffmann and Wohlauf had been shunted into slow-track careers by SS standards. Wohlauf's career in the Order Police in particular was marked by mediocre, even negative, evaluations. Ironically, it was the relatively old (forty-eight) Reserve Lieutenant Gnade, not the two young SS captains, who turned out to be the most ruthless and sadistic killer, a man who took pleasure in his work. Finally, the assignment of Reserve Lieutenant Buchmann could scarcely have been made by anyone consciously selecting prospective killers.

In short, Reserve Police Battalion 101 was not sent to Lublin to murder Jews because it was composed of men specially selected or deemed particularly suited for the task. On the contrary, the battalion was the “dregs” of the manpower pool available at that stage of the war. It was employed to kill Jews because it was the only kind of unit available for such behind-the-lines duties. Most likely, Globocnik simply assumed as a matter of course that whatever battalion came his way would be up to this murderous task, regardless of its composition. If so, he may have been disappointed in the immediate aftermath of Józefów, but in the long run events proved him correct.

Many studies of Nazi killers have suggested a different kind of selection, namely self-selection to the Party and SS by unusually violence-prone people. Shortly after the war, Theodor Adorno and others developed the notion of the “authoritarian personality.” Feeling that situational or environmental influences had already been studied, they chose to focus on hitherto neglected psychological factors. They began with the hypothesis that certain deep-seated personality traits made “potentially fascistic individuals” particularly susceptible to antidemocratic propa-

ganda.⁹ Their investigations led them to compile a list of the crucial traits (tested for by the so-called F-scale) of the "authoritarian personality": rigid adherence to conventional values; submissiveness to authority figures; aggressiveness toward outgroups; opposition to introspection, reflection, and creativity; a tendency to superstition and stereotyping; preoccupation with power and "toughness"; destructiveness and cynicism; projectivity ("the disposition to believe that wild and dangerous things go on in the world" and "the projection outward of unconscious emotional impulses"); and an exaggerated concern with sexuality. They concluded that the antidemocratic individual "harbors strong underlying aggressive impulses" and fascist movements allow him to project this aggression through sanctioned violence against ideologically targeted outgroups.¹⁰ Zygmunt Bauman has summed up this approach as follows: "Nazism was cruel because Nazis were cruel; and the Nazis were cruel because cruel people tended to become Nazis."¹¹ He is highly critical of the methodology of Adorno and his colleagues, which neglected social influences, and of the implication that ordinary people did not commit fascist atrocities.

Subsequent advocates of a psychological explanation have modified the Adorno approach by more explicitly merging psychological and situational (social, cultural, and institutional) factors. Studying a group of men who had volunteered for the SS, John Steiner concluded that "a self-selection process for brutality appears to exist."¹² He proposed the notion of the "sleeper"—certain personality characteristics of violence-prone individuals that usually remain latent but can be activated under certain conditions. In the chaos of post-World War I Germany, people testing high on the F-scale were attracted in disproportionate numbers to National Socialism as a "subculture of violence," and in particular to the SS, which provided the incentives and support for the full realization of their violent potential. After World War II, such men reverted to law-abiding behavior. Thus Steiner concludes that "the situation tended to

be the most immediate determinant of SS behavior" in rousing the "sleeper."

Ervin Staub accepts the notion that "some people become perpetrators as a result of their personality; they are 'self-selected.'" But he concludes that Steiner's "sleeper" is a very common trait and that under particular circumstances most people have a capacity for extreme violence and the destruction of human life.¹³ Indeed, Staub is quite emphatic that "ordinary psychological processes and normal, common human motivations and certain basic but not inevitable tendencies in human thought and feeling" are the "primary sources" of the human capacity for mass destruction of human life. "Evil that arises out of ordinary thinking and is committed by ordinary people is the norm, not the exception."¹⁴

If Staub makes Steiner's "sleeper" unexceptional, Zygmunt Bauman goes so far as to dismiss it as a "metaphysical prop." For Bauman "cruelty is social in its origin much more than it is characterological."¹⁵ Bauman argues that most people "slip" into the roles society provides them, and he is very critical of any implication that "faulty personalities" are the cause of human cruelty. For him the exception—the real "sleeper"—is the rare individual who has the capacity to resist authority and assert moral autonomy but who is seldom aware of this hidden strength until put to the test.

Those who emphasize the relative or absolute importance of situational factors over individual psychological characteristics invariably point to Philip Zimbardo's Stanford prison experiment.¹⁶ Screening out everyone who scored beyond the normal range on a battery of psychological tests, including one that measured "rigid adherence to conventional values and a submissive, uncritical attitude toward authority" (i.e., the F-scale for the "authoritarian personality"), Zimbardo randomly divided his homogeneous "normal" test group into guards and prisoners and placed them in a simulated prison. Though outright physical violence was barred, within six days the inherent structure of

prison life—in which guards operating on three-man shifts had to devise ways of controlling the more numerous prisoner population—had produced rapidly escalating brutality, humiliation, and dehumanization. “Most dramatic and distressing to us was the observation of the ease with which sadistic behavior could be elicited in individuals who were not ‘sadistic types.’” The prison situation alone, Zimbardo concluded, was “a sufficient condition to produce aberrant, anti-social behavior.”

Perhaps most relevant to this study of Reserve Police Battalion 101 is the spectrum of behavior that Zimbardo discovered in his sample of eleven guards. About one-third of the guards emerged as “cruel and tough.” They constantly invented new forms of harassment and enjoyed their newfound power to behave cruelly and arbitrarily. A middle group of guards was “tough but fair.” They “played by the rules” and did not go out of their way to mistreat prisoners. Only two (i.e., less than 20 percent) emerged as “good guards” who did not punish prisoners and even did small favors for them.¹⁷

Zimbardo’s spectrum of guard behavior bears an uncanny resemblance to the groupings that emerged within Reserve Police Battalion 101: a nucleus of increasingly enthusiastic killers who volunteered for the firing squads and “Jew hunts”; a larger group of policemen who performed as shooters and ghetto clearers when assigned but who did not seek opportunities to kill (and in some cases refrained from killing, contrary to standing orders, when no one was monitoring their actions); and a small group (less than 20 percent) of refusers and evaders.

In addition to this striking resemblance between Zimbardo’s guards and the policemen of Reserve Police Battalion 101, one other factor must be taken into account in weighing the relevance of “self-selection” on the basis of psychological predisposition. The battalion was composed of reserve lieutenants and men who had simply been conscripted after the outbreak of the war. The noncommissioned officers had joined the Order Police before the war because they hoped either to pursue a career in the police (in this case the metropolitan police of Hamburg, not the

political police or Gestapo) or to avoid being drafted into the army. In these circumstances it is difficult to perceive any mechanism of self-selection through which the reserve battalions of the Order Police could have attracted an unusual concentration of men of violent predisposition. Indeed, if Nazi Germany offered unusually numerous career paths that sanctioned and rewarded violent behavior, random conscription from the remaining population—already drained of its most violence-prone individuals—would arguably produce even less than an average number of “authoritarian personalities.” Self-selection on the basis of personality traits, in short, offers little to explain the behavior of the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101.

If special selection played little role and self-selection seemingly none, what about self-interest and careerism? Those who admitted being among the shooters did not justify their behavior on the basis of career considerations. In contrast, however, the issue of careerism was most clearly articulated by several of those who did not shoot. Lieutenant Buchmann and Gustav Michaelson, in explaining their exceptional behavior, noted that unlike their fellow officers or comrades, they had well-established civilian careers to return to and did not need to consider possible negative repercussions on a future career in the police.¹⁸ Buchmann was clearly reluctant to have the prosecution use his behavior against the defendants and thus may have emphasized the career factor as constituting less of a moral indictment of men who acted differently. But Michaelson’s testimony was not influenced by any such calculations or reticence.

In addition to the testimony of those who felt free of career considerations, there is the behavior of those who clearly did not. Captain Hoffmann is the classic example of a man driven by careerism. Crippled by stomach cramps—psychosomatically induced, at least in part, if not entirely, by the murderous actions of the battalion—he tenaciously tried to hide his illness from his superiors rather than use it to escape his situation. He risked his men’s open suspicion of cowardice in a vain attempt to keep his company command. And when he was finally relieved, he bitterly

contested that career-threatening development as well. Given the number of men from Reserve Police Battalion 101 who remained in the police after the war, career ambitions must have played an important role for many others as well.

Among the perpetrators, of course, orders have traditionally been the most frequently cited explanation for their own behavior. The authoritarian political culture of the Nazi dictatorship, savagely intolerant of overt dissent, along with the standard military necessity of obedience to orders and ruthless enforcement of discipline, created a situation in which individuals *had no choice*. Orders were orders, and no one in such a political climate could be expected to disobey them, they insisted. Disobedience surely meant the concentration camp if not immediate execution, possibly for their families as well. The perpetrators had found themselves in a situation of impossible "duress" and therefore could not be held responsible for their actions. Such, at least, is what defendants said in trial after trial in postwar Germany.

There is a general problem with this explanation, however. Quite simply, in the past forty-five years no defense attorney or defendant in any of the hundreds of postwar trials has been able to document a single case in which refusal to obey an order to kill unarmed civilians resulted in the allegedly inevitable dire punishment.¹⁹ The punishment or censure that occasionally did result from such disobedience was never commensurate with the gravity of the crimes the men had been asked to commit.

A variation on the explanation of inescapable orders is "putative duress." Even if the consequences of disobedience would not have been so dire, the men who complied could not have known that at the time. They sincerely thought that they had had no choice when faced with orders to kill. Undoubtedly in many units zealous officers bullied their men with ominous threats. In Reserve Police Battalion 101, as we have seen, certain officers and NCOs, like Drucker and Hergert, tried to make everyone shoot initially, even if they subsequently released those not up to continuing. And other officers and NCOs, like Hoppner and

Ostmann, picked out individuals known as nonshooters and pressured them to kill, sometimes successfully.

But as a general rule, even putative duress does not hold for Reserve Police Battalion 101. From the time Major Trapp, with choked voice and tears streaming down his cheeks, offered to excuse those "not up to it" at Józefów and protected the first man to take up his offer from Captain Hoffmann's wrath, a situation of putative duress did not exist in the battalion. Trapp's subsequent behavior, not just excusing Lieutenant Buchmann from participation in Jewish actions but clearly protecting a man who made no secret of his disapproval, only made matters clearer. A set of unwritten "ground rules" emerged within the battalion. For small shooting actions, volunteers were requested or shooters were chosen from among those who were known to be willing to kill or who simply did not make the effort to keep their distance when firing squads were being formed. For large actions, those who would not kill were not compelled. Even officers' attempts to force individual nonshooters to kill could be refused, for the men knew that the officers could not appeal to Major Trapp.

Everyone but the most open critics, like Buchmann, did have to participate in cordon duty and roundups, but in such circumstances individuals could still make their own decisions about shooting. The testimonies are filled with stories of men who disobeyed standing orders during the ghetto-clearing operations and did not shoot infants or those attempting to hide or escape. Even men who admitted to having taken part in firing squads claimed not to have shot in the confusion and melee of the ghetto clearings or out on patrol when their behavior could not be closely observed.

If obedience to orders out of fear of dire punishment is not a valid explanation, what about "obedience to authority" in the more general sense used by Stanley Milgram—deference simply as a product of socialization and evolution, a "deeply ingrained behavior tendency" to comply with the directives of those positioned hierarchically above, even to the point of performing repugnant actions in violation of "universally accepted" moral

norms.²⁰ In a series of now famous experiments, Milgram tested the individual's ability to resist authority that was not backed by any external coercive threat. Naive volunteer subjects were instructed by a "scientific authority" in an alleged learning experiment to inflict an escalating series of fake electric shocks upon an actor/victim, who responded with carefully programmed "voice feedback"—an escalating series of complaints, cries of pain, calls for help, and finally fateful silence. In the standard voice feedback experiment, two-thirds of Milgram's subjects were "obedient" to the point of inflicting extreme pain.²¹

Several variations on the experiment produced significantly different results. If the actor/victim was shielded so that the subject could hear and see no response, obedience was much greater. If the subject had both visual and voice feedback, compliance to the extreme fell to 40 percent. If the subject had to touch the actor/victim physically by forcing his hand onto an electric plate to deliver the shocks, obedience dropped to 30 percent. If a nonauthority figure gave orders, obedience was nil. If the naive subject performed a subsidiary or accessory task but did not personally inflict the electric shocks, obedience was nearly total. In contrast, if the subject was part of an actor/peer group that staged a carefully planned refusal to continue following the directions of the authority figure, the vast majority of subjects (90 percent) joined their peer group and desisted as well. If the subject was given complete discretion as to the level of electric shock to administer, all but a few sadists consistently delivered a minimal shock. When not under the direct surveillance of the scientist, many of the subjects "cheated" by giving lower shocks than prescribed, even though they were unable to confront authority and abandon the experiment.²²

Milgram adduced a number of factors to account for such an unexpectedly high degree of potentially murderous obedience to a noncoercive authority. An evolutionary bias favors the survival of people who can adapt to hierarchical situations and organized social activity. Socialization through family, school, and military service, as well as a whole array of rewards and punishments

within society generally, reinforces and internalizes a tendency toward obedience. A seemingly voluntary entry into an authority system "perceived" as legitimate creates a strong sense of obligation. Those within the hierarchy adopt the authority's perspective or "definition of the situation" (in this case, as an important scientific experiment rather than the infliction of physical torture). The notions of "loyalty, duty, discipline," requiring competent performance in the eyes of authority, become moral imperatives overriding any identification with the victim. Normal individuals enter an "agentic state" in which they are the instrument of another's will. In such a state, they no longer feel personally responsible for the content of their actions but only for how well they perform.²³

Once entangled, people encounter a series of "binding factors" or "cementing mechanisms" that make disobedience or refusal even more difficult. The momentum of the process discourages any new or contrary initiative. The "situational obligation" or etiquette makes refusal appear improper, rude, or even an immoral breach of obligation. And a socialized anxiety over potential punishment for disobedience acts as a further deterrent.²⁴

Milgram made direct reference to the similarities between human behavior in his experiments and under the Nazi regime. He concluded, "Men are led to kill with little difficulty."²⁵ Milgram was aware of significant differences in the two situations, however. Quite explicitly he acknowledged that the subjects of his experiments were assured that no permanent physical damage would result from their actions. The subjects were under no threat or duress themselves. And finally, the actor/victims were not the object of "intense devaluation" through systematic indoctrination of the subjects. In contrast, the killers of the Third Reich lived in a police state where the consequences of disobedience could be drastic and they were subjected to intense indoctrination, but they also knew they were not only inflicting pain but destroying human life.²⁶

Was the massacre at Józefów a kind of radical Milgram

experiment that took place in a Polish forest with real killers and victims rather than in a social psychology laboratory with naive subjects and actor/victims? Are the actions of Reserve Police Battalion 101 explained by Milgram's observations and conclusions? There are some difficulties in explaining Józefów as a case of deference to authority, for none of Milgram's experimental variations exactly paralleled the historical situation at Józefów, and the relevant differences constitute too many variables to draw firm conclusions in any scientific sense. Nonetheless, many of Milgram's insights find graphic confirmation in the behavior and testimony of the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101.

At Józefów the authority system to which the men were responding was quite complex, unlike the laboratory situation. Major Trapp represented not a strong but a very weak authority figure. He weepingly conceded the frightful nature of the task at hand and invited the older reserve policemen to excuse themselves. If Trapp was a weak immediate authority figure, he did invoke a more distant system of authority that was anything but weak. The orders for the massacre had been received from the highest quarter, he said. Trapp himself and the battalion as a unit were bound by the orders of this distant authority, even if Trapp's concern for his men exempted individual policemen.

To what were the vast majority of Trapp's men responding when they did not step out? Was it to authority as represented either by Trapp or his superiors? Were they responding to Trapp not primarily as an authority figure, but as an individual—a popular and beloved officer whom they would not leave in the lurch? And what about other factors? Milgram himself notes that people far more frequently invoke authority than conformity to explain their behavior, for only the former seems to absolve them of personal responsibility. "Subjects deny conformity and embrace obedience as the explanation of their actions."²⁷ Yet many policemen admitted responding to the pressures of conformity—how would they be seen in the eyes of their comrades?—not authority. On Milgram's own view, such admission was the tip of the iceberg, and this factor must have been

even more important than the men conceded in their testimony. If so, conformity assumes a more central role than authority at Józefów.

Milgram tested the effects of peer pressure in bolstering the individual's capacity to resist authority. When actor/collaborators bolted, the naive subjects found it much easier to follow. Milgram also attempted to test for the reverse, that is, the role of conformity in intensifying the capacity to inflict pain.²⁸ Three subjects, two collaborators and one naive, were instructed by the scientist/authority figure to inflict pain at the lowest level anyone among them proposed. When a naive subject acting alone had been given full discretion to set the level of electric shock, the subject had almost invariably inflicted minimal pain. But when the two collaborators, always going first, proposed a step-by-step escalation of electric shock, the naive subject was significantly influenced. Though the individual variation was wide, the average result was the selection of a level of electric shock halfway between no increase and a consistent step-by-step increase. This is still short of a test of peer pressure as compensation for the deficiencies of weak authority. There was no weeping but beloved scientist inviting subjects to leave the electric shock panel while other men—with whom the subjects had comradesly relations and before whom they would feel compelled to appear manly and tough—stayed and continued to inflict painful shocks. Indeed, it would be almost impossible to construct an experiment to test such a scenario, which would require true comradesly relations between a naive subject and the actor/collaborators. Nonetheless, the mutual reinforcement of authority and conformity seems to have been clearly demonstrated by Milgram.

If the multifaceted nature of authority at Józefów and the key role of conformity among the policemen are not quite parallel to Milgram's experiments, they nonetheless render considerable support to his conclusions, and some of his observations are clearly confirmed. Direct proximity to the horror of the killing significantly increased the number of men who would no longer

comply. On the other hand, with the division of labor and removal of the killing process to the death camps, the men felt scarcely any responsibility at all for their actions. As in Milgram's experiment without direct surveillance, many policemen did not comply with orders when not directly supervised; they mitigated their behavior when they could do so without personal risk but were unable to refuse participation in the battalion's killing operations openly.

One factor that admittedly was not the focal point of Milgram's experiments, indoctrination, and another that was only partially touched upon, conformity, require further investigation. Milgram did stipulate "definition of the situation" or ideology, that which gives meaning and coherence to the social occasion, as a crucial antecedent of deference to authority. Controlling the manner in which people interpret their world is one way to control behavior, Milgram argues. If they accept authority's ideology, action follows logically and willingly. Hence "ideological justification is vital in obtaining willing obedience, for it permits the person to see his behavior as serving a desirable end."²⁹

In Milgram's experiments, "overarching ideological justification" was present in the form of a tacit and unquestioned faith in the goodness of science and its contribution to progress. But there was no systematic attempt to "devalue" the actor/victim or inculcate the subject with a particular ideology. Milgram hypothesized that the more destructive behavior of people in Nazi Germany, under much less direct surveillance, was a consequence of an internalization of authority achieved "through relatively long processes of indoctrination, of a sort not possible within the course of a laboratory hour."³⁰

To what degree, then, did the conscious inculcation of Nazi doctrines shape the behavior of the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101? Were they subjected to such a barrage of clever and insidious propaganda that they lost the capacity for independent thought and responsible action? Were devaluation of the Jews and exhortations to kill them central to this indoctrination?

The popular term for intense indoctrination and psychological manipulation, emerging from the Korean War experience of some captured American soldiers, is "brainwashing." Were these killers in some general sense "brainwashed"?

Unquestionably, Himmler set a premium on the ideological indoctrination of members of the SS and the police. They were to be not just efficient soldiers and policemen but ideologically motivated warriors, crusaders against the political and racial enemies of the Third Reich.³¹ Indoctrination efforts embraced not only the elite organizations of the SS but also the Order Police, extending even to the lowly reserve police, though the reservists scarcely fit Himmler's notion of the new Nazi racial aristocracy. For instance, membership in the SS required proof of ancestry untainted by Jewish blood through five generations. In contrast, even "first-degree *Mischlinge*" (people with two Jewish grandparents) and their spouses were not banned from service in the reserve police until October 1942; "second-degree *Mischlinge*" (one Jewish grandparent) and their spouses were not banned until April 1943.³²

In its guidelines for basic training of January 23, 1940, the Order Police Main Office decreed that in addition to physical fitness, use of weapons, and police techniques, all Order Police battalions were to be strengthened in character and ideology.³³ Basic training included a one-month unit on "ideological education." One topic for the first week was "Race as the Basis of Our World View," followed the second week by "Maintaining the Purity of Blood."³⁴ Beyond basic training, the police battalions, both active and reserve, were to receive continued military and ideological training from their officers.³⁵ Officers were required to attend one-week workshops that included one hour of ideological instruction for themselves and one hour of practice in the ideological instruction of others.³⁶ A five-part study plan of January 1941 included the subsections "Understanding of Race as the Basis of Our World View," "The Jewish Question in Germany," and "Maintaining the Purity of German Blood."³⁷ Explicit instructions were issued on the spirit and frequency of

this continuing ideological training, for which the National Socialist world view was to be the "plumb line." Every day, or at least every other day, the men were to be informed about current events and their proper understanding in ideological perspective. Every week officers were to hold thirty- to forty-five-minute sessions in which they delivered a short lecture or read an edifying excerpt from suggested books or specially prepared SS pamphlets. The officers were to choose some theme—loyalty, comradeship, the offensive spirit—through which the educational goals of National Socialism could be clearly expressed. Monthly sessions were to be held on the most important themes of the time and could feature officers and educational personnel of the SS and Party.³⁸

The officers of Reserve Police Battalion 101 obviously complied with these directives on ideological education. In December 1942 Captains Hoffmann and Wohlauf and Lieutenant Grade were recognized for their activities "in the area of ideological training and care for the troops." They were each awarded a book to be presented by their commanding officer.³⁹ Himmler's undoubted intentions aside, however, a look at the actual materials used to indoctrinate Reserve Police Battalion 101 raises serious doubts about the adequacy of SS indoctrination as an explanation for the men becoming killers.

Two kinds of Order Police educational materials are preserved in the German Federal Archives (Bundesarchiv) in Koblenz. The first are two series of weekly circulars issued by the department for "ideological education" of the Order Police between 1940 and 1944.⁴⁰ A few of the lead articles were written by such Nazi luminaries and noted ideological firebrands as Joseph Goebbels, Alfred Rosenberg (Hitler's minister for occupied Russia), and Walter Gross (the head of the Party's Office of Racial Politics). The general racist perspective was of course pervasive. Nonetheless, in some two hundred issues altogether, relatively little space was devoted *explicitly* to anti-Semitism and the Jewish question. One issue, "Jewry and Criminality"—exceptionally ponderous even by the quite undistinguished standards of the

two series—concluded that alleged Jewish characteristics, such as "immoderateness," "vanity," "curiosity," "the denial of reality," "soullessness," "stupidity," "malice," and "brutality," were the exact characteristics of the "perfect criminal."⁴¹ Such prose may have put readers to sleep; it certainly did not turn them into killers.

The only other article devoted entirely to the Jewish question, on the back page in December 1941, was entitled "A Goal of This War: Europe Free of Jews." It noted ominously that "the word of the Führer, that a new war instigated by the Jews would not bring about the collapse of anti-Semitic Germany but on the contrary the end of the Jews, was now being carried out." "The definitive solution of the Jewish problem, that is, not only depriving them of power but actually removing this parasitical race from the family of European peoples," was imminent. "What appeared impossible two years ago was now becoming reality step by step: at the end of this war there would exist a Europe free of Jews."⁴²

Recalling Hitler's prophecy and invoking his authority in connection with the ultimate goal of a "Europe free of Jews" was not, of course, peculiar to SS indoctrination materials. On the contrary, the same message was widely circulated to the general public. How little these materials were directed at "brainwashing" the reserve police into becoming mass murderers, moreover, can be seen from another article of September 20, 1942, the single item in the entire two series devoted to the reserve police. Far from steeling them to be superhumanly inhuman to accomplish great tasks, the article assumed that the reserve police were doing nothing of noticeable importance. To boost their morale, presumably threatened above all by boredom, "older reservists" were assured that no matter how innocuous their jobs might seem, in total war "everyone is important."⁴³ By this time the "older reservists" of Reserve Police Battalion 101 had carried out the mass shootings at Józefów and Łomazy and the initial deportations from Parzew and Międzyrzec. They stood on the eve of a climactic and murderous six-week assault on

the ghettos of northern Lublin. It is unlikely any of them would have found this article terribly relevant, much less inspiring.

A series of special pamphlets (four to six a year) "for the ideological education of the Order Police" constituted a second group of indoctrination materials. In 1941 one issue covered "The Blood Community of the German Peoples" and "The Great German Empire."⁴⁴ In 1942 there was an issue entitled "Germany Reorganizes Europe," and a "special issue" called "SS Man and the Question of Blood."⁴⁵ A large combined issue in 1943 was devoted to "The Politics of Race."⁴⁶ Beginning with the 1942 special issue on the question of blood but above all in the 1943 issue "The Politics of Race," the treatment of racial doctrine and the Jewish question became very thorough and systematic. The German "people" (*Volk*) or "blood community" (*Blutsgemeinschaft*) was comprised of a mixture of six closely related European races, the largest (50 to 60 percent) being the Nordic race. Shaped by a severe northern climate that ruthlessly eliminated weak elements, the Nordic race was superior to any other in the world, as could be seen from German cultural and military achievements. The German *Volk* faced a constant struggle for survival ordained by nature, according to whose laws "all weak and inferior are destroyed" and "only the strong and powerful continue to propagate." To win this struggle, the *Volk* needed to do two things: conquer living space to provide for further population growth and preserve the purity of German blood. The fate of peoples who did not expand their numbers or preserve their racial purity could be seen in the examples of Sparta and Rome.

The main threat to a healthy awareness of the need for territorial expansion and racial purity came from doctrines propagating the essential equality of mankind. The first such doctrine was Christianity, spread by the Jew Paul. The second was Liberalism, emerging from the French Revolution—"the uprising of the racially inferior"—instigated by the Jew-ridden Freemasons. The third and greatest threat was Marxism/Bolshevism, authored by the Jew Karl Marx.

"The Jews are a racial mixture, which in contrast to all other peoples and races, preserves its essential character first of all through its parasitical instinct." With no regard for either consistency or logic, the pamphlet then asserted that the Jew kept his own race pure while striking at the existence of his host race through race mixing. No coexistence was possible between a race-conscious people and the Jews, only a struggle that would be won when "the last Jew had left our part of the earth." The present war was just such a struggle, one that would decide the fate of Europe. "With the destruction of the Jews," the last threat of European collapse would be removed.

For what explicit purpose were these pamphlets written? What conclusions did this review of the basic tenets of National Socialist race thinking urge upon the reader? Neither "The Question of Blood" nor "The Politics of Race" ended with a call to eliminate the racial enemy. Rather they concluded with exhortations to give birth to more Germans. The racial battle was in part a demographic battle determined by the laws of "fertility" and "selection." War was "counterselection in pure form," for not only did the best fall on the field of battle, but they did so before having children. "The victory of arms" required a "victory of children." As the SS represented a selection of predominantly Nordic elements within the German people, SS men had an obligation to marry early, choose young, racially pure, and fertile brides, and have large numbers of children.

A number of factors must be kept in mind, therefore, in evaluating the indoctrination of the reserve police through pamphlets such as these. First, the most detailed and thorough pamphlet was not even issued until 1943, after the northern Lublin security zone of Reserve Police Battalion 101 was virtually "free of Jews." It appeared too late to have played a role in indoctrinating this battalion for mass murder. Second, the 1942 pamphlet was clearly directed at the family obligations of the young SS man and particularly irrelevant to middle-aged reservists who had long ago made their decisions about marriage partner and size of family. Thus, even though available, it would

have seemed singularly inappropriate as the basis for one of the battalion's weekly or monthly indoctrination sessions.

Third, the age of the men affected their susceptibility to indoctrination in another way as well. Many of the Nazi perpetrators were very young men. They had been raised in a world in which Nazi values were the only "moral norms" they knew. It could be argued that such young men, schooled and formed solely under the conditions of the Nazi dictatorship, simply did not know any better. Killing Jews did not conflict with the value system they had grown up with, and hence indoctrination was much easier. Whatever the merits of such an argument, it clearly does not hold for the predominantly middle-aged men of Reserve Police Battalion 101. They were educated and spent their formative years in the pre-1933 period. Many came from a social milieu that was relatively unresponsive to National Socialism. They knew perfectly well the moral norms of German society before the Nazis. They had earlier standards by which to judge the Nazi policies they were asked to carry out.

Fourth, ideological tracts like those prepared for the Order Police certainly reflected the wider ambience within which the reserve policemen were trained and instructed as well as the political culture in which they had lived for the previous decade. As Lieutenant Drucker said with extraordinary understatement, "Under the influence of the times, my attitude to the Jews was marked by a certain aversion." The denigration of Jews and the proclamation of Germanic racial superiority was so constant, so pervasive, so relentless, that it must have shaped the general attitudes of masses of people in Germany, including the average reserve policeman.

Fifth and last, the pamphlets and materials that dealt with the Jews justified the necessity of a *judenfrei* Europe, seeking support and sympathy for such a goal, but they did not explicitly urge personal participation in achieving that goal through killing Jews. This point is worth mentioning, because some of the Order Police instructional guidelines concerning partisan warfare stated

quite plainly that each individual must be tough enough to kill partisans and, more important, "suspects."

The partisan struggle is a struggle for Bolshevism, it is not a people's movement. . . . The enemy must be *totally destroyed*. The incessant decision over life and death posed by the partisans and suspects is difficult even for the toughest soldier. But it must be done. He behaves correctly who, by setting aside all possible impulses of personal feeling, proceeds ruthlessly and mercilessly.⁴⁷

In all the surviving indoctrination materials of the Order Police, there is no parallel set of guidelines that attempts to prepare policemen to kill unarmed Jewish women and children. Certainly in Russia large numbers of Jews were murdered in the framework of killing "suspects" during antipartisan sweeps. In the Polish territories garrisoned by Reserve Police Battalion 101 in 1942, however, there simply was no major overlap between killing partisan suspects and killing Jews. For this unit, at least, the killing of Jews cannot be explained by brutal exhortations to kill partisans and "suspects."

One other comparison is pertinent here. Before the Einsatzgruppen entered Soviet territory, they underwent a two-month training period. Their preparation included visits and speeches by various SS luminaries who gave them "pep talks" about the coming "war of destruction." Four days before the invasion, the officers were recalled to Berlin for an intimate meeting with Reinhard Heydrich himself. In short, considerable effort was made to prepare these men for the mass murder they were going to perpetrate. Even the men of the police battalions that followed the Einsatzgruppen into Russia in the summer of 1941 were partially prepared for what awaited them. They were informed of the secret directive for the execution of captured Communists (the "commissar order") and the guidelines for the treatment of the civilian population. Some battalion command-

ers also attempted to inspire their troops through speeches, as did Daluge and Himmler when visiting. In contrast, both officers and men of Reserve Police Battalion 101 were singularly unprepared for and surprised by the murderous task that awaited them.

In summary, the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101, like the rest of German society, were immersed in a deluge of racist and anti-Semitic propaganda. Furthermore, the Order Police provided for indoctrination both in basic training and as an ongoing practice within each unit. Such incessant propagandizing must have had a considerable effect in reinforcing general notions of Germanic racial superiority and "a certain aversion" toward the Jews. However, much of the indoctrination material was clearly not targeted at older reservists and in some cases was highly inappropriate or irrelevant to them. And material specifically designed to harden the policemen for the personal task of killing Jews is conspicuously absent from the surviving documentation. One would have to be quite convinced of the manipulative powers of indoctrination to believe that any of this material could have deprived the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101 of the capacity for independent thought. Influenced and conditioned in a general way, imbued in particular with a sense of their own superiority and racial kinship as well as Jewish inferiority and otherness, many of them undoubtedly were; explicitly prepared for the task of killing Jews they most certainly were not.

Along with ideological indoctrination, a vital factor touched upon but not fully explored in Milgram's experiments was conformity to the group. The battalion had orders to kill Jews, but each individual did not. Yet 80 to 90 percent of the men proceeded to kill, though almost all of them—at least initially—were horrified and disgusted by what they were doing. To break ranks and step out, to adopt overtly nonconformist behavior, was simply beyond most of the men. It was easier for them to shoot.

Why? First of all, by breaking ranks, nonshooters were leaving the "dirty work" to their comrades. Since the battalion had to shoot even if individuals did not, refusing to shoot constituted

refusing one's share of an unpleasant collective obligation. It was in effect an asocial act vis-à-vis one's comrades. Those who did not shoot risked isolation, rejection, and ostracism—a very uncomfortable prospect within the framework of a tight-knit unit stationed abroad among a hostile population, so that the individual had virtually nowhere else to turn for support and social contact.

This threat of isolation was intensified by the fact that stepping out could also have been seen as a form of moral reproach of one's comrades: the nonshooter was potentially indicating that he was "too good" to do such things. Most, though not all, nonshooters intuitively tried to diffuse the criticism of their comrades that was inherent in their actions. They pleaded not that they were "too good" but rather that they were "too weak" to kill.

Such a stance presented no challenge to the esteem of one's comrades; on the contrary, it legitimized and upheld "toughness" as a superior quality. For the anxious individual, it had the added advantage of posing no moral challenge to the murderous policies of the regime, though it did pose another problem, since the difference between being "weak" and being a "coward" was not great. Hence the distinction made by one policeman who did not dare to step out at Józefów for fear of being considered a coward, but who subsequently dropped out of his firing squad. It was one thing to be too cowardly even to try to kill; it was another, after resolutely trying to do one's share, to be too weak to continue.⁴⁸

Insidiously, therefore, most of those who did not shoot only reaffirmed the "macho" values of the majority—according to which it was a positive quality to be "tough" enough to kill unarmed, noncombatant men, women, and children—and tried not to rupture the bonds of comradeship that constituted their social world. Coping with the contradictions imposed by the demands of conscience on the one hand and the norms of the battalion on the other led to many tortured attempts at compromise: not shooting infants on the spot but taking them to the assembly point; not shooting on patrol if no "go-getter" was along

who might report such squeamishness, bringing Jews to the shooting site and firing but intentionally missing. Only the very exceptional remained indifferent to taunts of "weaking" from their comrades and could live with the fact that they were considered to be "no man."⁴⁹

Here we come full circle to the mutually intensifying effects of war and racism noted by John Dower, in conjunction with the insidious effects of constant propaganda and indoctrination. Pervasive racism and the resulting exclusion of the Jewish victims from any common ground with the perpetrators made it all the easier for the majority of the policemen to conform to the norms of their immediate community (the battalion) and their society at large (Nazi Germany). Here the years of anti-Semitic propaganda (and prior to the Nazi dictatorship, decades of shrill German nationalism) dovetailed with the polarizing effects of war. The dichotomy of racially superior Germans and racially inferior Jews, central to Nazi ideology, could easily merge with the image of a beleaguered Germany surrounded by warring enemies. If it is doubtful that most of the policemen understood or embraced the theoretical aspects of Nazi ideology as contained in SS indoctrination pamphlets, it is also doubtful that they were immune to "the influence of the times" (to use Lieutenant Drucker's phrase once again), to the incessant proclamation of German superiority and incitement of contempt and hatred for the Jewish enemy. Nothing helped the Nazis to wage a race war so much as the war itself. In wartime, when it was all too usual to exclude the enemy from the community of human obligation, it was also all too easy to subsume the Jews into the "image of the enemy," or *Feindbild*.

In his last book, *The Drowned and the Saved*, Primo Levi included an essay entitled "The Gray Zone," perhaps his most profound and deeply disturbing reflection on the Holocaust.⁵⁰ He maintained that in spite of our natural desire for clear-cut distinctions, the history of the camps "could not be reduced to the two blocs of victims and persecutors." He argued passionately, "It is naive, absurd, and historically false to believe that an

infernal system such as National Socialism sanctifies its victims; on the contrary, it degrades them, it makes them resemble itself." The time had come to examine the inhabitants of the "gray zone" between the simplified Manichean images of perpetrator and victim. Levi concentrated on the "gray zone of *protekcya* [corruption] and collaboration" that flourished in the camps among a spectrum of victims: from the "picturesque fauna" of low-ranking functionaries husbanding their minuscule advantages over other prisoners; through the truly privileged network of Kapos, who were free "to commit the worst atrocities" at whim; to the terrible fate of the Sonderkommandos, who prolonged their lives by manning the gas chambers and crematoria. (Conceiving and organizing the Sonderkommandos was in Levi's opinion National Socialism's "most demonic crime".)

While Levi focused on the spectrum of victim behavior within the gray zone, he dared to suggest that this zone encompassed perpetrators as well. Even the SS man Muhlstedt of the Birkenau crematoria—whose "daily ration of slaughter was studded with arbitrary and capricious acts, marked by his inventions of cruelty"—was not a "monolith." Faced with the miraculous survival of a sixteen-year-old girl discovered while the gas chambers were being cleared, the disconcerted Muhlstedt briefly hesitated. In the end he ordered the girl's death but quickly left before his orders were carried out. One "instant of pity" was not enough to "absolve" Muhlstedt, who was deservedly hanged in 1947. Yet it did "place him too, although at its extreme boundary, within the gray band, that zone of ambiguity which radiates out from regimes based on terror and obsequiousness."

Levi's notion of the gray zone encompassing both perpetrators and victims must be approached with a cautious qualification. The perpetrators and victims in the gray zone were not mirror images of one another. Perpetrators did not become fellow victims (as many of them later claimed to be) in the way some victims became accomplices of the perpetrators. The relationship between perpetrator and victim was not symmetrical. The range of choice each faced was totally different.

Nonetheless, the spectrum of Levi's gray zone seems quite applicable to Reserve Police Battalion 101. The battalion certainly had its quota of men who neared the "extreme boundary" of the gray zone. Lieutenant Gnade, who initially rushed his men back from Minsk to avoid being involved in killing but who later learned to enjoy it, leaps to mind. So do the many reserve policemen who were horrified in the woods outside Józefów but subsequently became casual volunteers for numerous firing squads and "Jew hunts." They, like Munschfeld, seem to have experienced that brief "instant of pity" but cannot be absolved by it. At the other boundary of the gray zone, even Lieutenant Buchmann, the most conspicuous and outspoken critic of the battalion's murderous actions, faltered at least once. Absent his protector, Major Trapp, and facing orders from the local Security Police in Łuków, he too led his men to the killing fields shortly before his transfer back to Hamburg. And at the very center of the perpetrators' gray zone stood the pathetic figure of Trapp himself, who sent his men to slaughter Jews "weeping like a child," and the bedridden Captain Hoffmann, whose body rebelled against the terrible deeds his mind willed.

The behavior of any human being is, of course, a very complex phenomenon, and the historian who attempts to "explain" it is indulging in a certain arrogance. When nearly 500 men are involved, to undertake any general explanation of their collective behavior is even more hazardous. What, then, is one to conclude? Most of all, one comes away from the story of Reserve Police Battalion 101 with great unease. This story of ordinary men is not the story of all men. The reserve policemen faced choices, and most of them committed terrible deeds. But those who killed cannot be absolved by the notion that anyone in the same situation would have done as they did. For even among them, some refused to kill and others stopped killing. Human responsibility is ultimately an individual matter.

At the same time, however, the collective behavior of Reserve Police Battalion 101 has deeply disturbing implications. There are many societies afflicted by traditions of racism and caught in

the siege mentality of war or threat of war. Everywhere society conditions people to respect and defer to authority, and indeed could scarcely function otherwise. Everywhere people seek career advancement. In every modern society, the complexity of life and the resulting bureaucratization and specialization attenuate the sense of personal responsibility of those implementing official policy. Within virtually every social collective, the peer group exerts tremendous pressures on behavior and sets moral norms. If the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101 could become killers under such circumstances, what group of men cannot?