

FROM WEIMAR TO NUREMBERG: A HISTORICAL CASE STUDY OF  
TWENTY-TWO EINSATZGRUPPEN OFFICERS

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## Abstract

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FROM WEIMAR TO NUREMBERG: A HISTORICAL CASE STUDY OF TWENTY-TWO EINSATZGRUPPEN OFFICERS (134 pp.)

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This is an examination of the motives of twenty-two perpetrators of the Jewish Holocaust. Each served as an officer of the *Einsatzgruppen*, mobile killing units which beginning in June 1941, carried out mass executions of Jews in the German-occupied portion of the Soviet Union. Following World War II the subjects of this study were tried before a U.S. Military Tribunal as part of the thirteen Nuremberg Trials, and this study is based on the records of their trial, known as Case IX or more commonly as the Einsatzgruppen Trial. From these records the thesis concludes that the twenty-two men were shaped politically by their experiences during the Weimar Era (1919-1932), and that as perpetrators of the Holocaust their actions were informed primarily by the tenets of Nazism, particularly anti-Semitism.

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## 1. Introduction

Since 1945 scholars have conducted numerous studies of leading Nazis with the aim of explaining how Nazism mobilized the German people. As important as these studies are, one must also consider that Hitler's rise to power and Nazi government policy became a reality through the efforts of millions of ordinary Germans. The invasions of every one of Germany's neighbors save Switzerland, the enslavement of non-Germans and the pillaging of their natural resources, the imprisonment and murder of leftist political figures and intellectuals, the murder of handicapped Germans, and the systematic extermination of the European Jews all required the cooperation and indeed the initiative of individuals outside the circle of top Nazi leaders.

For those seeking to understand the process by which Germans came to reject the moral standards of the western world, the specter of the Jewish Holocaust is the single most important point of study. The Nazi movement, based on long-standing hatred and fueled by more immediate conditions particular to Germany, found its most profound expression in the destruction of the European Jews. The Holocaust thus epitomizes Nazi Germany's departure from traditional Western morality: a set of guiding principles found first in Ancient Greece, then in the Roman Republic, and later in democracies such as Great Britain and the United States. The magnitude of the crime and the intensity of the hatred have inspired a large volume of research, making the Holocaust the most closely studied genocide in human history. Fortunately, researchers today can draw on a number of excellent historical works which help explain how and why a modern Western nation shed the morals of so many generations. The five most important studies, concerning the

Holocaust and its origins, are discussed below as a review of the existing historical literature.

The 1960s saw the release of two crucial books, Raul Hilberg's *The Destruction of the European Jews* (1961)<sup>1</sup> and Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963).<sup>2</sup> Hilberg's book demonstrates how Nazi plans for genocide and the infrastructure of extermination developed. He argues that psychological rationalization soothed the perpetrator conscience, enabling men to kill as if part of a larger machine. Hilberg identifies four key types of rationalization employed by Holocaust perpetrators. First, preexisting prejudices and propaganda led them to believe that Jews deserved punishment for criminal acts of one kind or another. Second, perpetrators took refuge in the military concept of obedience to superior orders. That, in turn, led to a belief that ones' superiors bore full responsibility. Lastly, this mind-set allowed each perpetrator to view himself as totally incapable of influencing events.

Hilberg also demonstrated that Holocaust perpetrators often took the initiative against Jews without orders from above. Once they had developed their rationalizations, he argued, they moved with efficiency and encountered relatively few obstacles. The Holocaust "was brought into being because it had meaning to its perpetrators... They displayed a striking pathfinding ability in the absence of directives...a fundamental comprehension of the task even when there were no explicit communications."<sup>3</sup>

Hilberg's work suggests some driving force, beyond superior orders, which motivated

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<sup>1</sup> Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, Revised and Definitive Edition, 3 vols. (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1985).

<sup>2</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin Books, 1994).

<sup>3</sup> Hilberg, vol. 3, 993.



Holocaust perpetrators in their task, but he left it to later scholars to define and explain this force.

In *Eichmann in Jerusalem* Hannah Arendt viewed the Holocaust through the eyes of a single Holocaust perpetrator, Adolf Eichmann. Between 1941 and 1944 Eichmann had the job of coordinating the transport of Jews from towns and cities throughout Europe to the gas chambers of German-occupied Poland.<sup>4</sup> Arendt based her book on testimony given by Eichmann during his 1961 trial in Israel. From his testimony she formulated her “banality of evil” hypothesis. Arendt identified a moral shift affecting Eichmann as he became increasingly involved in the Holocaust. She argued that as Nazi tenets became law, Eichmann’s moral conscience was confused by the inconsistencies between Nazi morals and the pre-Nazi morality he had known all his life. In the end bureaucratic procedure remained the one consistency in Eichmann’s world, and he chose continued action over moral reflection.

Today most scholars agree that Arendt was too willing to take Eichmann’s testimony at face value. She uncritically accepted Eichmann’s portrayal of himself as a simple beurocrat incapable of independent thought yet “normal” in the sense that he was “neither perverted nor sadistic.” Arendt used his “normality” to extend her argument concerning Eichmann to Holocaust perpetrators in general. She concluded,

This normality was much more terrifying than all the atrocities put together, for it implied – as had been said at Nuremberg over and over again by the defendants and their counsel – that this new type of criminal...commits his crimes under circumstances that make it well-nigh impossible for him to know or to feel that he is doing wrong.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> A lieutenant colonel, Adolf Eichmann was head of Section IV B 4 (Jewish Affairs) of the Reich Security Main Office.

<sup>5</sup> Arendt, 276.

Even if Adolf Eichmann was really the banal man Arendt described, the application of her findings to others has contributed to a trend toward downplaying political ideology and anti-Semitism as motivating factors.

Through the work of Hannah Arendt and Raul Hilberg the machinery of destruction, which gave the Holocaust structure, was well understood by the mid-1960s. But it would be another three decades before scholarship focusing on perpetrators in the field, with their guns and whips and bloodied clothing, came to the fore. Christopher Browning's *Ordinary Men* (1992)<sup>6</sup> and Daniel Goldhagen's *Hitler's Willing Executioners* (1996)<sup>7</sup> brought those closest to the killing into the spotlight. Their greatly differing views of what motivated Holocaust perpetrators has become known to scholars as the Browning-Goldhagen Debate.

Christopher Browning explored Holocaust perpetrator motivation through the records of Reserve Police Battalion 101, an execution squad in German-occupied Poland. His book is based on a well-defined group of perpetrators who participated in the Holocaust under similar circumstances. Browning considered 210 of the approximately five hundred men who served in Battalion 101 during 1942. He concluded that group pressures and the wartime environment in the East motivated the battalion's men in their task of killing defenseless Jewish men, women, and children.

The starting point of Browning's argument is that the men of Battalion 101 were "ordinary," much as Arendt described Adolf Eichmann as "normal." The Battalion's men were drawn from a pool of middle-aged leftovers not drafted into the German Army.

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<sup>6</sup> Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*, HarperPerennial edition (New York: Harper Collins, 1998).

<sup>7</sup> Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997).

Most had families and had lived their formative years before the Nazi Party became dominant in German politics. They came largely from the working class, and had not previously distinguished themselves as particularly anti-Semitic. But unlike Arendt, who portrayed Eichmann as a confused and uncritical man who grew incapable of telling right from wrong, Browning viewed his subjects as men who made knowledgeable decisions under the influence of the circumstances at hand.

According to Browning a wartime mentality served as the key factor motivating Battalion 101's men to kill Jews. Surrounded by peoples of alien language and culture, the men increasingly thought as a group rather than as individuals. Their orders confirmed their growing group sense of civilians, and particularly of Jewish civilians, as a danger. Browning states, "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*."<sup>8</sup> In Browning's view an "us against them" mind frame provided the psychological means by which ordinary men became murderers.

In *Hitler's Willing Executioners* Daniel Goldhagen employs the records of Police Battalion 101 to counter Browning's emphasis on situational factors. Goldhagen argues that Battalion 101's men were ordinary Germans in the sense that they, like all Germans, were the product of a uniquely anti-Semitic culture in which the elimination of the Jews was considered "common sense." Thus the men of Battalion 101 came to the killing fields of Poland as anti-Semites who understood the necessity of their assignment. Feelings of unease arose from the gore that accompanied their task - the sights and smells

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<sup>8</sup> Browning, 186.

and sounds - rather than from any principled objection to getting rid of the Jews. “Like medical students who might initially be shaken by their exposure to blood and guts yet who view their work as ethically laudable, these men easily adjusted to the unpleasant aspect of their calling.”<sup>9</sup> According to Goldhagen, the men of Battalion 101 were agents not of Hitler or Nazism, but of German culture.

Aside from Reserve Police Battalion 101 Daniel Goldhagen examines several other aspects of the Holocaust. He includes a section on Jewish forced labor and another section on the death marches, in which Jews were marched under brutal conditions from place to place during the final months of World War II. Yet in 483 pages the author barely mentions the drastic political and social changes of the Weimar Era, which immediately preceded the rise of Nazism. Goldhagen’s cultural thesis leaves little room for important historical developments in Germany between the World Wars.

Historians agree that anti-Semitism has played an important role in German history since well before Germany’s national inception in 1871, but so too has anti-Semitism been a prominent feature throughout French and Russian history. In my view Goldhagen is correct when he writes,

The widely differing degree of anti-Semitic expression at different moments in a bounded historical time...in a particular society is not the result of anti-Semitism appearing and disappearing, of larger and smaller numbers of people being or becoming anti-Semites, but of a generally constant anti-Semitism becoming more or less manifest, owing primarily to altering political and social conditions that encourage or discourage people’s expression of their anti-Semitism.<sup>10</sup>

But despite this mention of developments in politics and society, Goldhagen’s book focuses solely on German anti-Semitism without demonstrating any substantial

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<sup>9</sup> Goldhagen, 261.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 39.

difference between anti-Semitism observed, say, in France, and that in Germany. In fact, much of what Goldhagen takes as evidence of a German cultural anti-Semitism is better explained by the “altering political and social conditions” that he mentions but fails to investigate.

Christopher Browning’s book is not without problems either. First, there is a discrepancy between the actions of Battalion 101’s men and their actual wartime experiences. Before and during the period of its greatest activity against Jews Battalion 101 was never stationed on the front lines and very rarely contacted armed partisans. In comparison to the average German soldier the men of Battalion 101 experienced little personal danger, leading one to believe that their association of Jews with the enemy had prewar origins. Second, the trial of the men of Battalion 101 was conducted under West German law, which significantly influenced how Browning’s subjects explained themselves to the court. Though a statute pertaining to genocide was enacted in the Federal Republic in 1954, existing law prohibited prosecuting the men of Battalion 101 retroactively. Thus the best available option was to charge them with murder, but the West German murder statute required that the prosecution prove intent – that the men had wanted to kill Jews. As historian Rebecca Wittmann writes, intent was defined as “‘the knowledge that the behavior will have a particular result and the desire or will that this result should come about.’ Therefore, for example, a person is not guilty because he pulled the trigger and killed another person, but because he pulled the trigger with the intention of killing the other person...”<sup>11</sup> With the exigencies of the West German

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<sup>11</sup> Rebecca Wittmann, *Beyond Justice: The Auschwitz Trial* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 37.

murder statute in mind, it is little wonder that Christopher Browning's subjects denied anti-Semitism as a factor motivating their actions against Jews.

Another book deserves note here; Helmut Krausnick's *Hitlers Einsatzgruppen: Die Truppe des Weltanschauungskrieges*.<sup>12</sup> Krausnick argues that by 1941 the German Army officer corps had come to adopt the central component of Hitler's *Weltanschauung* or world view. According to Krausnick, Hitler and his generals were in agreement that a combined Judeo-Communist threat existed and that its seat was the Soviet Union. If not eliminated root and branch, Communism – Jewish *Politik*, would engulf Germany and indeed the world. But the German generals were apprehensive about directly involving their beloved army, with its long tradition of gallantry, in what would undoubtedly be very dirty work. For this reason, Krausnick demonstrates, the German Army surrendered many of its operational prerogatives to special formations of the Nazi state security system, whose job it was to secure army territory against Jews and Communists - by killing them.

Krausnick sees the Second World War in Europe, in my view correctly, as a life or death struggle between competing political ideologies. He identifies political ideology as the key factor explaining the Holocaust and shows how easily and thoroughly a long-standing German institution, the German Army, came to adopt Nazism in practice, if not in name. Unfortunately, though Krausnick demonstrates that Hitler and the German Army reached agreement on the basis of their concurring views of Jews and

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<sup>12</sup> Helmut Krausnick, *Hitlers Einsatzgruppen: Die Truppe des Weltanschauungskrieges, 1938-1942* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1985). This is an abridged version of the larger work co-authored by Helmut Krausnick and Hans-Heinrich Wilhelm, *Die Truppe des Weltanschauungskrieges: die Einsatzgruppen der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD, 1938-1942* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1981).

Communism, his work does not get at the roots of one very important question. What lay behind the political development of the German generals which, by early 1941, brought them into agreement with Hitler's eastern policy? Krausnick's evidence implies that developments before 1941, and indeed before the Nazi takeover of government in 1933, led the German Army leadership to regard Jews and Communists as a danger great enough to require their extermination.

Each of the works discussed above has contributed greatly to our current understanding of the Holocaust. The task ahead is to take the solid parts of each argument and to connect them in the light of further primary evidence. The result, I hope, will be a contribution to understanding why the Holocaust happened when and where it did, and what motivated its perpetrators.

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With the work of past and present scholars in mind I set about researching a group of twenty-two men. The subjects of this study served as officers in mobile killing squads termed *Einsatzgruppen* – special task groups. When Germany invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941 the *Einsatzgruppen* moved east, behind the German Army, with orders to exterminate the Soviet Jews.<sup>13</sup> *Einsatzgruppe A* operated in the North, *Einsatzgruppe D* in the South, *Einsatzgruppe C* in Northern Ukraine, while *Einsatzgruppe B* moved through Belarus in the direction of Moscow (see Appendix A, Figure 1). The four

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<sup>13</sup> Formations termed *Einsatzgruppen* took part in German military operations before 1941, including the invasions of Austria (March 1938), Czechoslovakia (March 1939), Poland (September 1939), and France (May 1940). These *Einsatzgruppen* had the task of extending the German state security network into newly occupied territory. The *Einsatzgruppen* created in 1941 are distinguished from earlier units by their assigned tasks and by bureaucratic nomenclature. The terminology “*Einsatzgruppen* of the Gestapo and SD” was used only in reference to units operating in Soviet territory (Krausnick and Wilhelm, 34). The *Einsatzgruppen* of the Gestapo and SD fulfilled the same duties as their predecessors, but their main task was the extermination of the Soviet Jews. For this reason the *Einsatzgruppen* which operated in captured Soviet territory involved far more personnel than the earlier formations.

Einsatzgruppen varied in size from about six hundred to one thousand men, of whom approximately fifteen percent ranked as officers.<sup>14</sup>

Each of the Einsatzgruppen consisted of smaller formations known as *Einsatzkommandos* and *Sonderkommandos*. Initially it was intended that the *Einsatzkommandos* would receive orders from Einsatzgruppe headquarters, while *Sonderkommandos* would operate nearer the front lines and receive orders from the army. In practice, however, there was no real difference between these formations. Geographical areas of responsibility were assigned according to the needs at any particular time and orders could come from either the Einsatzgruppe or the German army, depending on the situation. In general, *Einsatzkommandos* and *Sonderkommandos* operating in forward areas received orders from local army commanders, while those operating in rearward areas received orders from Einsatzgruppe headquarters (see Appendix A, Figure 2).

The *Einsatzkommandos* and *Sonderkommandos* were themselves at times divided into smaller temporary formations known as *Teilkommandos*, again according to the needs of the situation. Additionally, a formation known as *Vorkommando Moskau* was attached to Einsatzgruppe B and was intended to rush into Moscow to secure the records of the Communist Party and state. The unit never reached its destination and for the eight months of its existence *Vorkommando Moskau* operated as an *Einsatzkommando* / *Sonderkommando*.<sup>15</sup> The members of these sub-units of the Einsatzgruppen scoured their

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<sup>14</sup> The twenty-two subjects of this study represent a small portion of the Einsatzgruppen officer corps. At any one time the four Einsatzgruppen together had a total of approximately 480 officers (Krausnick and Wilhelm, 287).

<sup>15</sup> In January 1942 the designation *Vorkommando Moskau* was changed to *Sonderkommando 7c*, which was disbanded in December 1943.



assigned territory in search of Jews and Communists, whom they rounded up and shot. Estimates of the total number of Jews murdered by the four Einsatzgruppen between June 1941 and the end of 1943 range from 1 million<sup>16</sup> to 2.2 million<sup>17</sup> people.

Following World War II the United States government indicted twenty-four former Einsatzgruppen officers on three counts.<sup>18</sup> Count one dealt with crimes against humanity, count two with war crimes, and count three with membership in criminal organizations, primarily meaning the SS and its sub-organizations, the *Gestapo* and the *Sicherheitsdienst* or *SD*. One of the accused, Emil Haussmann, committed suicide in July 1947, before court proceedings began. A second defendant, Otto Rasch, was removed from the trial for health reasons.<sup>19</sup> The remaining twenty-two men were tried en masse from September 27, 1947, to April 9, 1948, before an American Military Tribunal at Nuremberg.<sup>20</sup> This thesis is based on the English language transcript of that trial, known as Case IX or more commonly as the Einsatzgruppen Trial.<sup>21</sup>

These twenty-two men offer a particularly interesting point of study because they served in close proximity to the scene of the crime and yet many also had influence with officials responsible for organizing the Holocaust. In comparison to other groups or

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<sup>16</sup> This number is based on regular reports (*Ereignismeldungen UdSSR*) which the Einsatzgruppen sent to Berlin.

<sup>17</sup> Krausnick and Wilhelm, 621-622.

<sup>18</sup> The indictments and trial were carried out on the basis of Allied Control Council Law No. 10. Unlike the greater part of the Einsatzgruppen leadership, in 1947 the twenty-two subjects of this study were in custody and were known at that time to have served as officers of the Einsatzgruppen.

<sup>19</sup> Due to advanced Parkinson's Disease Otto Rasch was unable to testify in court. The case against him was officially severed on February 5, 1948.

<sup>20</sup> In the English trial transcript the German *Umlaut* was not used, and the city of Nürnberg appears as "Nuernberg," rather than the more common English language spelling of "Nuremberg."

<sup>21</sup> During the trial all questions and answers were translated in real time, a formidable task even without the added complication of accents, dialects, and concepts which have no direct translation. Given that situation it is certainly understandable that the trial transcript contains grammatical errors. In citing testimony I do not use "*sic*" to indicate a grammatical error, rather I cite the trial testimony as it appears in the transcript, occasionally with an addition in brackets for clarification.

individuals studied in the past, the Einsatzgruppen officers ranked in many cases with Adolf Eichmann, though unlike Eichmann they served in the field and commanded the “ordinary men” studied by Browning and Goldhagen. Such a group of subjects, who witnessed and carried out the Holocaust firsthand, and who also had contacts with high officials in Berlin, allows for important comparisons with the work of Arendt, Browning, and Goldhagen.

I have considered the records of Case IX with several factors in mind. Most important is the fact that the men were on trial for their lives. If we were to simply take their testimony at face value we would have to believe that none of the men killed a single Jew personally and that they only rarely witnessed executions. Yet the four Einsatzgruppen together, staffed by a total of approximately three thousand men, killed over one million Jews.<sup>22</sup> By a conservative estimate that comes to a ratio of 350 Jewish deaths per member of the Einsatzgruppen. Thus we must begin with the understanding that the Einsatzgruppen officers’ testimony represents an inaccurate picture of the scope and depth of their actual involvement in the Holocaust.

During detention the accused had plenty of opportunity to communicate without being directly observed, for example during their time outdoors in the prison yard. Also, their lawyers were allowed to coordinate the men’s defense strategies and served as a channel of communication between the accused. Surely the men and their attorneys kept each other fully abreast of the evidence available to the prosecution, and without doubt

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<sup>22</sup> The Einsatzgruppen of the Gestapo and SD existed in name for approximately four years. During that time significantly more than three thousand men served, since many of the original officers and enlisted men were later replaced. However, the vast majority of the Jewish victims of the Einsatzgruppen were killed within a period of little more than one year, between July 1941 and the late summer of 1942. Thereafter few Jews remained alive in the German occupied portion of the Soviet Union, and the Einsatzgruppen shifted into an anti-partisan role.

the defendants lied in circumstances where hard evidence was lacking.<sup>23</sup> What the men did admit to I treat as genuine recollections because such admissions could not have helped them avoid punishment. Unfortunately, we may never know the full extent of each man's responsibility, but a comparison of the facts against the men's testimony demonstrates that what they admitted to represents the tip of a much larger iceberg.

A second consideration is that the primary concern of every court is to establish guilt or innocence. Questions to the accused are thus framed in a manner of "Did you do it?" rather than "*Why* did you do it?" Motivation tends to fall by the wayside. Fortunately, in Case IX the three judge panel provided the accused with ample opportunity to explain themselves beyond the scope of their own guilt or innocence. The defendants were particularly talkative on the subject of their lives before 1941, and naturally much less so on the subject of their actual deeds as officers of the Einsatzgruppen. Much of the information the men volunteered, particularly concerning their lives before the Nazi Era, was part of an effort to excuse their later involvement in the Holocaust. However, that does not make such recollections untrue, invalid, or unimportant. The fact is that the men's testimony concerning their lives before Hitler's rise to power fits well with the actual history of the period 1919-1932 and helps to explain why the Holocaust happened when and where it did.

I therefore accept such testimony as representing what was most important to the men in explaining themselves to the court, though always with the knowledge that testimony concerning the defendant's early lives was also intended to excuse their later actions. Their digressions concerning politics, society, economics, and culture are the

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<sup>23</sup> Author's correspondence from 05/13/2006 with Benjamin Ferencz, Chief Prosecutor of Case IX.

most fruitful portion of the trial transcript in understanding how the men came to Nazism and the Einsatzgruppen and what motivated them in carrying out their orders. Here it is important to remember, however, that as Christopher Browning has noted, “Explaining is not excusing; understanding is not forgiving.”<sup>24</sup> I do not accept that the men’s early experiences, as difficult as they often were, excuse their later actions, nor do I accept that their early experiences in any way predestined them to become Nazis or perpetrators of the Holocaust.

In many ways my method is similar to that of Christopher Browning. This study is, like *Ordinary Men*, based on trial records and is an examination of the everyday lives of men who committed extraordinary deeds under the influence of a certain time and place. The disadvantage of my sources in comparison to those of Browning is that the Einsatzgruppen Trial took place at a time when the records of the Nazi Party and state were only beginning to be explored. The prosecution team had a relatively short period of time and little to guide them as they made their way through the records of the Nazi bureaucracy. On the other hand, the main advantage that my sources have is that the Einsatzgruppen officers were tried in 1947-48, beginning two years after the end of World War II. Proceedings against Christopher Browning’s subjects began in October 1967 and came to a close in April of 1968. Concerning historical memory, the recollections of the Einsatzgruppen officers are certainly more accurate and less contaminated by postwar events.

Through the records of the Einsatzgruppen Trial I intend to answer the following question: What were the main factors which motivated these twenty-two men in their

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<sup>24</sup> Browning, XX.

collective task of exterminating the Soviet Jews? My thesis begins from the premise that anti-Semitism was a feature of German culture, as it was of European culture more generally. Undoubtedly, anti-Semitism was one important factor which made the Holocaust a reality. But just as the Holocaust would not have happened without anti-Semitism, so it would not have happened in the absence of important political, social, and economic factors peculiar to Germany in the wake of the First World War.

I argue that the men's experiences during the years 1919-1932 were the decisive factor in their political development. Fourteen of the twenty-two subjects of this study had already joined the Nazi Party by the time Hitler came to power in 1933, five joined that same year, and the remaining three men would become card carrying Nazis in the years to come. For the vast majority of the men Nazi ideology became their primary means of self-identity and their most important point of reference when comparing themselves to others. As Nazis each of the subjects of this study held anti-Semitic and anti-Communist beliefs, and they lumped Jews and Communists together into what Nazi ideology identified as a "Judeo-Communist threat." The modern legend of a Judeo-Communist conspiracy coupled the long-accepted image of the pernicious, manipulative Jew with an international political movement openly espousing world revolution. The men attributed to this supposed combined threat every ill which befell Germany following World War I, and they involved themselves voluntarily in countering the influence of Jews and Communists well before their assignment to the Einsatzgruppen in 1941.

The men's efforts manifested themselves in service within the Nazi state security apparatus, into which they initially came through personal connections and a high regard

for the mission of fighting Judeo-Communism at every turn. It was only after proving themselves politically in the Nazi Party and state that the subjects of this study were entrusted with the very sensitive, and according to Nazi ideology, absolutely crucial task of destroying the Soviet Jews. I argue that as officers of the Einsatzgruppen the subjects of this study viewed their assigned task as unpleasant but absolutely necessary, and that for this reason the men carried out their mission with efficiency and determination.

## 2. A Coming of Age

The twenty-two men who are the subjects of this study began their lives in the late 1800s and early 1900s in Wilhelmine Germany. As boys and adolescents the future officers of the Einsatzgruppen could be proud of their nation, which after unification in 1871 had quickly taken its place as one of Europe's leading economic and military powers. Yet despite its confident, optimistic populace, a host of social problems simmered just beneath the surface. While the economy grew quickly social development lagged far behind, especially in comparison to that of Germany's economic and military rivals, Britain and France.

The enlightenment tradition, so important in Western Europe, had failed to take hold in Germany. True, the German lands produced notable *philosophes*, but non-intellectual Germans of the 1700s held fast to their religious convictions, and beginning around 1800 German thinkers turned to Romanticism.<sup>25</sup> A rejection of Enlightenment rationality in favor of emotion, Romanticism would influence German literature for the following 150 years, until the fall of Hitler's Third Reich. Furthermore, half a century after the Enlightenment had modernized British and French society, in Germany a failed bourgeois revolution in 1848 meant that the middle class, whose economic importance had surpassed that of Germany's elites, would remain politically impotent.<sup>26</sup>

In an effort to redirect the energies of the middle and lower classes, at the dawn of the twentieth century Europe's political and military leaders turned to nationalism. In

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<sup>25</sup> Gordon Craig, *The Germans* (New York: Penguin Books, 1991), 29-30.

<sup>26</sup> John Weiss, *The Politics of Hate: Anti-Semitism, History, and the Holocaust in Modern Europe* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2003), 24-25.

comparison to Britain or France this trend was particularly strong in Germany, where industrialization was just reaching full fruition and where the middle and working classes had the least political voice. Also, in Germany recent experience had demonstrated how social divisions could be papered over through the promotion of national identity as a tie that binds irrespective of class. Prussia's victory in 1871 over France in the Franco-Prussian War had led directly to the unification of Germany under Prussian auspices, and thereafter Germans of every socio-economic class became enamored with the growing power and importance of their new nation.

After 1871 the German leadership could call on an economy rivaling that of the other great powers and a population surpassing that of Britain and France. A war against either or even both nations appeared perfectly winnable, and victory promised to secure the position of Germany's landed and business interests for the foreseeable future.<sup>27</sup> Thus the German leadership walked quite confidently down the path toward the next war, which began in earnest with Germany's invasion of France and Belgium in August 1914. But four years later, in the waning months of 1918, Germany's situation was far different than its leaders had imagined. Though the Russian Revolution had led to German victory in the East, years of trench warfare against the Franco-British Alliance and America's entry on the Allies' side meant that Germany could no longer afford in men or material to continue the fight. In September 1918 the German Army was on the verge of collapse and a leftist revolution threatened the home front. By November the German leadership had no choice but to seek an armistice. The end of the fighting, and thus of the

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<sup>27</sup> Hans Mommsen, *The Rise and Fall of Weimar Democracy*, trans. Elborg Forster and Larry Eugene Jones (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 18.



Wilhelmine Era, came as quite a shock to the German people who, like their leaders, had been fully caught up in German nationalism.

The ramifications of World War I meant that the later Einsatzgruppen officers, born of the Wilhelmine Era, entered their late teens and early twenties in a far different political environment. None of the men had experience with democracy, which in 1919 became Germany's new political system. The quick change from monarchy to democracy in Germany came about for two main reasons. First, the victorious Allies, and especially the Americans, tied a final resolution of the World War I to the creation of a democratic German government.<sup>28</sup> Second, Germany's political and economic elites saw democracy as preferable to all-out revolution, in which the upper class could have lost all status, as in the Russian model of 1917.<sup>29</sup> Democracy thus came to Germany as a result of both external and internal demands. Significantly, the internal demands for change came from the political Left, rather than from a mass movement of German citizens as such.

Yet under such circumstances the German people initially gave democracy a chance. The lower and middle classes had never enjoyed such political influence, and with hopes of permanently relegating World War I to the past, in the January 1919 election for a National Assembly eighty-three percent of eligible voters participated.<sup>30</sup> The four parties closest to the political Center garnered over three-fourths of all votes, providing the new democracy with a good foundation of leaders committed to the rule of

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<sup>28</sup> Mommsen, 15-16, 20.

<sup>29</sup> Detlev J. K. Peukert, *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity*, trans. Richard Deveson (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), 6.

<sup>30</sup> New voting regulations allowed all German citizens twenty years of age or older (including women) to vote. This contributed to the high voter turnout.

law.<sup>31</sup> The election results represented hopes for a new beginning, but soon harsh realities were faced. The first of such realities was that, while the fighting had stopped in November 1918, a final settlement of World War I had yet to be concluded.

Five months after the January 1919 election, representatives of the new German government signed the Treaty of Versailles, officially ending the First World War. Initially both the Allies and Germany expected to negotiate the treaty terms. However, out of concern that negotiation would exacerbate divisions within the Allied camp, the terms were hastily drawn up without consulting the German representatives, who were given the choice of signing the treaty or facing an Allied invasion.<sup>32</sup> In the Treaty of Versailles Germany formally accepted:

1. Reparations, the amount and payment schedule of which were set later. In the final settlement Germany was to make reparations payments up to the year 1987.
2. Military sanctions which prohibited Germany from reforming its air force as well as from possessing tanks and submarines, and which limited the German Army to 100,000 men.
3. Allied occupation of German territory west of the Rhine River for fifteen years and demilitarization of the eastern side of the Rhine within fifty kilometers of the river.

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<sup>31</sup> Jürgen W. Falter, *Hitlers Wähler* (München: Verlag C. H. Beck, 1991), 25.

<sup>32</sup> Sally Marks, *The Illusion of Peace: International Relations in Europe, 1918-1933*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 4, 10, 11-12.

4. Territorial losses including Upper Silesia,<sup>33</sup> Alsace-Lorraine, and West Prussia, and the internationalization of the Saarland and the Baltic port of Danzig.

The territorial losses and occupation of the Rhineland had psychological but also economic effects. Berlin lost control of 75 percent of Germany's prewar iron ore reserves, 26 percent of its coal production, 44 percent of its pig iron production, and 38 percent of its steel production.<sup>34</sup>

The terms of the treaty represented a conscious effort by the Allies, and particularly by France, to cripple the German economy and thus Germany's ability to make war in the future.<sup>35</sup> This motive is understandable given the heretofore unknown scale of damage to life and property wrought by the First World War. In such a war, where entire peoples fought in a "destroy or be destroyed" manner, one could only expect to be treated in defeat as nothing more than an enemy. In fact Germany had set the precedent for peace agreements in the new era of total war when, in 1917, Russia collapsed into revolution, bringing about a German victory on the eastern front. In the resulting Treaty of Brest-Litovsk (March 1918) Germany had demanded and received huge territorial concessions, and in an amendment to the treaty the new Soviet government had also agreed to pay war reparations.<sup>36</sup> The Treaty of Versailles (June 1919) was thus a predictable outcome of a total war started and lost by Germany.

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<sup>33</sup> The Treaty of Versailles stipulated that a plebiscite would decide the fate of Upper Silesia. As a result of the plebiscite the industrial areas of Upper Silesia went to Poland in 1921.

<sup>34</sup> Mommsen, 110.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* Additionally, there was the more immediate concern of funneling resources into France's coal and steel industries, which had been devastated by the war.

<sup>36</sup> Peukert, 29, 43.

All of this made for a very difficult situation for the newly elected German government. Because Germany's representatives at Versailles had no good options they begrudgingly signed the treaty. At the same time the German people, still under the influence of nationalistic wartime rhetoric and shocked by the sudden collapse of their government and military, unrealistically hoped to treat World War I as if it had never happened. In June 1919 the German people had not yet come to realize that losing the First World War would have profound and lasting consequences, and as such the terms of the Treaty of Versailles came as yet another shock. As Sally Marks has noted, "The real difficulty was not that the Treaty was exceptionally unfair but that the Germans thought it was."<sup>37</sup> With the treaty's announcement in Germany the public mood turned quickly from hope for the future to backward looking resentment focused on the newly elected German government. From 1919 to 1932, during the period known as Weimar Germany, the association of the Weimar government with the terms of Versailles would only intensify.

The popular term "November criminals" soon came into use in reference to German politicians on the Center-Left who had supported Germany's acceptance of the Versailles Treaty. In an organized effort the anti-Republican Right, with its close ties to the German Army, conjured up what became known as the "stab in the back" legend. According to this popular myth democratic socialists and their political allies, many of whom held key positions in the early Weimar government, had fomented revolution on the home front just as Germany was on the verge of winning the First World War. Such thinking was taken to heart by many ordinary Germans who, in the early stages of

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<sup>37</sup> Marks, 18.

Weimar democracy, expressed their anger through violence. Three of the founders of Germany's new government, Matthias Erzberger, Walter Rathenau, and Hugo Haase, were assassinated within three years of the establishment of the Weimar Republic. Other political leaders including Philipp Scheidemann, head of the Social Democratic Party, were assaulted but survived.<sup>38</sup>

This was the political environment in Germany as the future officers of the Einsatzgruppen reached adolescence and early adulthood. In 1919 the men ranged in age from five to twenty-five, with an average age of twenty. Three of the older subjects of this study had seen service in the First World War.<sup>39</sup> Ernst Biberstein testified at Nuremberg, "As a veteran in the First World War I had to experience the shameful collapse of the Reich in 1919. Therefore, for me as a soldier it was the duty of conscience to do everything in order to have rescinded the Versailles Treaty, which I regarded as very humiliating."<sup>40</sup> In the early 1920s via the Nazi newspaper *Völkischer Beobachter*, which harped continuously on the theme of the "November criminals" and "the stab in the back," Biberstein "got very interested in the Nazi Party."<sup>41</sup> His interest would later culminate on the steppes of Northern Ukraine, where as a major Biberstein commanded Einsatzkommando 6 of Einsatzgruppe C.

Walter Haensch's age was more typical of the twenty-two men; he was fifteen when World War I ended and twenty-nine when Hitler came to power in 1933. At Nuremberg Haensch, who as a lieutenant colonel had commanded Sonderkommando 4b

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<sup>38</sup> Paul Bookbinder, *Weimar Germany: The Republic of the Reasonable* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1996), 104.

<sup>39</sup> The three men were: Ernst Biberstein, Paul Blobel, and Woldemar Klingelhöfer.

<sup>40</sup> National Archives Collection of World War Two War Crimes Records (Nuremberg), Record Group 238, *U.S. v. Otto Ohlendorf et. al.*, Microfilm Publication M895, 38 Rolls, Roll 4, Frames 354-355 (Biberstein).

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, Roll 4, Frame 354 (Biberstein).

of Einsatzgruppe C, described his most memorable adolescent experiences in

Hirschfelde, his hometown, as follows:

The class struggle of the proletariat...the elimination of the bourgeois or middle class, all these slogans influenced the working population very much. Meetings, propaganda speeches, mass demonstrations took place in turn and created a psychoses which did away with all inhibitions. I myself experienced at that time that people were taken from their apartments and ill-treated. I myself saw [how] the general director of the large power plant of Hirschfelde was ill-treated and wounded and thrown into the Neisse River...I myself at the suggestion of third persons, as a boy had to warn people who were in danger in order to save them from such terror acts or ill-treatment by incited elements.... I believe very few boys have had such a vivid political lesson concerning the consequence of Communist activities. Nobody has ever learned so much about it as we did when we were children.<sup>42</sup>

Clearly, Walter Haensch believed that the prevailing political atmosphere of his adolescence, in which friends and family members became bitter enemies, resulted from Communist political activity. But in fact the growing influence of Communism in Germany was not a cause but rather an expression of fundamental social problems, masked during the Wilhelmine Era and suddenly let loose with the birth of the Weimar Republic.

Like Ernst Biberstein and Walter Haensch, the other men also came from middle-class families. As opposed to the old middle class (farmers and artisans) the new middle class (office workers, small business owners, managers, and civil servants) was paid by salary. During the First World War inflation had become a nagging problem, and in the first third of the Weimar Era rampant hyperinflation destroyed the purchasing power of the German middle class. By late 1923 one U.S. dollar was worth more than one trillion German Marks. In comparison to workers, who were represented by unions and whose

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<sup>42</sup> Record Group 238, Microfilm Publication M895, Roll 4, Frame 893 (Haensch).

hourly wages were thus somewhat adjustable, as well as to the ownership class, who could pass on the cost of inflation to the consumer, middle-class salaries were inflexible and therefore most affected by inflation.<sup>43</sup> But not only was the purchasing power of the German middle class destroyed, so too were hard earned family savings. This affected the lives of young men such as Erwin Schulz, who as a colonel later commanded Einsatzkommando 5 of Einsatzgruppe C. At Nuremberg Schulz explained that in the early 1920s he was forced to discontinue his university studies because his parents' savings had been wiped out by inflation.<sup>44</sup>

A higher education of some kind, whether in the form of an apprenticeship or university study, was typical of the German middle class. Despite the economic situation in the early Weimar Republic a surprising number of the later Einsatzgruppen officers received university degrees. Of the twenty-two subjects of this study eighteen received the German equivalent of a bachelor's degree, and of these eighteen men six went on to earn graduate degrees. Political clubs, so prominent in German universities of the time, attracted middle-class sons faced with inflation and uncertain employment opportunities. As the institutional springboard of young middle-class men the German university logically became the first outlet for the expression of anti-Republican views, and increasingly a bastion of anti-Semitism and anti-Communism.<sup>45</sup> Many of the subjects of this study first contacted Nazism on campus, and a number of them became active in the Nazi Students' Association.

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<sup>43</sup> Bookbinder, 166-167.

<sup>44</sup> Record Group 238, Microfilm Publication M895, Roll 2, Frame 935 (Schulz).

<sup>45</sup> Mommsen, 304, Peukert, 226.

When the men left university they sought professional employment. During the Weimar Era Woldemar Klingelhöfer<sup>46</sup> worked as an opera singer, Ernst Biberstein as a pastor, and Franz Six<sup>47</sup> as a university professor, while the others worked as civil servants, lawyers, and businessmen. Many of the men were lucky to enter the job market in the years 1924-1928, a relatively stable period sometimes known as the “Golden Era” of the Weimar Republic. In 1924 currency reform brought inflation under control and by 1928 industrial output in Germany had surpassed pre-World War I levels. But it must be remembered that the mid-1920s represent the high point of a fundamentally troubled era. Even in the best of times resentment stemming from the Versailles settlement remained at the surface in Germany. As for the economy, although German heavy industry temporarily recovered, the agricultural sector continued in a downward spiral and unemployment rose significantly beginning in 1926.<sup>48</sup>

Though I emphasize economics and politics, cultural developments in Germany have also been cited as an important factor explaining the rise of Nazism. Certainly Weimar culture differed significantly from that of Wilhelmine Germany, and its sudden burst onto the scene shocked many Germans. With democracy and Germany’s full-fledged entrance into the world market, money or the lack thereof took on a central role. Young Germans struggled with their inability to live up to fashionable images presented through mass advertisement and popular entertainment. In the arts the avant-garde of Berlin reached a fevered pitch of experimentation, but the majority of

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<sup>46</sup> Woldemar Klingelhöfer served as a major in Sonderkommando 7b (Einsatzgruppe C). He later took over from Franz Six as commander of Vorkommando Moskau (Einsatzgruppe B). In the records of the court Woldemar Klingelhöfer’s first name was often misspelled as “Waldemar.”

<sup>47</sup> Franz Six, the first commander of Vorkommando Moskau, ranked as a colonel.

<sup>48</sup> Peukert, 121.



Germans lived outside what they increasingly maligned as a Mecca of social permissiveness. As economic troubles continued and politics became ever more polarized, many ordinary Germans began to regard postwar developments in the arts as a sure sign that the culture of Goethe, Bach, and Wagner had come under foreign domination.

But in fact much of Weimar culture, while a clear break with the past, was relatively apolitical and accurately represented the fears and hopes of Germans who later became Nazis. A good example is the 1926 film *Die letzte Droschke von Berlin* (The Last Horse Carriage of Berlin). In Walter Laqueur's description of the film the motor car becomes "the incarnation of all evil. For the spread of the taxicabs has made the hero, an old coachman, unemployed. His wife tells him he is no longer of any use to anyone and, to make his humiliation complete, his daughter marries a young taxi-driver." In this light some scholars have argued that rapid technological advances further threatened the financial well-being of Weimar Era Germans, causing them to react in favor of Nazism.

While this argument has limited merit, in his study of reactionary modernism Jeffrey Herf shows that Germans who rejected the permissiveness of Weimar culture nonetheless came to accept modern technology, which promised to become an important weapon in rescuing Germany from the depths of defeat.<sup>49</sup> Thus, in the film, after attempting suicide the out of work coachman "is saved by his son-in-law [the taxi-driver]. In the end an abode is found even for his horse, between two garages. Both

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<sup>49</sup> Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

coachman and horse reluctantly accept the spirit of modernity.”<sup>50</sup> The film and Weimar culture as a whole were representative of economic, political, and social trends, rather than a cause of them. Like the Treaty of Versailles, Weimar culture is important to this study because despite the historian’s ability to analyze more rationally both points sixty years after the fact, few Germans possessed the considerable perspective and foresight necessary to do so at that time.

The beginning of the end for the Weimar Republic came in 1930. Worldwide economic depression sent unemployment soaring, this at a time when budgetary problems necessitated cuts in Germany’s social welfare system. Already in January 1930 over three million Germans were out of work. By January 1932 this number had doubled to over six million.<sup>51</sup> Felix Rühl, who later served as a first lieutenant in Sonderkommando 10b of Einsatzgruppe D, was the son of a customs official and one of the youngest of the twenty-two subjects of this study. Rühl had completed an apprenticeship in England but could not find a job upon his return to Germany in 1930. He had no choice but to accept a job as an unskilled industrial laborer, which he lost a few months later when the factory closed.<sup>52</sup> It was at this time - Rühl was twenty years old in 1930 - that he joined the Nazi Party. In court he explained his political development as follows:

I was against the idea of class struggle [i.e. Communism] because, in spite of the position I held then [as a laborer], I felt that I belonged to the bourgeoisie because of my background. But in addition to that, there was another thing. In the party system of the Weimar Republic, I saw one of the chief causes of our catastrophic economic and political conditions, which in my opinion, led to the absolutely senseless number of over thirty

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<sup>50</sup> Walter Laqueur, *Weimar: A Cultural History, 1918-1933* (London: Phoenix Press, 1974), 241.

<sup>51</sup> Bookbinder, 174.

<sup>52</sup> Record Group 238, Microfilm Publication M895, Roll 5, Frame 809 (Rühl).

political parties. Thus the political will of the German people was so split up that the formation of an efficient government became impossible. Here, in my opinion, was the most important impediment [the Weimar Government] to relieving our distress which could only be overcome by joining forces with everybody. Thus I decided to join the Nazi Party...<sup>53</sup>

Indeed a large part of the appeal of Nazism was that its vision for the future stood in sharp contrast to prevailing conditions in the Weimar Republic. Like the other extremist parties the Nazi Party benefited from high unemployment. Hitler promised that the creation of his vision for a new German order would mean full employment for all German men. But more importantly, Nazism offered Germans the chance to do away with the politics of individual rights and socio-economic class in favor of a homegrown politics of blood.

In their testimony the officers of the Einsatzgruppen repeatedly commented on divisions within *das Volk*, the German people, which arose during the Weimar Era. This is what Felix Rühl meant when he expressed his wish to relieve “our distress” (i.e. the German people’s distress) “by joining forces with everybody” (i.e. Germans coming together in a movement which identified itself with the supposed will of the German people). Werner Braune, who as a major would later command Einsatzkommando 11b of Einsatzgruppe D, was one year older than Felix Rühl. In 1930, at the age of twenty-one, Braune came into contact with Nazism at university and was particularly impressed by the Nazi platform because as he later explained,

We suffered greatly from the political dissension and weakness in Germany; class struggle and class hatred governed public life. The moral decay increased. For the first time I came across a movement here which didn’t want to separate people. They didn’t want to emphasize class

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<sup>53</sup> Record Group 238, Microfilm Publication M895, Roll 5, Frame 811 (Rühl).

differences, but [rather] they emphasized that all Germans were alike, who were bound together by fate, and [that] they belonged together.<sup>54</sup>

In fact the German upper and working classes never fully accepted Nazism, but the Nazi promise to unite all classes of Germans as Germans appealed to young middle-class men like Felix Rühl and Werner Braune, who felt most threatened by developments in Germany during the Weimar Era.

In the 1930 election the Nazis received 18.3 percent and the Communists 13.1 percent of the vote respectively, and thus both parties became major factors in German politics.<sup>55</sup> Within a period of ten years the German electorate had shifted from the Center-Left to the extreme Left and Right. Nazi Party members tended to be middle-class; office professionals, small business owners, farmers, artisans, and government bureaucrats were all overrepresented in comparison to their percentage of the population.<sup>56</sup> The Nazi Party's members were also very young. During the period 1925-1933 sixty percent of new party members were under thirty and the average for all members was thirty-one years of age.<sup>57</sup> By the time Hitler came to power in 1933 fourteen of the subjects of this study had already joined the Nazi Party while five others joined that same year. Two of the men became party members in 1934 and 1937 respectively, and the last man, a Baltic German named Waldemar von Radetzky,<sup>58</sup> entered the Nazi Party in 1940.

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<sup>54</sup> Record Group 238, Microfilm Publication M895, Roll 4, Frames 670-671 (Braune).

<sup>55</sup> Mommsen, 315.

<sup>56</sup> Peukert, 237.

<sup>57</sup> Falter, 146.

<sup>58</sup> The Baltic Germans lived in the modern day nations of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. A significant German presence in the Baltic lands dates back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century and the arrival of the Teutonic Order of Knights, who ruled the native Baltic peoples until the mid-1500s. Thereafter, as the influence of Russia, Sweden, and Poland grew, the Teutonic Order collapsed, though the descendants of the Teutonic Knights, the *Ritterschaft* as they were known, remained a distinct ruling class and continued to control government,

As defendants at Nuremberg three of the men did attempt to portray themselves as “fair weather” Nazis. Waldemar von Radetzky described the mass basis of the Nazi movement as “incomprehensible,”<sup>59</sup> and stated that Germany’s eastern policy had struck him as “severe.”<sup>60</sup> He offered no explanation as to why he had joined the Nazi Party shortly after his 1939 emigration from Latvia to Germany. Mathias Graf, the lowest ranking of the men, had served as a master sergeant in Einsatzkommando 6 of Einsatzgruppe C. Graf claimed that during the Weimar Era his attitude toward Jews had been “indifferent” and that his career as a businessman had taken precedence over his activities in the Nazi Party.<sup>61</sup> A third defendant, Gustav Nosske, had commanded Einsatzkommando 12 of Einsatzgruppe D with the rank of major. Nosske claimed that he became a Nazi chiefly for the purpose of advancing his career, stating that in 1933 he had joined the party “without any particular reluctance, but also without any special enthusiasm.”<sup>62</sup> However, the actions of these three men between the world wars suggest that they too, were motivated to a considerable extent by the political platform of Nazism. Though von Radetzky and Graf in particular were indeed less committed Nazis in comparison to their fellow defendants, they were Nazis nonetheless.

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education, and much of the land. In the 1880s Russia took control of the Baltic lands and the privileges of the *Ritterschaft* were curtailed but not ended. After World War I Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania gained independence and as a result the Baltic Germans lost all rights as a distinct group, setting in motion a period of Baltic German emigration to Germany proper. This period of emigration culminated in the Nazi-Soviet Pact of 1939, which stipulated that the remaining Baltic Germans be forcibly resettled to Germany. Waldemar von Radetzky was resettled to Germany in 1939 and he joined the Nazi Party the following year, though his SS file indicates that he had already been a member of the Nazi movement in Latvia. Radetzky later served as a captain in Sonderkommando 4a of Einsatzgruppe C, and his SS file also mentions him as being “in command of a ‘Teilkommando’” in the summer of 1942 (Record Group 242, Microfilm Publication A3343, Roll 002B, Waldemar von Radetzky).

<sup>59</sup> Record Group 238, Microfilm Publication M895, Roll 5, Frame 578 (von Radetzky).

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., Roll 5, Frame 604 (von Radetzky).

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., Roll 5, Frames 1204, 1274 (Graf).

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., Roll 4, Frame 1097 (Nosske).

Concerning the men's political beliefs one must remember that while prevailing conditions heavily influenced the decisions of Weimar Era Germans, people reacted differently to the situation at hand and a number of paths were available to Germans of the time. The conditions of Weimar did not force anyone, middle class or otherwise, to become a member of the Nazi Party. Each and every one of the subjects of this study chose the path of Nazism, which though it had its twists and turns, led generally in an easterly direction. It would indeed be asking too much to expect the men to have predicted the details of their wartime lives, but certainly they were aware of the direction in which they were heading. And as I will demonstrate, all along the path, from its beginnings in Weimar Germany to its endpoint in the East, the subjects of this study gave every indication that they could be trusted with the most sensitive and difficult tasks.

When we trace each of the men's lives back to its origin, to a time before the troubles of Weimar and the temptations of Nazism, one common theme jumps forth. All came from middle-class backgrounds; their fathers were civil servants, small business owners and office workers, and the men trained for similar careers. With the dawn of the Weimar Era middle-class Germans suddenly gained a long sought-after political voice, but this was a voice in a nation they did not recognize and could not identify with; a Germany born of foreign influence resulting from a lost war. To much of the German middle class the Weimar Republic, in the words of Eric Weitz, "Invoked the specter of a world gone awry."<sup>63</sup> Like so many of their generation and background the later officers of the Einsatzgruppen blamed the new order for the loss of World War I, for inflation and

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<sup>63</sup> Eric D. Weitz, *Creating German Communism, 1890-1990: From Popular Protest to Socialist State* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 100.

unemployment, for what Werner Braune expressed to the court with the words “moral decay,” and for the socio-political disunity so prevalent in Weimar society.

And unfortunately, as has so often been the case in modern European history, the subjects of this study turned to scapegoating. As they explained voluntarily in their courtroom testimony, Communism and its followers were a major cause of Germany’s ills. What the men did not volunteer, and certainly this was of key importance to the case, is that they connected Communism with “the Jews” and viewed “international Jewry” as the true source of everything ailing Germany. In the next two chapters I present evidence showing that despite attempting to explain away their actions as anything but Jew-hatred, it was anti-Semitism more than any other factor which brought the men to the killing fields of the East and motivated them in their assigned task of exterminating the Soviet Jews.

### 3. A Savage Descent

It is difficult for most Westerners today to comprehend how intense and universal anti-Semitism was in Europe from the fourth to the middle of the twentieth century. For example, the impression that Jews ritually murdered Christian children, using their blood to make matzot during Passover, now seems ridiculous to Americans and Germans alike. Yet before 1945 such mythical beliefs were commonly held throughout Europe, and though the content of charges against Europe's Jews changed over time, myth and malice remained constants. By the nineteenth century the image of "the Jew" as murderer of Christian children had been superceded, though not replaced, by the image of "the Jew" as economic parasite. In the late nineteenth century new trends in biomedical science would be employed for political purposes, adding to 1,500 years of anti-Semitic legend and resulting in the near total destruction of the European Jewish community.

In its original form European anti-Semitism was based on Christian religious hatred.<sup>64</sup> Jews not only denied Jesus as the Messiah, according to the New Testament they were also responsible for his death.<sup>65</sup> As a result of the theological divide over the acceptance or rejection of Jesus, the New Testament's account of Jesus' crucifixion, and Judaism's minority status in Europe, its adherents suffered slander and at times death at

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<sup>64</sup> There is evidence of European anti-Semitism before the birth of Christ, in the writings of the Roman authors Seneca and Tacitus for example. But Judaism also had powerful protectors during the period of Roman Paganism, and Jews enjoyed a number of specifically Jewish religious rights. It is only with the coming of Christianity that we find the development of a systemic hatred of Judaism and its adherents in Europe (Wistrich, 5, 7-12).

<sup>65</sup> The New Testament's account of Jesus' death is considered by most experts to be more theology than history. Whether or not Jews were primarily responsible for the death of Christ, blaming all Jews (which Christian theologians did) is tantamount to blaming all Germans, including those born after the Nazi era, for the Holocaust. Sadly, in Europe from the fourth century into the modern age it was held as a matter of course that "the Jews" killed Christ.



the hands of secular and clerical authorities. Yet despite their abhorrence of the Jewish religion, early Catholic theologians hoped that Europe's Jews would voluntarily convert to Catholicism. These hopes failed to materialize, and during the Middle Ages the Catholic Church turned to a policy of coerced and even forced conversion. Early in the Reformation Martin Luther, the father of Protestantism and one of Germany's most influential writers, also hoped to convert the European Jews. In 1523 Luther wrote, "[The Catholics] have dealt with the Jews as if they were dogs rather than human beings; they have done little else than deride them and seize their property.... I hope that if one deals in a kindly way with the Jews and instructs them carefully from the Holy Scripture, many of them will become genuine Christians."<sup>66</sup> However, Luther soon realized that like Catholicism, his form of Christianity would not bring about a mass conversion of Europe's Jews. And like his Catholic predecessors, by the 1540s Luther no longer viewed Jews as misguided adherents of a heretical religion, but rather as an incorrigible lot destined for eternal damnation.

Well before Martin Luther's time the Jews of Europe had been restricted to the professions of money lending and commerce, prohibited from land ownership, and were segregated from Christians by laws governing where Jews could live. Segregation and professional restrictions led to self-fulfilling prophecies by which, in the minds of Gentiles, Jews could plausibly be seen as "shysters," to invoke but one derogatory term employed to this day.<sup>67</sup> In his 1543 essay *The Jews and Their Lies* Luther returned

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<sup>66</sup> Martin Luther, "That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew," in *Faith and Freedom: An Invitation to the Writings of Martin Luther*, ed. John F. Thornton and Susan B. Varenne (New York: Vintage Books, 2002), 259.

<sup>67</sup> The terminology "self-fulfilling prophecy" in relation to anti-Semitism is used repeatedly by John Weiss.

repeatedly to the subject of Jews and the economy. Under the heading “A Bitter, Poisonous Enemy” Luther wrote;

A person who does not know the Devil [the Devil being the Jews], might wonder why they [the Jews] are so at enmity with Christians. They live...under our protection, use [our] land and highways, market and streets. Princes and government sit by, snore and have their mugs (mouths) open, let the Jews take from their purse and chest, steal and rob what-ever they will. That is, they permit themselves and their subjects to be abused and sucked dry and reduced to beggars with their own money, through the usury of the Jews. For the Jews, as foreigners, certainly should have nothing; and what they have certainly must be ours. They do not work, do not earn anything from us.... Yet they have our money and goods and are lords in our land where they are in exile.<sup>68</sup>

This passage illustrates how as Christians came to realize that the Jewish presence in Europe would be lasting, and as finance and commerce increased in importance, hatred based on the Jewish rejection of Jesus gave way to economic anti-Semitism. Luther’s *The Jews and Their Lies* is particularly important because it anticipates future developments; it was meant as a wake-up call, a plea to retake society from the grips of Jewish influence.<sup>69</sup>

Given the methods of the Catholic and Protestant Churches it is not surprising that the Enlightenment of the 1700s did more to assimilate Europe’s Jews than over one thousand years of abuse, discrimination, and slander. Though Enlightenment thinkers rejected Judaism as well as Christianity, they recognized that the image of “the Jew” was a creation of discrimination and theological contrivances, and under the influence of the

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<sup>68</sup> Martin Luther, *The Jews and Their Lies* (Los Angeles: Christian Nationalist Crusade, 1948), 29-30.

<sup>69</sup> In Luther’s theology “society” is ill-defined. He writes of Christian society but implies German society with talk of princes, government, subjects, and foreigners, and with the words “under our protection” and “in our land.” Furthermore, in the final paragraph of his pamphlet Luther refers to himself as “a good patriot.”

Enlightenment French and British Jews gained legal equality.<sup>70</sup> But because Enlightenment thought had far less influence in the German speaking lands, German Jews remained behind ghetto walls until the intervention of an outside power. In 1805 Napoleon Bonaparte crossed the river Rhine; his troops poured into the German heartland and by 1807 his army had defeated Prussia, the most influential of the German principalities. With control of Central Europe Napoleon liberated the German Jews from residency and professional restrictions. Napoleon's policy concerning Jews grew partly from the fact that he was influenced by Enlightenment thought and the French Revolution, but also from practical considerations. By granting rights to traditionally underprivileged groups, including Jews, Napoleon consolidated his power in the newly conquered German lands.<sup>71</sup>

Though Napoleon held sway in Central Europe for less than ten years his influence represented a turning point for the Jews of Germany. With liberation many were attracted to the liberal ideals of the Enlightenment which had ultimately led to their new freedoms. Beginning in the 1800s Jews in Germany were less likely to be orthodox, tending to adopt the deism of the Enlightenment or in some cases the traditional forms of Christianity practiced by their German coworkers, friends, and family members. Jews entered German universities and excelled, often attracted to law and medicine since private practice lessened the effects of anti-Semitism,<sup>72</sup> which persisted despite the legal

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<sup>70</sup> The Enlightenment did little for the position of women, who, whether Jewish or Gentile, remained in an inferior position to men despite the Enlightenment's emphasis on equality before the law.

<sup>71</sup> John Weiss, *Ideology of Death: Why the Holocaust Happened in Germany* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1997), 58, 59, 64.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 131, 134.

reforms begun under Napoleon.<sup>73</sup> In fact the Jewish tendency toward liberalism, which only grew as Jews entered professional careers and earned middle-class salaries, reinforced the image of “the Jew” as economic manipulator in the minds of Germans. While middle-class German Jews, like the middle classes of France and Britain, embraced the economic and political legacies of Adam Smith and John Locke, in the years after the failed Revolutions of 1848 the German middle class turned to *völkisch* nationalism as a substitute for political aspirations which had come to naught.

The German concept of *das Volk* has its origins in the fact that Germany as a nation did not exist until 1871. Before “Germany” there existed in Central Europe a theoretical nation, the Volk, who shared a common culture. In the absence of political unity the word “Volk” defined what it meant to be German. The earliest evidence of a discernable *völkisch* politics is contained in the writings of the German romanticists Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803) and Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814). In contrast to post-Enlightenment French or British thinkers who defined “nation” on the basis of political rights, Herder and Fichte linked “nation” with cultural inheritance. They held that peoples are essentially different and advocated preserving and cultivating the supposedly unique characteristics of the German Volk. Over the following 150 years this line of thinking proved to be a very slippery slope. Herder and Fichte focused primarily on German culture, but with the political union of Germans as such in 1871, a new movement melded national politics with a modernized conception of the Volk.

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<sup>73</sup> Because Napoleon’s direct influence over Central Europe was relatively short-lived, and because Germany before 1871 was a loose confederation of principalities, Jewish liberation proceeded in a haphazard manner after Napoleon’s downfall. Liberation in the German lands was a long process characterized by gradual further improvement in the legal status of Jews, the pace of which depended largely on regional and local authorities.

The völkisch movement of the late 1800s was led largely by intellectuals and was composed of disparate organizations with various agendas, which found common ground through their views on the relationship between Germany and the Volk. According to völkisch thought Germany was the political expression of the unique characteristics of the Volk, and therefore class and individual interests had to be yielded to the German nation-state. Thus the 1894 Declaration of the German Union, a popular völkisch organization, read as follows: “We will not be shaken by...the delusion of a world bourgeoisie; rather, we will cherish and cultivate our national characteristics with the proper care and reflection, for we realize that...it is only upon the field of our national characteristics, *Volkstum*, that one can sow, cultivate, and harvest.”<sup>74</sup> The supposed national characteristics of the Volk included the “honest labor” of German farmers and artisans and a strong devotion to one’s place of origin. Völkisch writers and politicians contrasted this German politico-economic ideal against “the Jew,” by nature a commercially oriented rootless cosmopolitan.

While the image of the noble savage fanned the egos of German farmers and artisans of the old middle class, a return to the land and the guild system held no appeal for the urban professionals of the new middle class. The main effect of völkisch thought on the new middle class was to highlight increasing disunity within German society, resulting from the rise of liberal market economics and Communist class-based theory. By identifying “the Jew” as the source of unwelcome political and economic developments during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the völkisch

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<sup>74</sup> M.R. Gerstenhauer, *Der Völkische Gedanke in Vergangenheit und Zukunft* (Leipzig: Armanen Verlag, 1933), 31. Translation from: Jost Hermand, *Old Dreams of a New Reich: Volkish Utopias and National Socialism*, trans. Paul Lavesque and Stefan Soldovieri (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992), 33.

movement gained support from city-dwelling professionals and villager artisans and farmers alike. Thus a key section of the German populace came to adopt the view of Otto Glagau, a leading völkisch writer, who in 1878 wrote that “the social question is nothing but the Jewish question.”<sup>75</sup>

Taking the Romantic Movement as their starting point, völkisch thinkers of the late 1800s replaced the earlier German notion of a cultural nation with that of a racial nation. While the idea that blood determined group characteristics was not new,<sup>76</sup> three key scientific developments of the latter half of the nineteenth century lent crucial support to völkisch political thought. Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution (1859), Gregor Mendel’s discovery of biological inheritance (1866), and the germ theory of disease developed by Louis Pasteur and Robert Koch (1860s-1870s) revolutionized biomedical science. Eugenics, the study of human biology as it relates to society, grew from these scientific breakthroughs. Eugenicists, along with völkisch intellectuals in the social sciences and humanities, co-opted the work of Darwin, Mendel, Pasteur, and Koch for political purposes.

As Robert Proctor has written, “People generally found in Darwin what they wanted to find.”<sup>77</sup> Communists used Darwin’s work to discredit religion while liberals used it to justify the increasing gap between rich and poor. Völkisch thinkers employed the theory of evolution to argue that races, like plants and animals, compete for limited

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<sup>75</sup> Daniela Weiland, *Otto Glagau und „Der Kulturkämpfer“: Zur Entstehung des modernen Antisemitismus im frühen Kaiserreich* (Berlin: Metropol Verlag, 2004), 57.

<sup>76</sup> For example, by the 1400s a significant number of Spanish Jews had been converted to Catholicism. Known as *Conversos* (Converts) or *Marranos* (Pigs), it was widely believed that their blood drove them to secretly practice Judaism even at the risk of their own lives, reinforcing the belief that no Jew could ever “become” a Spaniard (Wistrich, 35-36).

<sup>77</sup> Robert N. Proctor, *Racial Hygiene: Medicine Under the Nazis* (Cambridge: MA, Harvard University Press, 1988), 16.

resources and grow stronger only at the expense of others.<sup>78</sup> Gregor Mendel's experiments with pea plants demonstrated that biological traits could be propagated or eliminated through selective breeding.<sup>79</sup> Völkisch thinkers extended Mendel's work with phenotype (appearance) to behavior, arguing for example that Jews were by nature prone to usury, homosexuality, and so forth. The concept of selective breeding raised the specter of "improving" the German Volk by removing undesirable elements from the gene pool.<sup>80</sup> Finally, Louis Pasteur and Robert Koch proved the germ theory of disease, that bacteria and viruses cause illness, and conversely that their elimination from the body results in a cure. Again völkisch thinkers applied biology to society, comparing Jews to bacteria and the human body to the German Volk.<sup>81</sup> The image of "the Jew" as a deadly microbe would later become a key component of Nazi propaganda.

In the humanities no one man contributed more to völkisch thought than Heinrich von Treitschke, the most influential German historian of the Wilhelmine Era. Other popular völkisch intellectuals, Otto Glagau and Wilhelm Marr for example, published a stream of works but could not invest the authority accorded Germany's premier university professor.<sup>82</sup> In Treitschke's seven volume masterpiece *History of Germany in the Nineteenth Century* (1879) he presented a völkisch interpretation of German history and thus gave weight to the völkisch movement like no other intellectual could. Also in

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<sup>78</sup> Eric D. Weitz, *A Century of Genocide: Utopias of Race and Nation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 36.

<sup>79</sup> Mendel's original experiments went practically unnoticed for three decades. At the turn of the twentieth century three biologists, Carl Correns, Hugo de Vries, and Erich von Tschermack, rediscovered Mendel's work (Proctor, 32).

<sup>80</sup> Proctor, 31-32.

<sup>81</sup> Weitz, *A Century of Genocide*, 47.

<sup>82</sup> Albert S. Lindemann, *Esau's Tears: Modern Anti-Semitism and the Rise of the Jews* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 132. Heinrich von Treitschke taught at Friedrich-Wilhelm-University in Berlin, currently Humboldt University.

1879 Treitschke published an article entitled “*Unsere Aussichten*” (Our Views) in the prestigious journal *Preußische Jahrbücher*. In this article he struggled with the fact that while enlightened thought precluded national and religious hatred, he and his colleagues were nonetheless convinced that the Jewish presence in Germany represented a growing problem. Treitschke concluded that “even in the highest circles of education, among men who would repudiate with horror every thought of religious intolerance or national arrogance, the unanimous view is: the Jews are our misfortune!”<sup>83</sup> A half century later these infamous words, “The Jews Are Our Misfortune!,” would serve as the literal masthead of *Der Stürmer*, the most anti-Semitic mass-circulation newspaper of the Weimar and Nazi eras.<sup>84</sup>

There are, however, important differences between the völkisch and Nazi movements. The völkisch movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was spearheaded by intellectuals and was composed of disparate associations with various agendas. The Nazi movement, beginning in the early 1920s, was organized in a single, hierarchical political party whose *Führer* was above question on all matters. The Nazi movement also had an anti-intellectual bent, especially among the members of Hitler’s inner circle. Certainly Nazism did attract intellectual types, as evidenced by the twenty-two men who are the subjects of this study. Even as defendants at Nuremberg they enjoyed musing over the political philosophy of Nazism. But as this study will show, in their practical work within the Nazi Party and state the men sometimes found themselves at odds with top Nazis who valued action over words.

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<sup>83</sup> Heinrich von Treitschke, “Unsere Aussichten,” *Preußische Jahrbücher*, 44 (15 Nov. 1879), 559-576.

<sup>84</sup> Weiss, *Ideology of Death*, 88.



A second important difference between the völkisch and Nazi movements involves the association of Jews with Communism. Communism had only begun to develop by the 1890s, the heyday of the völkisch movement. Karl Marx's most important writings, *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) and *Capital* (1867) were available to völkisch thinkers, but Marx's philosophy was little more than words on paper before the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the rise of the German Communist Party following the First World War. As a result of the Russian Revolution, Communists gained control of a nation with seemingly limitless natural resources and a huge population. Left-leaning Germans tended to view the Soviet Union as an example to be emulated, and during the 1920s it was obvious to all that international Communism was on the rise. Furthermore, the German Communist Party of the Weimar Era, the KPD, was modeled on the Soviet Party and was tightly controlled by Moscow.<sup>85</sup> In an effort to implement Marx's philosophy in Germany the KPD intentionally contributed to the impression that the republic was teetering on the verge of a Russian-style revolution. Non-Communist Germans of the Weimar years thus had substantial reason to worry that a post-Weimar Germany would be a Communist Germany.

The Nazis made a great deal of political hay by promoting the modern legend that Communism was a Jewish invention designed to gain control of Germany and the wider world.<sup>86</sup> Like Communism, the Nazis argued, the Jewish Diaspora was by definition

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<sup>85</sup> Weitz, *Creating German Communism*, 234-235, 278.

<sup>86</sup> This was not a new idea. For example, in 1903 a forged document entitled "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion" was published in Czarist Russia. Supposedly authored by a group of Jewish Elders, the Protocols describe a Jewish conspiracy to dominate the world through the promotion of political discord and control of finance and the media. The Protocols were exposed as a forgery by *The Times* of London in 1921 but continued to have a significant impact in Europe until the end of World War II. Though the subjects of this study believed in a Jewish world conspiracy, they were also likely aware that the Protocols had been proven a forgery.

international; a significant Jewish population existed in almost every nation of the western world. And Marx himself was a Jew by birth,<sup>87</sup> as were a number of prominent figures in the Soviet and German Communist parties. That was the extent of the hard evidence by which Jews could be linked with Communism. But the Nazis had a powerful historical card to play; they were able to call on a tradition of anti-Semitism dating back more than a thousand years, not only in Germany but also in the lands Germany later occupied. The preexisting willingness to believe that Jews were by nature conspiratorial and manipulative meant that hard evidence of a Judeo-Communist conspiracy was simply not necessary. And the long-standing belief that Jews were the source of all troubles, combined with the political, economic, and social situation in Weimar Germany and the coinciding rise of Communism as a force in German politics, made the Nazi connection of Jews with Communism seem especially plausible to Germans.

The twenty-two men who are the subjects of this study came of age at a time when talk of the “Jewish question” – what to do with the Jews of Germany – was the daily fare in German politics. Each of the men viewed Jews as the source of every trouble facing Germany and over time they turned to Nazism for a solution to the Jewish question. It is therefore not surprising that as defendants none of the men demonstrated the slightest bit of sympathy for the worsening situation of Jews in the Weimar and early Nazi periods. In court two of the men, Adolf Ott and Mathias Graf, did make claims of neutrality on the subject of the prewar Jewish question. Adolf Ott had commanded Sonderkommando 7b of Einsatzgruppe B with the rank of lieutenant colonel. Under examination by his own council and without further explanation Ott made the claim that

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<sup>87</sup> Marx’s father converted to Lutheranism one year before Karl was born (Brustein, 2003, 268).

the Jewish question was “of no significance” to him.<sup>88</sup> However, Adolf Ott also admitted that even after having learned first-hand that the Soviet Jews were being exterminated, and after having himself played a direct role in the process, he had remained a loyal follower of Hitler to the bitter end in 1945.<sup>89</sup>

Mathias Graf made a somewhat more detailed claim of neutrality on the subject of the prewar Jewish question. He told the court, “My attitude toward the Jews was indifferent, but certainly not hostile, at no time. In my home town [Kempton], there were about twelve to thirteen Jewish families living, who were all respected citizens and I had a partly personal contact which I maintained with these people, and I certainly respected them.”<sup>90</sup> Like the other defendants Graf made a distinction between “the Jews” and Jewish individuals whom he had known personally. However, unlike the others Graf claimed “indifference” not only toward individual Jewish acquaintances, but also toward Jews in general. Mathias Graf’s statement, given without further explanation, is as close as any of the accused would come to a recollection of neutrality on the subject of “the Jews” in interwar Germany.

Concerning their attitudes toward Jews in general, the other defendants made no attempt to reinvent their prewar lives in a neutral or pro-Jewish light. Probably they were aware that such would have been unbelievable, but the men also knew that speaking in court in the overtly racist parlance of their prewar lives would have been suicide. The best available strategy for the defendants was to provide the court with a very general and watered-down version of their prewar attitudes on the Jewish question. This strategy was

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<sup>88</sup> Record Group 238, Microfilm Publication M895, Roll 5, Frame 188 (Ott).

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., Roll 5, Frame 227 (Ott).

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., Roll 5, Frame 1264 (Graf).

made easier by the fact that the prosecution's main evidence in the matter came from the records of the Nazi Party and state. This evidence showed that the defendants had indeed been anti-Semites before the war, but the records did not provide details on the extent to which anti-Semitism had been a feature of their daily lives. Thus the men's testimony concerning their prewar anti-Semitism is a very general and minimized version of the truth, representing what the men sensed they had to admit to for the sake of credibility, but minus the virulent hatred which fueled their lives in the years leading up to the Holocaust.

As part of the strategy of minimizing their own anti-Semitism the defendants volunteered information on two points in particular. First, the men over-emphasized their personal contacts with individual Jews, and second, they took pains to present the view that the overt mob-style violence of the *Kristallnacht* pogrom (November 9-10, 1938) had been unnecessary and counterproductive.<sup>91</sup> Walter Haensch's testimony is typical, though unlike the other defendants Haensch gave specific justification for his views, explaining,

The Jewish problem did exist, of course, insofar as after the last World War...the two parts of the population, the Jewish sector that is, and the Gentile sector in the Reich, came into collision with each other more and more, and this had as its reason in my opinion, the following: After the last World War there was an especially strong immigration into the Reich from the East which now, in quite a disproportionate manner, took positions in public life.<sup>92</sup>

Indeed there had been a significant influx of Eastern Jews into Germany well before World War I; the "problem" had preoccupied the völkisch historian Heinrich von

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<sup>91</sup> During *Kristallnacht* (The Night of Broken Glass) nearly all of Germany's synagogues were destroyed or damaged and Jewish businesses throughout Germany were looted. The exact number of Jewish deaths is unknown, though most experts place the number at between one and two hundred.

<sup>92</sup> Record Group 238, Microfilm Publication M895, Roll 4, Frame 968 (Haensch).

Treitschke in the late 1870s. Immigrant Eastern Jews, who often spoke Yiddish and wore traditional clothing, were easily identifiable as Jews in comparison to the more assimilated German Jews. But the Eastern Jews were also very poor and had no real influence in Germany outside the immigrant Jewish community. If, as his testimony suggests, Walter Haensch made a link between Eastern Jewish immigrants and powerful positions in politics and the economy, he was imagining a situation which simply did not exist.

Haensch continued his testimony by citing prewar personal contacts with Jewish individuals;

I remember discussions in my own home town with a [Jewish] physician, Professor Klineberger, and I also had discussions with an old Jewish lady with whom I lived...a certain Mrs. Markus. It was in Leipzig. These two people by no means rejected this attitude that newly immigrated Jews, those who had immigrated after 1918, were in a certain way unjustified to occupy such posts in German public life of all spheres.<sup>93</sup>

Clearly, in his early life Haensch had somehow formed a psychological link between Eastern Jewish immigrants and people in positions of great power and influence in Germany. As noted, this was simply not the case and seems to have been a matter of wishful thinking; a non-existent Jewish conspiracy concocted on the basis of core anti-Semitic beliefs. Walter Haensch wanted so badly to believe that “the Jews” were the source of Germany’s ills that his mind required no real evidence. But Haensch had also had a personal relationship with at least two Jews, and after confirming his own anti-Semitism to the court he went on to insist, “I, and not only I alone, have strongly objected to the acts of terror which took place in 1938 in November.”<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Record Group 238, Microfilm Publication M895, Roll 4, Frame 968 (Haensch).

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., Roll 4, Frame 973 (Haensch). November of 1938 being a reference to Kristallnacht.

Several of the other defendants also made their displeasure with the Kristallnacht pogrom known to the court. Though the men volunteered this information as part of the effort to minimize their prewar anti-Semitism, such testimony also appears to have been based on their genuine reactions to the event. What the men actually said concerning Kristallnacht amounted to nothing more than general objections to the pogrom; the fact that Jews had died, been beaten, and had lost their businesses, homes, and places of worship was not mentioned. Though the defendants did not provide details, the best explanation for their negative reactions is that the men did not object to the principle of Kristallnacht, but to the manner in which it was carried out. During the pogrom Nazi street mobs did a great deal of economic damage, laid bare the barbaric intentions of Nazism for the world to see, and did little toward achieving the goal of a society free of Jews.<sup>95</sup> For the subjects of this study, who were well educated and had a point of reference to the outside world, the results of Kristallnacht confirmed that mob violence was not a viable solution to the Jewish question.

Concerning the prewar Jewish question, Erwin Schulz' testimony followed the same pattern as that of Walter Haensch. Schulz began with a minimized admission of his own anti-Semitism. He told the court, "If 'Anti-Semitic' means hatred and destruction I have never been 'Anti-Semitic.' My so-called 'Anti-Semitic' attitude only went to that extent as the immoral influence of the Jews which I saw in my native country, in policy, economics, and culture, which had great power here and which limited the development

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<sup>95</sup> In their testimony concerning the interwar period the defendants spoke in terms of German, rather than European society. By late 1938, however, it is reasonable to assume that they were beginning to think in international terms. The men had long since accepted the core Nazi belief in a Judeo-Communist conspiracy, they knew that the vast majority of Europe's Jews lived in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, and of course they were aware that the Soviet Union was the seat of the international Communist movement.

of our own forces.” Like Haensch, Erwin Schulz then shifted gears unexpectedly, stating, “If a Jew was an honorable man, his race or religious opinions were of no interest to me.”<sup>96</sup> To this Schulz added a claim that following Kristallnacht, in his then capacity as Gestapo chief in Bremen, he had returned to a certain Jewish jewelry shop owner, “Fischbein,” all of the property stolen from him during the pogrom.<sup>97</sup>

Such testimony is full of contradictions, or so it would seem. Even after his experiences as an officer of the Einsatzgruppen, when Erwin Schulz was asked whether he regarded the Nazi Party’s Jewish platform as “a program of hatred and contempt,” Schulz answered in the negative.<sup>98</sup> A card-carrying Nazi at the time of Kristallnacht, Schulz may nonetheless have ensured the return of Mr. Fischbein’s property, perhaps because of some sort of personal relationship. In their testimony the men consistently differentiated between “the Jews” and Jewish individuals whom they had come to know personally. Heinrich Himmler, the chief of Nazi Germany’s police and state security forces, was known to complain that his task was complicated by the fact that every German had his “good Jew.”<sup>99</sup> Unfortunately, the men were vague about their prewar relationships with Jews, and thus we are left to speculate whether Mr. Fischbein was in fact Schulz’s “good Jew.” What can be said is that while the men considered “the Jews”

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<sup>96</sup> Record Group 238, Microfilm Publication M895, Roll 2, Frame 950 (Schulz).

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., Roll 2, Frame 1160 (Schulz). The question was formulated in the present: “Do you regard that part of the program of the National Socialist Party insofar as it concerns the Jews, a program of hatred and contempt?” Schulz answered simply “no, Your Honor.” It is not clear whether Schulz meant to answer in the present or the past; whether he was confirming his then current views, or his past views. In general the court avoided the issue of the men’s postwar views since it had little to do with guilt or innocence for the crimes in question.

<sup>99</sup> See, for example, Heinrich Himmler’s speech at Posen (Poznan) on October 4, 1943. Speaking of the Holocaust, which by that time was fully underway, Himmler commented, “And then along they all come, all the eighty million upright Germans, and each one has his decent Jew. They say: all the others are swine, but here is a first-class Jew” (<http://www.holocaust-history.org/himmler-poznan/speech-text.shtml>).

a threat to the existence of Germany and the Volk, they apparently did not view Jews whom they knew personally in the same light.

Concerning the men's prewar anti-Semitism, Ernst Biberstein's testimony is most revealing. Because he was trained in theology and had worked as a pastor, he was questioned intensely on the subject of Jews in prewar Germany. Biberstein also seemed to be speaking partly for posterity, demonstrating a frankness which the other defendants only showed in situations where it served their defense strategy.<sup>100</sup> Under direct examination Biberstein told the court that he had approved of the Nuremberg Laws, adding "the laws had a certain justification, in my conviction."<sup>101</sup> When questioned concerning the later requirement that Jews wear the Star of David, he commented, "It was a matter of taste, but that some kind of insignia would be worn, I did not consider unjust."<sup>102</sup> The Presiding Judge, Michael Musmanno, sensed a contradiction between Biberstein's theological training and his anti-Semitic views, but Biberstein saw no such contradiction:

THE PRESIDENT: Then from 1926 until what time did you still entertain the conviction which you have just expressed, namely, that the program of the NSDAP insofar as it pertained to the racial questions harmonized with your views on religion?

THE WITNESS: Until the very end.

THE PRESIDENT: And you have told us that you were a student on the Old Testament?

THE WITNESS: Yes.

THE PRESIDENT: And you were able to reconcile the National Socialist Party program insofar as it pertained to the Jewish question with the teachings of the Old Testament?

THE WITNESS: I hardly think, Your Honor, that the teachings of the Old Testament have anything to do with the later events in Germany,

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<sup>100</sup> Having studied ancient Middle Eastern history, Ernst Biberstein was perhaps more concerned than the other men with leaving a record of his own life and times.

<sup>101</sup> Record group 238, Microfilm Publication M895, Roll 4, Frame 612 (Biberstein).

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.



because, as I already said it was not a religious matter which was concerned, but merely a biological matter.<sup>103</sup>

Here is the foundation of Nazi anti-Semitism laid bare, a hatred based on blood, not religion. Nazi ideologues such as Ernst Biberstein truly believed that the main “evils” facing Germany and the Volk had their origins in Jewish blood.

According to Nazi ideology, Jewish blood found its most dangerous expression in Communist politics. At Nuremberg Walter Blume, who as a lieutenant colonel had commanded Sonderkommando 7a of Einsatzgruppe B, made an important admission in this light. Blume testified that well before his assignment to the Einsatzgruppen he had read studies and reports on the Soviet Union which confirmed the existence of a Judeo-Communist conspiracy. According to Blume, the investigations (carried out by Nazis) showed that “Jews in the East, in Russia, played a special part concerning Communist activities.”<sup>104</sup> Blume went on to state that well before 1941 he “knew that the Jews in Soviet Russia were...the intellectual bearers of the idea of Bolshevism” and that he had considered war with the Soviet Union “unavoidable for many years.”<sup>105</sup> Walter Blume’s admission of his prewar “knowledge” gives us a glimpse into the real thinking of the men concerning the relationship between “the Jews” and the world’s first Communist state.

In court many of the accused attempted to separate the political ideology of Nazism from what later unfolded in the German-occupied portion of the Soviet Union, claiming that they simply could not have known what was over the horizon. But as Walter Blume’s testimony demonstrates, he knew well before 1941 that a Judeo-Communist threat existed, that its locus was the Soviet Union, and that a final reckoning

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<sup>103</sup> Record Group 238, Microfilm Publication M895, Roll 4, Frame 363 (Biberstein).

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., Roll 3, Frame 765 (Blume).

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., Roll 3, Frames 630, 699 (Blume).

with Judeo-Communism was “unavoidable.” Indeed it would be absurd to think that it took reports on the subject to convince the men, each a committed Nazi, that Communism was an expression of Jewish blood and a threat to Germany and the Volk.

There should be no doubt that the subjects of this study understood the elimination of the Jews as a basic tenet of Nazism from its earliest days. From its beginnings in the early 1920s to the bitter end in 1945, Nazism was characterized by a set of fundamental founding principles which were determined by one man, Adolf Hitler. Over a twenty year span Hitler made it abundantly clear that Europe’s Jews were slated for extermination. At a very early stage Hitler’s intentions were recorded by the journalist Joseph Hell. In a 1922 interview with the brash young party leader, Hell posed the question, “What do you want to do to the Jews once you have full discretionary powers?” Hitler responded, “shouting, as if to a whole public gathering:”

Once I really am in power, my first and foremost task will be the annihilation of the Jews. As soon as I have the powers to do so, I will have gallows built in rows – at the Marienplatz in Munich, for example – as many as traffic allows. Then the Jews will be hanged indiscriminately, and they will remain hanging until they stink; they will hang there as long as the principles of hygiene permit. As soon as they have been untied, the next batch will be strung up, and so on down the line, until the last Jew in Munich has been exterminated. Other cities will follow suit, precisely in this fashion, until all Germany has been completely cleansed of Jews.<sup>106</sup>

Here we can clearly see the base hatred which fueled the Holocaust. As intellectual types the subjects of this study would probably have considered Hitler’s 1922 statement

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<sup>106</sup> Record (*Aufzeichnung*) of Joseph Hell, *Institute für Zeitgeschichte - München*, ZS 640 (*Zeugenschriftum*, Nummer 640), 1922. In 1955 a Dr. Hoch organized Joseph Hell’s records at the *Institut für Zeitgeschichte* in Munich. Hoch noted that Joseph Hell was at that time deceased, that he had lived at Galeriestraße 6a in Munich, and that Hell had worked with Dr. Fritz Gerlach, the editor of the weekly newspaper *Der Gerade Weg*. The source cited here are the notes Hell took during his interview with Hitler. I have been unable to locate a database containing the issues of *Der Gerade Weg*, and Dr. Hoch made no mention of whether Hell’s interview with Hitler was ever published. The same source was cited in Gerald Fleming’s book *Hitler and the Final Solution* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), 17.

unrealistic and low-brow. However, the men would also have agreed with the basic sentiment which Hitler expressed; that the Jews had to go, one way or another. At the time of Joseph Hell's interview with Hitler the Nazi Party was limited in scope to the state of Bavaria, and even there the Nazis had little real influence. But Hitler's popularity, and with it the popularity of the Nazi Party, would grow dramatically in the years to come as Hitler outline his genocidal plans to ever larger audiences.

One year later, in November of 1923, Adolf Hitler attempted to take power in Bavaria in what became known as the Beer Hall Putsch. Though an unsuccessful endeavor, Hitler's trial gave him a great deal of public exposure and made him a popular figure, resulting in the expansion of the Nazi Party beyond Bavaria. While in prison Hitler wrote his autobiography, *Mein Kampf*, which became the bible of Nazism, widely read and prominently displayed in the houses of believers across Germany. In his book Hitler made clear on a number of occasions that a Judeo-Communist conspiracy existed, and that it endangered not only Germany but the world. He wrote, "In Russian Bolshevism we must see the attempt undertaken by the Jews in the twentieth century to achieve world domination.... Their endeavor lies profoundly rooted in their essential nature."<sup>107</sup> This is the same concept which Ernst Biberstein later expressed to the court, that the supposedly conspiratorial and manipulative nature of the Jews was determined by their blood, and by extension, that only the elimination of the European Jews could remove this imminent danger to Germany and the Volk.

Concerning Hitler's plans to exterminate the Jews of Europe, undoubtedly his best known public statement was recorded at a meeting of the Reichstag on January 30, 1939.

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<sup>107</sup> Adolf Hitler, *Mein kampf*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001) 661.

As a film camera rolled Hitler declared, “Today I will once more be a prophet: If the international Jewish financiers in and outside Europe should succeed in plunging the nations once more into a world war, then the result will not be the Bolshevization of the earth, and thus the victory of Jewry, but the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe!”<sup>108</sup> Here, with a firm grip on power, and more than two years before the invasion of the Soviet Union, Hitler once again plainly linked “the Jews” with Communism and forecast the annihilation of the European Jews. Hitler’s “prophecy” was widely available to the German public, and of course it was of particular interest to his supporters, which the subjects of this study certainly were. As Walter Blume told the court, “I believed in the Fuehrer to such a degree as one could possibly believe in a person.”<sup>109</sup> Certainly Blume and the other men heard or read Hitler’s Reichstag speech, and they must have understood what their Führer intended, for again Hitler made no attempt to cloak his intentions in ambiguity.

As we turn to the men’s lives during the Nazi Era it is important to remember that anti-Semitism was not a feature of German culture alone, and that European anti-Semitism has a very long history which continues in a less manifest form to this day. Germany’s völkisch thinkers did not invent anti-Semitism, nor were the Nazis the first to persecute the Jews. European anti-Semitism dates back at least to the early Middle Ages, and well before the modern era Jews had been the targets of semi-organized murderous

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<sup>108</sup> N.H. Baynes, ed., *The Speeches of Adolf Hitler*, vol. 1, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1942, 737-741).

<sup>109</sup> Record Group 238, Microfilm Publication M895, Roll 3, Frame 699 (Blume).

rampages.<sup>110</sup> However, violent outbreaks of anti-Semitism before the modern era depended largely on the whims of local princes and bishops and on the presence of troubles which were routinely blamed on Jews, natural disasters, plagues, and crop failures for example. But beginning in the mid-1800s new trends in science and the rise of the nation-state meant that violent anti-Semitic outbreaks, previously confined to particular towns or principalities, could in the Modern Age be carried out in a highly coordinated manner on a national and even a continental scale. In Germany, after the loss of World War I and more than a decade of chronic economic troubles and socio-political dislocation, a popular anti-Semitic movement gained control of the resources necessary to affect a “final solution to the Jewish question in Europe.”<sup>111</sup>

As Europeans the subjects of this study were born of a culture of anti-Semitism, and as Germans they had, in their eyes, good reason to believe that “the Jews” were the source of the problems which plagued Weimar Germany. Certainly these factors made them, like other Germans of the time, more likely to involve themselves in the Jewish question. This line of thinking was in fact a part of their defense strategy; the men asked for mercy partly on the basis of having lived in a certain time and place. While the fact that they were young Germans who came of age during the Weimar Era is important to explaining the Holocaust, it does not excuse their later actions. In comparison to other

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<sup>110</sup> Between a quarter and a third of the Jewish population of Northern France and Western Germany died at the hands of crusaders and local mobs in the year 1096 (Wistrich, 23). In 1391, over a three month period during the Spanish Inquisition, Spanish mobs killed an estimated fifty thousand Jews (Wistrich, 35).

<sup>111</sup> The term “Final Solution” came into official use as a result of the Wannsee Conference of January 20, 1942. On this date top Nazi functionaries met in a villa on the outskirts of Berlin for the purpose of better coordinating the Holocaust. The extermination of Europe’s Jews had gotten underway before the conference, as evidenced by the mass shootings carried out by the Einsatzgruppen beginning in June 1941. The activity of the Einsatzgruppen thus represents the first stage in a larger effort which resulted in the deaths of approximately six million Jews. The significance of the Wannsee Conference is that it involved the whole of Germany’s bureaucratic apparatus in the effort to bring about a “final solution to the Jewish question in Europe.”

young German men of that time, these twenty-two men proved themselves particularly reliable in a political sense, the cream of the Nazi crop so to speak. Ultimately, it was for this reason that they were entrusted with the difficult and absolutely crucial task of exterminating the Jews of the Soviet Union.

In the next chapter I examine the careers of the men while in service of the Nazi state. Specifically, I argue that the men came to employment in the Nazi state security apparatus as a result of two main factors; their professional skills and their proven political loyalties, and I argue that for these same reasons they were later assigned leadership roles in the Einsatzgruppen. The second half of chapter four concerns the men's deeds as officers of the Einsatzgruppen and the psychological factors which enabled them to make good on their long-held political beliefs. I begin chapter four with an overview of Nazi Germany's state security system in order to establish the context of the men's lives in service of the Führer.

#### 4. In Service of the Führer

In a culmination of the trend toward radical politics in Germany, in the July 1932 elections the Nazis became the largest political party in the Reichstag. Despite the election results, President Paul von Hindenburg initially attempted to resist Hitler's rise to power by refusing him the chancellorship. But after the failure of two short-lived conservative governments, on January 30, 1933, Hindenburg appointed Adolf Hitler chancellor, and with Hindenburg's death in August 1934 Hitler subsumed the offices of chancellor and president into his own person.

With the Nazi takeover of government Hitler's inner circle set about establishing a politically reliable intelligence network to support the Nazi state. Of the various intelligence organs which grew up following the Nazi ascendancy to power, the *Sicherheitsdienst* (Security Service) or *SD* was particularly oriented toward defending and supporting the political ideology of Nazism.<sup>112</sup> By origin a party organization, in building the SD its chief, Reinhard Heydrich, placed a great deal of emphasis on the political reliability of SD members and the network of intelligence sources they built. According to Heydrich's plan, the SD was to be an intelligence organ made up of men driven in their work by Nazi political ideology. Therefore, informants were almost never

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<sup>112</sup> The SD was founded as a Nazi Party intelligence organ in July 1932, six months before Hitler's rise to power. The institutional origins of the SD date back further, to the spring of 1931 and the formation of a small party intelligence unit known as *Ic-Abteilung SS* (Browder, 105, 109).

paid, and through 1934 the majority of SD members worked on a part-time unpaid basis, while salaried employees could only afford to live a very Spartan lifestyle.<sup>113</sup>

The SD was a component of Heinrich Himmler's *Schutzstaffel* or *SS*, which until July of 1934 was itself an elite formation of the *Sturmabteilung* or *SA*. With the eclipse of the SA during the Night of Long Knives (June 29-July 1, 1934)<sup>114</sup> the SS took over as the vanguard organization of Nazism, and both the SS and SD expanded quickly thereafter. During the mid to late-1930s the SD went through a number of structural changes as it grew into one of Nazi Germany's most important intelligence organs. By 1936 Reinhard Heydrich presided over what was then termed the SD Main Office, which was composed of three main departments. Department I handled SD personnel matters, Department II observed and reported on spheres of German life including education, culture, and the economy, and their relation to the political doctrine of Nazism, while Department III served as the foreign intelligence wing of the SD. With little more than 3,000 members in 1936 the SD was still in its developmental stages, though it had far more members than just a few years earlier.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> George C. Browder, *Hitler's Enforcers: The Gestapo and the SS Security Service in the Nazi Revolution*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 112, 120, 132-133, 185. Budgetary constraints during the early 1930s contributed significantly to the fact that many SD members worked on a part-time unpaid basis.

<sup>114</sup> The Stormtroopers or Brownshirts, as SA members were known, were at the forefront of the Nazi movement during the Weimar Era, when the streets and barrooms of Germany had served as the front lines of politics. But once Hitler gained a hold on the powers of government, the SA and its leader, Ernst Röhm, quickly became a liability. The German Army felt its prerogatives threatened by the 2.9 million strong SA, and Hitler himself began to doubt the loyalty of Röhm and his cohorts. Furthermore, putting Nazi political doctrine into practice required disciplined professionals with organizational skills and technical knowledge which the SA simply could not provide. For these reasons, in the summer of 1934 Hitler ordered a purge of the SA leadership in what became known as the Night of Long Knives. Röhm's rough and tumble street army was replaced by the SS, which quickly grew into an organization of men who possessed the knowledge and know-how necessary to build Hitler's vision for the future (Schleunes, 67-74, 177-178).

<sup>115</sup> The SD had about 40 members when Hitler came to power in January 1933 and grew to 240 members by the end of that year. At the end of 1934 the SD had approximately 820 members (Browder, 134-135, 177).



With the start of World War II in 1939 the organizational structure of the SD and its relation to the SS came into its final form. By that time Himmler's SS was divided into two main branches, the *Allgemeine-SS* and the *Waffen-SS*. The *Waffen-SS* provided for Adolf Hitler's personal security, and during the war it grew into an elite counterpart to the German Army. The *Allgemeine-SS* was composed of twelve *Hauptamte* or main offices, which dealt with matters ranging from ethnic Germans and population resettlement to crime and punishment and intelligence gathering. One of these twelve main offices, the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* (Reich Security Main Office) or RSHA, was created in September 1939 through the consolidation of Nazi Germany's various police and intelligence organs under Reinhard Heydrich's direct command.<sup>116</sup>

Located in the *Prinz Albrecht Palais* and an adjoining building at *Prinz-Albrecht-Strasse 8*, RSHA was composed of seven departments, three of which are particularly relevant to this study.<sup>117</sup> The SD comprised Departments III and VI of the Reich Security Main Office. Department III (*SD-Inland*) observed public opinion and reported on resistance to Nazism within German territory while department VI (*SD-Ausland*) gathered intelligence concerning foreign nations. Department IV of RSHA, the *Geheime Staatspolizei* or *Gestapo*, served as the enforcement arm of the Nazi state security system. Of the twenty-two subjects of this study, five worked for the *Gestapo* while the remaining

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<sup>116</sup> The German military maintained its own intelligence service, the *Abwehr*, until February 1944 when it was absorbed by the Reich Security Main Office.

<sup>117</sup> The Prince Albrecht Palace (*Wilhelmstrasse 102*) had formerly been the residence of Prince Albrecht of Prussia (1809-1872), the fourth son of Friedrich Wilhelm III, King of Prussia. The palace was taken over by the SS in November 1934 and was destroyed by bombing in November 1944. The adjacent building at *Prinz-Albrecht-Strasse 8* survived the war relatively intact, but was leveled in the early 1950s along with the remains of the Prince Albrecht Hotel (*Prinz-Albrecht-Strasse 9*), which had served as Heinrich Himmler's headquarters (Rürup, ed., 19-25, 198-203).

seventeen served in the SD, and in the years leading up to 1941 six of the men worked directly under Heydrich in the Reich Security Main Office.<sup>118</sup>

According to what the men later told the court at Nuremberg, they initially came to employment in the SD by chance. As the defendants explained, through a friend of a friend they happened to meet a representative of the SD, who happened to know of an open position. True, none of the men initiated contact by sending a resume or filling out an application, but the SD did not find its functionaries by placing a job advertisement in the newspaper. Its leaders actively sought to recruit young men with the proper professional and political qualifications. Professional qualifications such as education, skills, and experience could easily be determined, but word of mouth and the recommendations of acquaintances and friends were most important in determining what a man was made of politically.

The importance of personal connections, and the fact that the SD actively sought to recruit a certain type, are best demonstrated through the activities of two ranking SD members, Reinhard Höhn and Gustav-Adolf Scheel.<sup>119</sup> During the 1930s both men were professors at Heidelberg University. Scheel taught medicine and also headed the Nazi Students' Association in Baden and the SD section Southwest.<sup>120</sup> Two of the subjects of this study came into the SD as a result of connections with Gustav-Adolf Scheel. Eugen Steimle, who as a lieutenant colonel later commanded Sonderkommando 7a of Einsatzgruppe B, met Professor Scheel via the Nazi Students' Association at Tübingen

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<sup>118</sup> The Gestapo men were: Ernst Biberstein, Walter Blume, Gustav Nosske, Felix Rühl, and Erwin Schulz. The six men who worked directly under Heydrich in the Reich Security Main Office were: Walter Haensch, Heinz Jost, Otto Ohlendorf, Erwin Schulz, Willi Seibert, and Franz Six.

<sup>119</sup> Neither Höhn nor Scheel served in the Einsatzgruppen. In his final will and testament of 04/29/1945 Adolf Hitler appointed Gustav-Adolf Scheel as Minister of Education and Cultural Affairs (Wildt, 732).

<sup>120</sup> Record Group 238, Microfilm Publication M895, Roll 27, Frame 440 (Gustav-Adolf Scheel).

University. After several private discussions Scheel offered Steimle a job in the local SD office, which he accepted. Of their initial conversations Steimle told the court, “Dr. Scheel described the SD to me as a function of the SS whose job it is to observe the political development in domestic and foreign respect in order to be able to inform the leading agencies about what was going on.”<sup>121</sup> Scheel’s offer appealed to Eugen Steimle because as he put it, “I believed that via the SD I could exert positive information on the political development of the German state.”<sup>122</sup>

Through the Nazi Students’ Association Professor Scheel also met Martin Sandberger, who with the rank of lieutenant colonel later commanded Einsatzkommando 1a of Einsatzgruppe A. The two men first became acquainted in 1933 while Sandberger was head of the Nazi Students’ Association at Tübingen, and two years later Scheel approached him concerning a job in the SD.<sup>123</sup> In their 1935 conversation Scheel told Sandberger of “the danger which consisted after the parties and independent press were eliminated that then the highest Reich authorities would not be properly informed about the real situation.”<sup>124</sup> Indeed, it was part of the SD mission to support the Nazi Party and state by providing the leadership with an accurate picture of German and foreign public opinion, which in democratic countries would be expressed through the press and the agendas of political parties. Martin Sandberger did not want a democratic Germany or a

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<sup>121</sup> Record Group 238, Microfilm Publication M895, Roll 3, Frame 798 (Steimle).

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., Roll 3, Frame 799 (Steimle).

<sup>123</sup> During the Weimar Era, Tübingen University had a reputation for refusing admission and employment to Jews. Two other Einsatzgruppen officers, neither of whom was tried at Nuremberg, had also belonged to the Nazi Students’ Association at Tübingen. The two men were Erich Ehrlinger, who commanded Einsatzkommando 1b of Einsatzgruppe A, and Erwin Weinmann, the commander of Sonderkommando 4a of Einsatzgruppe C (Wildt, 89-104).

<sup>124</sup> Record Group 238, Microfilm Publication M895, Roll 3, Frame 1006 (Sandberger). Sandberger’s recollection of Scheel’s words fit perfectly with Scheel’s own description of their conversation, Ibid, Roll 27, Frames 440-441 (Gustav-Adolf Scheel).

free press, rather, he accepted Professor Scheel's offer because he wanted to help Hitler and his inner circle govern effectively.

A colleague of Gustav-Adolf Scheel, Reinhard Höhn was professor of law and politics at Heidelberg University. From 1934 to 1937 Höhn also headed Department II of what was then the SD Main Office.<sup>125</sup> Via connections with Höhn three of the later Einsatzgruppen officers came into the SD. Professor Höhn offered Werner Braune a job in the SD following a meeting arranged by a friend from Braune's university days. At Nuremberg Braune recalled, "At a later time Hoehn once told me that one of the reasons he picked me was my critical views, my search for the truth, and my tendency not to say yes, to everything I was told."<sup>126</sup> Werner Braune, a doctor of law, repeatedly made clear in court that he, like the other men, was a thinking Nazi. And this was exactly what Professors Höhn and Scheel were looking for, young professionals with an in-depth understanding of Nazism and its enemies and the skills to aid in transforming Nazi political doctrine into reality.

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<sup>125</sup> In 1937 Reinhard Höhn was removed from his post in the SD after a feud with Walther Frank, a historian and close associate of Julius Streicher (Höhne, 236). However, Höhn continued to be a valued Nazi functionary. He headed the main SS research library, the *Institut für Staatsforschung* in Berlin, until the end of the war. Höhn's work there was centered on improving the "effectiveness" of Germany's occupation policy in Eastern Europe. From 1941 to 1943 he also served as editor of *Reich – Volksordnung – Lebensraum: Zeitschrift für völkische Verfassung und Verwaltung*, a journal of Nazi law and administration in the German-occupied territories. In the final weeks of World War II Reinhard Höhn fled Berlin into temporary obscurity. In the early 1950s he resurfaced in Hamburg, working as a *Heilpraktiker*; a traditional healer ([http://www.ghwk.de/sonderausstellung/villenkolonie/institut\\_staatsforschung.htm](http://www.ghwk.de/sonderausstellung/villenkolonie/institut_staatsforschung.htm)). In 1956 Höhn suddenly reentered academia as head of the Bad Harzburger Academy, which became the leading management school in West Germany. There he developed the Harzburger Management Model, which was adopted by the West German Army and continues to influence German business management to this day. When Höhn died in 2000 at the age of ninety-six, Germany's most prestigious newspaper, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, dedicated 200 words to his postwar achievements without mention of his activities before 1945 (Frei, 117), (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, May 19, 2000, 18).

<sup>126</sup> Record Group 238, Microfilm Publication M895, Roll 4, Frame 674 (Braune).

Otto Ohlendorf, who would serve as commander of Einsatzgruppe D with the rank of brigadier general, held a Ph.D. in economics.<sup>127</sup> In 1936 Ohlendorf met Reinhard Höhn through the arrangement of a mutual colleague. Professor Höhn was so impressed by their meeting that he offered Ohlendorf, then twenty-nine years of age, the job of forming a new SD section for the purpose of gathering information on the economy. As Ohlendorf later testified, “I was to create an organization which would be in a position in the field of economics to give all the information which would tell about mistendencies and mistaken developments in the National Socialist philosophy. This was the motive which induced me to enter the SD.”<sup>128</sup> Ohlendorf’s accepted Professor Höhn’s offer because, as he explained on several occasions, he was deeply concerned with preserving the purity of Nazism as it was then being translated from political doctrine to government policy.

In 1934 Franz Six received his Ph.D. in political science from Heidelberg University. He was active in the Nazi Students’ Association at Heidelberg and was therefore acquainted with both Gustav-Adolf Scheel and Reinhard Höhn. In 1935 Professor Höhn asked Franz Six, then twenty-six years old, to found a new SD section focusing on tendencies and attitudes in the domestic and foreign press.<sup>129</sup> Six accepted Höhn’s offer, and through one of Höhn’s close associates, Ernst Krieck, Six also became editor of the journal *Volk im Werden* (A People in the Making), the leading Nazi journal of higher education.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Having attained the rank of major general, Otto Ohlendorf was the highest ranking of the defendants.

<sup>128</sup> Record Group 238, Microfilm Publication M895, Roll 2, Frame 510 (Ohlendorf).

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., Roll 3, Frame 175 (Six).

<sup>130</sup> Frank H. W. Edler, “Heidegger and Ernst Krieck: To What Extent Did They Collaborate?” <http://commhum.mccneb.edu/Philos/krieck.htm>.

Unlike the other men recruited by Professors Scheel and Höhn, at Nuremberg Franz Six did not include political ideology as a factor in explaining how he came to the SD. Six told the court that he accepted Professor Höhn's offer because it was in line with his academic interests, and because the job provided him access to press material no longer available to the general public.<sup>131</sup> However, as is clear from the testimony of the other men, the leadership of the SD chose their people very carefully, on the basis of both professional and political qualifications. And certainly Professor Höhn had no doubts about Six's political reliability. Like Otto Ohlendorf, Franz Six was hand-picked by Höhn for the task of developing a new section within the SD. Though Six wished to give another impression in court, the most reasonable explanation of his motive for joining the SD is that like Ohlendorf, he was deeply concerned with preserving the purity of Nazism as it was then being put into practice.

As most of the men admitted in court, political ideology brought them to their jobs in Nazi Germany's state security network and motivated them in their work in the years leading up to 1941. However, it is important that we remember why the subjects of this study were put on trial. The legal case against the men rested not on their membership in the SD or Gestapo, but on the men's activities as officers of the Einsatzgruppen. Therefore, to save their own lives the accused had to convince the court that their assignment to the Einsatzgruppen had resulted from something other than proven political beliefs. Starting with their own explanations, we turn now to the question of why these men in particular were chosen for the task of exterminating the Jews of the Soviet Union.

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<sup>131</sup> Record Group 238, Microfilm Publication M895, Roll 3, Frame 175 (Six).

With the creation of the Reich Security Main Office in 1939 Otto Ohlendorf became head of Department III (SD-Inland), while Franz Six was put in charge of Department VII (Research and Records), which performed historical research on the racial and political enemies of Nazism. In court both men claimed that through their work they incurred the animosity of their superiors, Reinhard Heydrich and Heinrich Himmler. Ohlendorf and Six explained specifically that by questioning policy decisions and making light of negative developments, they increasingly came into conflict with Heydrich and Himmler, who valued action and results over words. The two men testified that they had suffered particularly at the hands of Heydrich; described by Six as a “political terroristic character” who “could not bear intellectual arguments and...disregarded education and personal opinion completely.”<sup>132</sup> Several witness affidavits lent significant support to the men’s accounts of their troubles with Heydrich and Himmler.

Luitpold Schallermeier had been an assistant to the chief of Heinrich Himmler’s personal staff. He confirmed that Otto Ohlendorf incurred Himmler’s disfavor by reporting on “abuses and failures of the National Socialist philosophy in the fields of administration, of the German Labor Front, of the Party, of education, etc.” According to Schallermeier, due to Ohlendorf’s relentless whistle-blowing Himmler was known to ironically call him “The Keeper of the Holy Grail of National Socialism.”<sup>133</sup> Werner Best, who had served as Reinhard Heydrich’s deputy, confirmed that for similar reasons Franz Six earned Heydrich’s scorn. He stated that Heydrich took to calling Six a “Pedantic Professor,” treated him in an “unbearable” manner, and made him “suffer” at

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<sup>132</sup> Record Group 238, Microfilm Publication M895, Roll 3, Frame 176 (Six).

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., Roll 26, Frame 1137 (Luitpold Schallermeier).

every opportunity.<sup>134</sup> With the support of witnesses, Ohlendorf and Six asked the court and history to believe that they had been assigned to the Einsatzgruppen as castaways, following years of stubborn refusal to adopt the “don’t talk – just do” attitude demanded by their superiors.

It is true that Otto Ohlendorf and Franz Six, and the other men as well, were of a different mold than Reinhard Heydrich and Heinrich Himmler. Heydrich and Himmler did in fact demand unquestioning obedience and personal loyalty from their subordinates and had little use for philosophy and intellectual debate. Therefore, it is reasonable to believe that as they claimed, Ohlendorf and Six had personal disagreements with their superiors. However, the information offered by the two men and their witnesses, intended to show that their relationships with Heydrich and Himmler had been practically unbearable, amounted to nothing more than recollections of personality conflicts and name calling. The fact is that in the end Ohlendorf and Himmler and Six and Heydrich were, so to speak, members of the same family who built a life together over many years. They shared the same world view, depended on one another, and worked together toward a common goal. Most importantly, despite all of the talk in court of “grave disputes,” the hard evidence shows that both Ohlendorf and Six were held in high regard by their superiors.

The SS kept personnel files on its members, which included an evaluation of each man’s racial and personality characteristics, job performance, and political convictions. Otto Ohlendorf’s file reveals a “long time National Socialist, faultless in profession and

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<sup>134</sup> Record Group 238, Microfilm Publication M895, Roll 28, Frame 133 (Werner Best).



character” who “possesses all the good qualities of an SS leader.”<sup>135</sup> Franz Six’s file is similar. Noting that he could be temperamental, Six’s superiors judged him as “an active and proven National Socialist, who already in the early days earned a name as a speaker in university circles. His world view and reliability are without question.”<sup>136</sup> In neither man’s file is there a shred of evidence to suggest that Heydrich or Himmler viewed them as trouble makers deserving of punishment. Rather, both Ohlendorf and Six’s SS files are a record of true Nazi believers who approached their work in the party and state with a great deal of passion, which Heydrich and Himmler rewarded through promotions before, during, and after their service as officers of the Einsatzgruppen.<sup>137</sup>

In comparison to Otto Ohlendorf and Franz Six, the majority of the accused provided a somewhat more believable explanation of why they were assigned leadership roles in the Einsatzgruppen. As employees of the SD and Gestapo, each of the men came under what was called “war emergency status” in September 1939, with the start of World War II. This measure was intended to protect essential state and party organizations from manpower shortages and meant that the subjects of this study were not eligible for military service and were committed to serve under Reinhard Heydrich until the conclusion of the war.<sup>138</sup> Yet despite being on war emergency status, a majority of the accused produced evidence that between 1939 and 1941, they had applied to leave their jobs for the German Army or Waffen-SS. According to these men, their assignment

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<sup>135</sup> National Archives Collection of Foreign Records Seized, Record Group 242, Microfilm Publication A3343, 907 Rolls, Roll 365A (Otto Ohlendorf).

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., Roll 139B (Franz Six).

<sup>137</sup> Both Ohlendorf and Six were promoted in the fall of 1941, as their SS files indicate, because of “special merit in the eastern assignment.”

<sup>138</sup> On May 27, 1942, Reinhard Heydrich’s car was ambushed by partisans near Prague. Heydrich survived the assassination attempt but died of his wounds eight days later.

as officers of the Einsatzgruppen resulted directly from their earlier efforts to join the troops in battle.

Two of the subjects of this study, Felix Rühl and Lothar Fendler, belonged to a group known as “candidates for the executive service.” The candidates were the future of the SD and Gestapo; they had been selected by their superiors to undergo an intensive course of training in order to qualify for higher positions. Lothar Fendler, who at the age of twenty-eight served as a captain in Sonderkommando 4b of Einsatzgruppe C, testified that previous to his assignment he had asked to be released for the Waffen-SS because he considered himself “too young to work in the staff in Berlin and not to be with the fighting forces.”<sup>139</sup> Similarly, Felix Rühl, a thirty-one year old first lieutenant in Sonderkommando 10b of Einsatzgruppe D, told the court that prior to his assignment he had applied repeatedly for transfer to the army because he was “ashamed” to train for a desk job while men older than himself were serving at the front.<sup>140</sup>

Section I B 2 of the Reich Security Main Office, headed by Rudolf Hotzel, oversaw the non-curricular aspects of the executive service program. In reference to the executive service candidates as a whole, in his affidavit Hotzel confirmed the testimony of Felix Rühl and Lothar Fendler. According to Hotzel “time and again” the candidates made known that due to the war, training for the executive service was “incompatible with their honor and conscience. Repeatedly and impressively they requested to be released for army service.”<sup>141</sup> In May 1941 the entire executive service program was put

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<sup>139</sup> Record Group 238, Microfilm Publication M895, Roll 5, Frame 481 (Fendler).

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., Roll 5, Frame 814 (Rühl).

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., Roll 26, Frame 450 (Rudolf Hotzel), see also Ibid., Roll 2, Frame 958 (Schulz). In his affidavit Hotzel’s name is misspelled as “Hetzel.”

on hold and the candidates, including Felix Rühl and Lothar Fendler, were assigned as officers of the Einsatzgruppen.

Despite being on war emergency status, prior to being assigned to the Einsatzgruppen many of the higher ranking officers had also applied to leave their jobs to serve with the army or Waffen-SS. Like Rühl and Fendler, these men testified that their attempts were motivated by a sense of duty to serve with the troops in the field, rather than by any distaste for their work in SD or Gestapo. Eugen Steimle, a thirty-two year old lieutenant colonel in 1941, told the court;

In the years 1939-1940 I tried in various ways to join the combat troops. My applications were always refused. I was very unhappy about this because as a young man I did not want to stay at home – whereas a brother of mine, who was ten years older, was at the front. I was afraid of being called a slacker. I considered it my duty to be a soldier. For this reason in May or June 1941 I made another attempt to get away from the SD and to be able to join the troops. I went to Berlin, to the Main Security Office, and reported to [Bruno] Streckenbach, the Chief of Office I [Personnel]...I expressed my wish to him. Streckenbach rejected it categorically, without discussion, and he explained to me that I would soon have an opportunity to prove myself at the front. I could not find an explanation for this answer at the time, but when I received my marching order to Russia it was clear that this was what Streckenbach meant.<sup>142</sup>

Like Eugen Steimle, the majority of the defendants explained their assignment to the Einsatzgruppen in this way. Out of a sense of duty, the men testified, they had attempted to be released from their jobs in order to serve at the front. This was not possible since the SD and Gestapo needed every single man, but when the Einsatzgruppen of the Gestapo and SD were formed in the spring of 1941, those men who had expressed a desire to serve in the field were granted their wish.

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<sup>142</sup> Record Group 238, Microfilm Publication M895, Roll 3, Frames 802-803 (Steimle). Eugen Steimle was assigned to his post as head of Sonderkommando 7a of Einsatzgruppe B in September 1941, three months after expressing his wish to serve at the front. Steimle later went on to command Sonderkommando 4a of Einsatzgruppe C.

This explanation is more plausible than that posited by Otto Ohlendorf and Franz Six. The men's attempts to join the army and Waffen-SS did indicate to their superiors an eagerness to serve in the field in close contact with the enemy. However, from the testimony of Rudolf Hotzel and that of the defendants themselves, it appears that beginning in 1939 there existed a general desire among employees of the SD and Gestapo to join the troops in battle. As Walter Haensch told the court, "Most of us had the wish at the outbreak of war [in 1939] to do our duty to our Fatherland."<sup>143</sup> Yet of all the officer level employees who worked at RSHA and in the thirteen main regional offices of the SD and the more numerous field offices of the Gestapo, only a small percentage ever served in the Einsatzgruppen, and the evidence indicates that these men were carefully chosen.<sup>144</sup>

What the subjects of this study did not mention in court, and what they probably did not know, is that in March 1941 Office I (Personnel) of RSHA began drawing up working lists of potential Einsatzgruppen officers.<sup>145</sup> The head of Office I, Bruno Streckenbach, fell into Soviet hands at the end of the war and was therefore not available to testify at Nuremberg. However, following his release from Soviet custody in 1955, Streckenbach's role in the establishment of the Einsatzgruppen drew the attention of West German prosecutors, who attempted until his death in 1977 to build a case against

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<sup>143</sup> Record Group 238, Microfilm Publication M895, Roll 4, Frame 910 (Haensch).

<sup>144</sup> Of the subjects of this study, chance did play a role in one instance. Heinz Jost, a brigadier general and head of Department VI (SD-Ausland), happened to be on an inspection tour in the occupied Soviet territories during March 1942. During that time the commander of Einsatzgruppe A, Walther Stahlecker, was killed by partisans and Jost was assigned as his successor.

<sup>145</sup> Michael Wildt, *Generation des Unbedingten: das Führungskorps des Reichssicherheitshauptamtes* (Hamburger Edition Verlagsgesellschaft, 2002), 547-548.

him.<sup>146</sup> Bruno Streckenbach told West German investigators that from the working lists of officers assembled by his office, Reinhard Heydrich had personally decided upon a final roster of men for the approval of Heinrich Himmler. And according to Streckenbach, up until the last few days before the invasion of the Soviet Union, Heydrich and Himmler continuously altered the roster of officers, adding names and removing others.<sup>147</sup>

Clearly, Heydrich and Himmler put a great deal of consideration into finding the right men for the job, and given the task at hand we should expect nothing less. The Soviet Jews were central to the Nazi world view and their extermination could not be entrusted to just anyone. This was an absolutely crucial mission, and as the men's SS files confirm, they were the best of the best.<sup>148</sup> Eugen Steimle's file is typical; his superiors judged his character as "outstanding" and "resolute." Steimle's worldview was considered "always exemplary, fanatically steadfast National Socialist attitude and

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<sup>146</sup> The effort to build a case against Bruno Streckenbach was centered in the district attorney's office in Hamburg, the same office which prosecuted the subjects of Christopher Browning's book *Ordinary Men*. Though Streckenbach was officially accused, he was never tried for his role in the Holocaust. The accusation, *Anklageschrift gegen Bruno Streckenbach vom 30.6.1973, Staatsanwaltschaft Hamburg, Js 31/67*, is the primary source for what Streckenbach told West German investigators in the years following his release from Soviet custody. I was unable to personally view the primary source because it is under a *Schutzfrist* (protection period) and currently is not available to the general public.

<sup>147</sup> Wildt, 548.

<sup>148</sup> Eduard Strauch, who as a lieutenant colonel commanded Einsatzkommando 2 of Einsatzgruppe A, was the one possible exception among the subjects of this study. Strauch was educated as a lawyer and his SS file states that his political beliefs were "without question." However, he did not display the tact of the others in dealing with his peers, superiors, and subordinates. Strauch's SS file criticizes his "inability to compromise," "inability to win over others," and "impulsive and explosive reactions." Well before his assignment as commander of Einsatzkommando 2, his file notes that "repeated difficulties with numerous comrades arose which through a more understanding attitude could have been avoided" (Record Group 242, Microfilm Publication A3343, Roll 165B, Eduard Strauch). As for Eduard Strauch's courtroom testimony, it is of little use here because, as the court concluded after consultation with medical experts, his defense strategy was to feign mental incompetence. Thus the court record contains such statements by Strauch as, "Because there was no air as a consequence of the war it was very difficult to live." One of Strauch's shenanigans involved the courtroom translation process. The words of the prosecution and judges were translated into German, which the defendants received through a headset, prompting Strauch to complain, "Well, Your Honor, I always get the German. I always hear you speaking German. I don't know that much German" (Record Group 238, Microfilm Publication M895, Roll 6, Frames 44, 58).

lifestyle,” while his knowledge and education were evaluated as “especially well developed (*besonders weitgehend vorhanden*).”<sup>149</sup> This is exactly what Heydrich and Himmler needed for the mission ahead; energetic professionals capable of organizing and managing such a large scale operation who truly believed in the necessity of their task. It was on this basis that the subjects of this study were chosen as officers of the Einsatzgruppen.

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The town of Pretzsch lies on the Elbe River, thirty miles northeast of Leipzig. In the center of town there exists to this day a palace dating in its current form to the year 1570. Originally the residence of the family von Rehfeld-Löser, and from 1827 an orphanage, on January 1, 1938, the black and white flag of the SS was hoisted over the Palace of Pretzsch for the first time. From that date until early 1942 the building and grounds served as a training center for employees of the police and intelligence organs of the SS.<sup>150</sup> Beginning in late May 1941 thousands of enlisted men and officers of the various SS agencies descended on Pretzsch. The number of men involved was far more than the town itself could support, and thus many had to be quartered in the nearby spa towns of Bad Döben and Bad Schmiedeberg. With the SS training center in the Palace of Pretzsch serving as a base of operations, over a period of approximately three weeks the Einsatzgruppen and their subunits were formed and outfitted.

The officers of the Einsatzgruppen came almost exclusively from the SD and Gestapo while the enlisted men were drawn mainly from the lower ranks of the Gestapo

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<sup>149</sup> Record Group 242, Microfilm Publication A3343, Roll 151B (Eugen Steimle).

<sup>150</sup> In 1942 the Palace of Pretzsch became headquarters to a reserve unit of the German Army. Today it is the *Adolf-Reichwein-Schule*, a home for troubled children. Information concerning the town and palace is from “*Die Aufzeichnungen von Eberhard Dubrau*” – *Heimatmuseum Pretzsch*.

and reserve units of the Waffen-SS.<sup>151</sup> Though the enlisted men were assigned on the basis of their availability, as members of the Waffen-SS and Gestapo they were a relatively reliable group from a political standpoint.<sup>152</sup> During their stay in Pretzsch the assembled men took part in terrain exercises and were given a chance to fire their weapons, and the officers received instruction in map reading and orientation. Little more training was possible in such a short period of time, especially since many of the men fell ill after receiving typhus and cholera inoculations. Approximately two days in advance of the invasion of the Soviet Union the higher ranking officers were notified of their mission.<sup>153</sup>

A meeting of the designated heads of the Einsatzkommandos, Sonderkommandos, and Einsatzgruppen took place at the Palace of Pretzsch, most probably on June 20. Of the twelve subjects of this study who were in Pretzsch during the formation of the Einsatzgruppen, five were present at the meeting, which was chaired by the head of Office I, Bruno Streckenbach.<sup>154</sup> The meeting began with Streckenbach describing the men's mission in terms of overall security in areas occupied by German forces, though he soon came to the heart of the matter. As Walter Blume plainly recalled, Streckenbach

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<sup>151</sup> In early 1941 regional offices of the Gestapo were consolidated to free up enlisted men for the Einsatzgruppen (Wildt, 547-548).

<sup>152</sup> Wildt, 547-548.

<sup>153</sup> Those defendants who were informed of their mission at Pretzsch could not recall the exact date, though the men agreed that it was two to three days before June 23, when the Einsatzgruppen departed for the East.

<sup>154</sup> In total, twenty to twenty-five officers attended the meeting, including the chief of the Gestapo, Heinrich Müller. Of the subjects of this study, Paul Blobel, Walter Blume, Gustav Nosske, Otto Ohlendorf, and Martin Sandberger were present. Erwin Schulz, the designated commander of Einsatzkommando 5 of Einsatzgruppe C, testified that he was unable to attend because he was busy finishing up his old assignment in Berlin. No information to the contrary has ever come to light. Also, the designated leader of Vorkommando Moscow, Franz Six, did not join his unit until July 14, and was also not present at the June 20 meeting.

then “announced to us the Fuehrer Decree, which said that during the Russian Campaign the Eastern Jews in Soviet Russia were to be exterminated.”<sup>155</sup>

The defendants agreed that following this announcement a great deal of commotion ensued. In Walter Blume’s words, “Those who were of the same rank as Streckenbach called out loudly, and other people present in spite of the usual strict discipline were very restless, and remarks were made to the effect: how can this be done, it is impossible and cannot be carried out.” Blume’s account, the most detailed offered to the court, has the officers questioning the feasibility of the project. While they may well have framed their comments in terms of feasibility, more likely the men’s “objections” were an instinctual negative reaction to being personally charged with such a monumentally dirty task. Upon hearing the extermination order, Blume recalled, “I felt particularly concerned that we who were present at the time – all of us were intellectually inclined – had to be given such an order.”<sup>156</sup> As Walter Blume’s account suggests, the men did not react against the spirit of the Führer Order, rather they reacted against the fact that it had fallen on them to personally carry it out.

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<sup>155</sup> Since the Einsatzgruppen Trial, what Bruno Streckenbach said at Pretzsch has come into question. Upon his return to West Germany in 1955, he vehemently denied ever having conveyed an order to exterminate the Soviet Jews. Soon after Streckenbach’s return three of the subjects of this study changed their stories. Blume and Sandberger now claimed that it was Heydrich who had given them the extermination order, while Nosske claimed that the order was announced later, after the Einsatzgruppen had left Pretzsch (Longerich, 1998, 318). This sudden change was probably an effort to protect Streckenbach, who was well liked by the men (Franz Six called Streckenbach the “good angel of RSHA” and both Erwin Schulz and Walter Blume had close relationships with him). If at Nuremberg the accused had wished to concoct an orchestrated story about who announced the extermination order or when it was announced, they could have blamed Reinhard Heydrich from the beginning. The same group of officers met with Heydrich in Berlin on the day following their meeting with Streckenbach, and not only did they dislike Heydrich, he also did not survive the war and thus could not have questioned anything the men said in court. Therefore, it is most probable that as the men originally testified, Streckenbach informed the higher ranking officers at Pretzsch that Hitler had ordered the extermination of the Soviet Jews, and that a major part of their mission would be to carry out this so-called “Führer Order.”

<sup>156</sup> Record Group 238, Microfilm Publication M895, Roll 3, Frame 629 (Blume).



Streckenbach answered that he understood the men's reactions but that this was a direct order from Adolf Hitler, a Führer Order.<sup>157</sup> According to Blume's description, Streckenbach then explained "that the Eastern Jews were the intellectual supporters of World Bolshevism, and this total destruction was necessary, in order to make the victory over Soviet Russia final."<sup>158</sup> In explaining the rationale of the Führer Order Streckenbach's apparently intended to remind the officers of the grave danger presented by the Soviet Jews, though on this point he was preaching to the choir. The men did not need to be convinced of the necessity of the undertaking; they needed to be convinced that they had no choice but to personally carry it out. According to the five defendants who were present, Streckenbach closed the meeting by emphasizing that the Führer Order was final and that disobedience would be severely punished.

On the day following their meeting with Bruno Streckenbach, most probably June 21, the same group of officers met with Reinhard Heydrich at the Prince Albrecht Palace in Berlin. The "objection" and "protest" of the previous day had completely subsided. The men listened as Heydrich explained the relationship between the Einsatzgruppen and the army. Months of negotiations had resulted in an agreement by which the Einsatzgruppen would be allowed to operate in army territory.<sup>159</sup> He explained the dual command structure through which the Einsatzgruppen and their sub-units could receive orders from either the Reich Security Main Office or the German Army.<sup>160</sup> Concerning

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<sup>157</sup> The Führer Order also included Gypsies and Communist Party functionaries, though Jews made up an overwhelming majority of those killed by the Einsatzgruppen.

<sup>158</sup> Record Group 238, Microfilm Publication M895, Roll 3, Frames 626-627 (Blume).

<sup>159</sup> For a detailed account of the agreement reached between RSHA and the German Army see: Krausnick and Wilhelm, 107-141.

<sup>160</sup> Additionally, orders could come directly from Heinrich Himmler through the so called Higher SS and Police leaders, who served as Himmler's personal field representatives. The two most important Higher SS

their mission, Walter Blume testified that Heydrich took for granted that the men knew of the Führer Order, and remembered that Heydrich “described the entirety of the Eastern Jews” as an “imminent danger.”<sup>161</sup> According to those defendants who were present, as Streckenbach had done, Heydrich closed by emphasizing that strict discipline would be expected and that failure to obey orders would be severely punished.

The lower ranking officers, who were not present during either meeting, became aware of the Führer Order at different times and under different circumstances. Most heard the order from their superiors shortly after leaving Pretzsch, though several men claimed that it was never actually announced to them, and that they came to realize through experience that such an order existed. Woldemar Klingelhöfer is the only one of the men who, though not present at the Streckenbach meeting, testified that he became aware of the mission of the Einsatzgruppen before leaving Pretzsch. Klingelhöfer told the court that one to two days before leaving for the East his commando leader, Günter Rausch, informed the entirety of Sonderkommando 7b of the Führer Order, though again no details were given as to how it was to be carried out.<sup>162</sup> Concerning his initial reaction, Klingelhöfer admitted that he knew the order was morally wrong; in his words, “my inner attitudes objected.” However, in the same breath he told the court, “I fully realized that the Jewry in Russia in its entirety as convinced followers of Bolshevism would constitute a great danger.”<sup>163</sup> Klingelhöfer’s reaction was typical of the men. His instincts told him that the task ahead was morally wrong, while reason told him that it

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and Police Leaders for the time and place in question were Friedrich Jeckeln and Erich von dem Bach-Zelewski.

<sup>161</sup> Record Group 238, Microfilm Publication M895, Roll 3, Frame 631 (Blume).

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., Roll 5, Frame 240 (Klingelhöfer). Gunter Rausch was not tried at Nuremberg, and is not to be confused with Otto Rasch, who commanded Einsatzgruppe C.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., Roll 5, Frame 241 (Klingelhöfer).

was fully necessary. In the end Woldemar Klingelhöfer understood that the Jews of the Soviet Union had to die, though like the other men he would have preferred that someone else be assigned to do the dirty work.

Importantly, the six men who learned of the Führer Order at Pretzsch each testified that they received no instructions as to how the order was to be carried out. Paul Blobel, who as a colonel commanded Sonderkommando 4a of Einsatzgruppe C, explained in court that the process by which the mission was to be achieved was “left completely open;” that “these questions were to be considered out there.”<sup>164</sup> This account makes sense considering the scale of the undertaking, and the fact that nobody knew how the perpetrators, victims, and bystanders would react once the operation actually got underway. Would the non-Jewish populations of the Soviet Union aid in the extermination process, do nothing, warn the Jews, or even help them? Would the intended victims sense what was afoot and attempt to avoid the dragnet, or would they remain unsuspecting until it was too late to flee, hide, or fight? How would the officers of the German Army respond to what was taking place in their midst? Most importantly, how would the perpetrators react when it actually came time to follow through on their political convictions? Indeed, it must have been clear to Himmler, Heydrich, and Streckenbach that the specifics by which the mission was to be accomplished would have to be developed in the field, according to the reactions of all those involved.

On June 23, 1941, one day after the German invasion of the Soviet Union, the fully motorized Einsatzgruppen departed Pretzsch for the East.<sup>165</sup> Lvov, in what is today

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<sup>164</sup> Record Group 238, Microfilm Publication M895, Roll 3, Frame 493 (Blobel).

<sup>165</sup> Significantly, the German Army was not yet fully motorized, indicating the importance Berlin placed on the mission of the Einsatzgruppen (Rhodes, 13).

Western Ukraine, was one of the first major cities which the Einsatzgruppen encountered. On July 1, 1941 Einsatzkommandos 5 and 6 of Einsatzgruppe C entered the city, which at that time had a mixed population of Ukrainians, Poles, Jews, and ethnic Germans. Before its capture by German forces the Ukrainian population of Lvov had staged an unsuccessful uprising against the Soviet government. The Soviet secret police (NKVD) had responded by executing approximately five thousand Ukrainian nationalists.<sup>166</sup> When the Germans arrived, the Ukrainian population demanded retribution, creating the perfect justification for a second bloodbath, this time targeting the city's Jewish population.<sup>167</sup>

Citing the earlier events in Lvov, the commander of Einsatzgruppe C, Otto Rasch, immediately ordered his officers to carry out executions of the city's Jews.<sup>168</sup> For the first time Erwin Schulz, the commander of Einsatzkommando 5, was called upon to make good on the ultimate implications of his long-held political beliefs. "Under the impression of the Lemberg [Lvov] incidents," Schulz remembered, "I assembled my men and spoke with them about this order. I told them that this is a reprisal measure ordered by the Fuehrer." At the execution site, Schulz recalled, "I told my men once more about the reason for these executions and I pointed out especially that the investigations which had been conducted had determined definitely...the participation in the crimes on the part

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<sup>166</sup> Record Group 238, Microfilm Publication M895, Roll 2, Frame 969 (Schulz).

<sup>167</sup> In the days following the German takeover Ukrainians took the initiative against their Jewish neighbors, most notably at the High Castle on the northern outskirts of Lvov, where Ukrainian paramilitary units carried out a mass beating of approximately eight hundred Jews (Rhodes, 62-63).

<sup>168</sup> Record Group 238, Microfilm Publication M895, Roll 2, Frames 972-973 (Schulz). According to Schulz's description, the order he received at Lvov was very general, without mention of numbers or whether women and children were to be included (nearly all of the victims of the July executions in Lvov were men).

of the victims.”<sup>169</sup> In fact there had been no time for investigations, nor had there been any interest on the part of Schulz or anyone else in finding the truth, but such psychological justifications served an important purpose.

Erwin Schulz recognized the NKVD mass killings of Ukrainians as a crime, and as a Nazi reason told him that the Jews were ultimately responsible. Thus despite “serious misgivings,” Schulz was able to rationalize the orders he received in Lvov in terms of crime and punishment. As he explained, “My inner feelings were against the measures which had been ordered. But when I thought it over conscientiously, and when I left out all feeling, I had to determine that law, and feeling, had nothing to do with each other.”<sup>170</sup> Though he was forced to perform some very complicated mental gymnastics, during his first mass execution Erwin Schulz ultimately was able to bring himself to play a crucial role in the deaths of approximately seven thousand Jews in Lvov.<sup>171</sup>

As was the case with the mass execution at Lvov, during the first few months of Einsatzgruppen operations it was standard procedure to “justify” the Führer Order through assertions that “the Jews” of a particular area had, as a group, committed one crime or another. Importantly, the RSHA required no justification for the men’s actions, rather the officers created such justifications for their own consumption, and that of their

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<sup>169</sup> Record Group 238, Microfilm Publication M895, Roll 2, Frames 974-975 (Schulz).

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., Roll 2, Frame 973 (Schulz).

<sup>171</sup> It is difficult to estimate how many Jews remained in any particular location upon the arrival of the men of the Einsatzgruppen. Some of their reports to Berlin indicated that a significant portion of the Jews of a given location had fled, or had been evacuated by Soviet authorities. Of those who fled, many became victims after returning to their homes, while others found only temporary refuge in areas later overrun by the Germans. Certainly the death toll in Lvov, seven thousand, was far less than the number of Jews who remained in the city when the Germans arrived. The Jewish population of Lvov was as high as two hundred thousand in 1939, about one hundred thousand being refugees from the German occupied portion of Poland. Such large numbers meant that initially, especially in the larger cities, the Einsatzgruppen and local police battalions conducted numerous mass executions over time, and set up sealed ghettos to house the remaining Jews, many of whom died of starvation and disease or were later sent to camps where they were worked to death or gassed.

subordinates.<sup>172</sup> The trumped up charges of crimes committed by entire Jewish communities were self fulfilling prophecies which confirmed to the subjects of this study what they had long believed, namely that “the Jews” were evil by nature and a danger so grave that nothing less than their extermination would suffice. In this way each of the men made the initial crossover from Nazi ideologue to mass murderer.

However, as was also the case at Lvov, during the first two months of Einsatzgruppen operations the vast majority of victims were male Jews, despite the fact that from the beginning, the men agreed, the Führer Order included all Jews. But because the front moved forward so quickly during the opening phase of their mission, the men of the Einsatzgruppen were initially spared the mental burden of shooting women and children, since there simply was not enough manpower and time to kill all the Jews they encountered. Also, at first the men’s superiors in Berlin did not push them on the subject of Jewish women and children, rather they nonspecifically demanded that the men kill as many Jews as possible. The very general nature of the instructions the officers received, beginning in late June at Pretzsch, continued into early August, almost certainly in order to allow the officers and enlisted men time to become acclimated to the psychological demands of their assignment.

Though like the other men Erwin Schulz made the initial crossover from political ideologue to mass murderer, when Schulz received more specific instructions he proved unable to carry out the Führer Order to its full extent.<sup>173</sup> In early August the Higher SS and Police Leader for the southern sector, Friedrich Jeckeln, visited the headquarters of Einsatzgruppe C in Zhytomyr, west of Kiev. Jeckeln passed on a direct order from

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<sup>172</sup> Hilberg, vol. 1, 329.

<sup>173</sup> Wildt, 562.

Heinrich Himmler that from then on, all Jews, including women and children, were to be shot. As justification Jeckeln explained that such was necessary “in order to have no avengers remain.”<sup>174</sup> According to Erwin Schulz, at this point he became determined to obtain a transfer out of the Einsatzgruppen.

As he described it, one of his men was scheduled for furlough, and this man was tasked with delivering a private note to Bruno Streckenbach, in Berlin. In his note Schulz urgently asked to meet with Streckenbach, whom he knew personally. Streckenbach promptly replied via radio message, calling Schulz to a meeting in Berlin. During their private meeting, Schulz testified, he impressed on Streckenbach the mental strain which he and his men were under, and told Streckenbach that he was psychologically unable to shoot women and children. Schulz told the court that he pleaded for a transfer, and that Streckenbach promised to talk with Reinhard Heydrich. During a second meeting with Streckenbach a few days later, Schulz was informed that his transfer had been granted.<sup>175</sup>

Though Erwin Schulz deserves credit for his determination, his efforts were certainly not heroic. Like the other men, Schulz never objected to the extermination of the Soviet Jews, he simply decided that he was personally unable to carry out such a task. With direct knowledge of the systematic extermination effort underway in the occupied Soviet Union, Schulz continued to be a loyal servant of the Nazi state following his dismissal from the Einsatzgruppen. And far from being punished, he returned to his job

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<sup>174</sup> Record Group 238, Microfilm Publication M895, Roll 2, Frames 985-986 (Schulz). Otto Ohlendorf repeated this rationale in court. Asked what danger women and children had posed, Ohlendorf replied that the Jewish children would have grown up to “constitute a danger no smaller than that of their parents” (Ibid., Roll 2, Frame 684).

<sup>175</sup> Record Group 238, Microfilm Publication M895, Roll 2, Frames 987-995 (Schulz).

as head of the Security Police training school in Berlin,<sup>176</sup> and was later promoted as Bruno Streckenbach's successor as chief of Office I.

The case of Erwin Schulz lies in sharp contrast to the majority of the subjects of this study, who after a period of acclimation to their mission and under increased pressure from their superiors, soon made the transition to shooting Jewish women and children as well.<sup>177</sup> As Erwin Schulz testified, in early August 1941 Einsatzgruppe C received a direct order from Heinrich Himmler via his field representative, Higher SS and Police Leader Friedrich Jeckeln, to the effect that from then on all Jews were to be killed.<sup>178</sup> In October 1941 Heinrich Himmler personally made an inspection tour of the German-occupied areas of the Soviet Union, during which time he met with the chiefs of the Einsatzgruppen at their respective headquarters. On October 4 Otto Ohlendorf, the commander of Einsatzgruppe D, met with Himmler at Einsatzgruppe D headquarters in Nikolajev, east of Odessa.<sup>179</sup> Felix Rühl remembered that immediately following this

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<sup>176</sup> The term "security police" or *Sicherheitspolizei* was used in combined reference to the Gestapo and criminal police or *Kripo*.

<sup>177</sup> Two of the other men, Walter Blume and Franz Six, were also relieved of their commands in August 1941, before the Einsatzgruppen began shooting Jewish women and children in earnest. In court Blume claimed that he had entrusted executions to one of his officers, a certain Voltis (this is supported by the testimony of Blume's successor, Eugen Steimle), and that he was relieved of his command because Artur Nebe, the commander of Einsatzgruppe B, found that he was personally avoiding the Führer Order (Record Group 238, Microfilm Publication M895, Roll 3, Frames 641-643, 646-650). Franz Six testified that he was relieved of command of Vorkommando Moskau because Nebe wanted to gain personal control over that unit, which was designated to be the first commando of the Einsatzgruppen to enter Moscow. Like Erwin Schulz, after their dismissal from the Einsatzgruppen both Blume and Six initially returned to their old jobs at RSHA. Franz Six later took up a high position in the Foreign Ministry and Walter Blume went on to serve as the chief of the Gestapo and SD in Athens.

<sup>178</sup> Erwin Schulz was quite specific about when he received the order to kill women and children, placing it between August 10 and 12, 1941 (Record Group 238, Microfilm Publication M895, Roll 2, Frame 986). See also the testimony of Paul Blobel, who places Himmler's order via Jeckeln at the end of August (*Ibid.*, Roll 3, Frame 394).

<sup>179</sup> Record Group 238, Microfilm Publication M895, Roll 4, Frame 698 (Braune), *Ibid.*, Roll 5, Frame 1079 (Schubert). Otto Ohlendorf was the first of the men to testify at Nuremberg, and he did not mention his meeting with Himmler at Nikolajev, probably because he wished to avoid the topic of incriminating orders which he passed to his men in the field. According to Ohlendorf's SS file the meeting took place on



meeting his unit, Sonderkommando 10b of Einsatzgruppe D, began shooting Jewish women and children.<sup>180</sup> Indeed, from mid-October 1941 onward all four Einsatzgruppen included Jewish women and children in the mass executions which they conducted. Clearly, by October at the latest the acclimation period granted the men of the Einsatzgruppen had come to an end.

Sonderkommando 4a of Einsatzgruppe C, commanded by Paul Blobel, entered the city of Kiev on September 25, 1941.<sup>181</sup> In a similar manner to the massacre at Lvov, the officers involved found a ready excuse to “justify” a mass execution of Kiev’s Jews, though now women and children were to be included as well. As the Soviet Army was being pushed out of Kiev in mid-September, the NKVD had planted time bombs in key buildings in the city. Soon after the Germans moved in the bombs exploded, and blame was naturally assigned to the Jewish community. The event itself was actually of little significance to the end result for Kiev’s Jews, for if the NKVD had not planted bombs some other “crime” would certainly have been uncovered and attributed to the Jewish community.<sup>182</sup>

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October 4, at which time Himmler promoted Ohlendorf to the rank of brigadier general (Record Group 242, Microfilm Publication A3343, Roll 365A, Otto Ohlendorf).

<sup>180</sup> Record Group 238, Microfilm Publication M895, Roll 5, Frame 829 (Rühl).

<sup>181</sup> In June 1942 Paul Blobel was put in charge of the newly created Sonderkommando 1005. This was a special unit tasked with eliminating the traces of earlier Einsatzgruppen executions. Blobel’s mission was to open the mass graves which the Einsatzgruppen left in their wake and to burn the corpses on huge pyres. Like the Führer Order, Blobel testified that the mission of Sonderkommando 1005 was never put in writing. He told the court, “this order was Top Secret, and Major General [Heinrich] Müller decreed that, owing to the strict secrecy of this task, no written correspondence of any kind was to be carried on” (Record Group 238, Microfilm Publication M895, Roll 11, Frame 720). In the end the mass graves and corpses proved far too numerous for Blobel’s unit to accomplish its mission.

<sup>182</sup> Hilberg notes a number of stock “justifications” which the men of the Einsatzgruppen used to rationalize their actions. According to the officers’ reports, in various locations the Jews had supposedly carried out attacks on German troops, sabotaged their own resettlement, spread rumors and propaganda, etc. (Hilberg, vol. 1, 328-329).

With “justification” in hand Paul Blobel reported to Berlin on September 28: “Measures taken to apprehend the entire Jewish population. Execution of at least 50,000 foreseen. Army welcomes these measures and requests radical action.”<sup>183</sup> Blobel quickly got to work, ordering the local Ukrainian militia to post notices throughout Kiev which read in part;

All Yids living in the city of Kiev and its vicinity are to report by 8 o’clock in the morning of Monday, 29 September 1941, at the corner of Melnikovsky and Dokhturov streets (near the cemetery). They are to take with them documents, money, valuables, as well as warm clothes, underwear, etc.<sup>184</sup>

In total, approximately thirty-four thousand Jews went voluntarily to the designated collection point, all of whom were shot over the next two days.

Aside from Blobel’s Sonderkommando 4a and the local Ukrainian militia, two units of Police Regiment South took part in the massacre. Situated near the collection point, a ravine known as *Babi Yar* served as the execution site. A German truck driver, whose job was to transport goods taken from the victims, described the scene above the ravine;

I watched what happened when the Jews – men, women and children – arrived. The Ukrainians led them past a number of different places where one after another they had to remove their luggage, then their coats, shoes and overgarments and also underwear.... No distinction was made between men, women and children. One would have thought that the Jews that came later would have had a chance to turn back when they saw the others in front of them having to undress. It still surprises me today that this did not happen.<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> National Archives Collection of Foreign Records Seized, Record Group 242, Microfilm Publication T175, 219 Rolls, Roll 233, *Ereignismeldung UdSSR Nr. 97*.

<sup>184</sup> Richard Rhodes, *Masters of Death: The SS Einsatzgruppen and the Invention of the Holocaust* (New York: Vintage Books, 2002), 172.

<sup>185</sup> Ernst Klee, Willi Dressen, and Volker Riess, ed., *The Good Old Days: The Holocaust as Seen by Its Perpetrators and Bystanders*, trans. Deborah Burnstone (New York: Konecky and Konecky, 1988), 63-64.

The Ukrainian militiamen led the Jews to paths which had been cut into the side of Babi Yar, and from there they walked unaccompanied to the bottom. Kurt Werner, one of the shooters from Sonderkommando 4a, described what took place at the bottom of the ravine;

The Jews had to lie face down on the earth by the ravine walls. There were three groups of marksmen...each made up of about twelve men. Groups of Jews were sent down to each of these execution squads simultaneously. Each successive group of Jews had to lie down on top of the bodies of those that had already been shot. The marksmen stood behind the Jews and killed them with a shot in the neck.<sup>186</sup>

According to the official number reported by Einsatzgruppe C, in this way 33,771 Jews of Kiev were murdered.<sup>187</sup>

The September massacre in Kiev demonstrates important differences from Einsatzgruppen executions carried out in July and August of 1941. As was the case in Lvov, in the first two months of Einsatzgruppen operations the victims remained clothed. By September the officers had realized that their victims were most compliant when undressed, and that the clothing and valuables they brought to the collection points were quite valuable, especially in a time of war. Also, during the opening phase of Einsatzgruppen operations the victims were shot standing in front of mass graves, into which they fell. By September a new execution method had been developed, what the perpetrators termed *Sardinenpackung* or sardine packing.<sup>188</sup> This method, as described above by Kurt Werner, was more efficient because the corpses occupied less space when

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<sup>186</sup> Klee, Dressen, and Riess, 66-67. Concerning the “three groups of marksmen...each made up of about twelve men,” these men worked in shifts of approximately fifteen to thirty minutes, and therefore only one man from each group would have been shooting at any one time.

<sup>187</sup> As in Lvov, this number fell far short of the total number of Jews in Kiev, which Sonderkommando 4a estimated at 150,000 when they arrived. Indeed it fell well short of the 50,000 executions which Blobel had hoped to carry out in Kiev.

<sup>188</sup> Rhodes, 175. According to Otto Ohlendorf, this method was never employed by Einsatzgruppe D.

arranged in an orderly fashion, and since it made aiming easier. Also, because there was a constant flow of victims to the shooters, the entire process took less time.

As the technical process of the massacre in Kiev makes clear, when the men of Sonderkommando 4a arrived in the city they already knew from previous experience that their victims would offer little resistance. Through public announcements the Jews of Kiev were ordered to make their way to a certain point at a certain time, and approximately thirty-four thousand did so voluntarily. And despite the constant sound of gunfire in the distance, the thousands of Jews who reported to the collection point stayed, essentially waiting their turn in line. The perpetrators were so confident that they even allowed the victims to walk unaccompanied from the undressing point atop Babi Yar to the bottom of the ravine, in full view of what was taking place below! The behavior of the victims in Kiev was a common feature of Einsatzgruppen operations, and some historians have argued that it characterized the Holocaust as a whole.<sup>189</sup> What appears to have been a failure to suspect what was afoot and a resignation to one's "fate" is better left to social scientists to explain. The behavior of the victims is important here because without a doubt it made the task of the perpetrators far easier from both a technical and a psychological standpoint.

Nonetheless, psychologically the men's mission remained a difficult one, and while they understood the necessity of the undertaking, the officers continued to resent the fact that it had fallen on them to personally execute the Führer Order. But from the nature of the mission and the fact that they had been chosen to carry it out, the men also developed an important psychological coping mechanism. Throughout their time as

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<sup>189</sup> On this point, compare Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, and Lucy S. Dawidowicz, *The War Against the Jews, 1933-1945* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1975).

officers of the Einsatzgruppen the subjects of this study preferred to view themselves as the real victims, suffering day in and day out under the psychological weight of their assignment. As killing became routine the men trivialized the significance of their actions from the standpoint of their victims and came to view the psychological strains they experienced as little more than a sort of occupational hazard, a bearable burden. Thus Paul Blobel, who directed the mass execution at Babi Yar, could cavalierly comment in court, “It took time, of course, and I must say that our men who took part in these executions suffered more from nervous exhaustion than those who had to be shot.”<sup>190</sup>

To the south of Kiev Einsatzgruppe D made its way along the Black Sea coast, moving its headquarters in mid-November from Nikolajev to Simferopol, on the Crimean Peninsula.<sup>191</sup> Among the more than fifty thousand Jews of the Crimea, the men of Einsatzgruppe D encountered a group known as the Karaites, who numbered approximately four thousand.<sup>192</sup> According to the locals the Karaites did not intermarry with other Jews, prompting the question of whether they were of Jewish blood. Otto Ohlendorf, the head of Einsatzgruppe D, sent a query to the Reich Security Main Office. Heydrich’s experts found that while the Karaites were Jewish by religion they were indeed of non-Jewish blood, and replied that for this reason they did not fall under the Führer Order.<sup>193</sup> The fact that Ohlendorf concerned himself with this matter, and the decision he received from RSHA, confirm better than any other instance the pernicious

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<sup>190</sup> Record Group 238, Microfilm Publication M895, Roll 3, Frame 544 (Blobel).

<sup>191</sup> In addition to the group staff in Simferopol, Sonderkommandos 10b, 11a, and 11b were active in the Crimea, though not all at the same time.

<sup>192</sup> *The WJC Report* 18, no. 4 (July/August 1994), <http://members.aol.com/askinazy/crimeajw.html>. In court the term “Karaimian” was used in place of “Karaite.” Some scholars prefer the terminology “Karaylar-Karaite,” which distinguishes Crimean Karaites from related groups.

<sup>193</sup> Record group 238, Microfilm Publication M895, Roll 2, Frames 648-650 (Ohlendorf).

nature which Nazism ascribed specifically to Jewish blood. As Ernst Biberstein explained at Nuremberg, the Jewish question “was not a religious matter, but merely a biological matter,” and as the case of the Karaites demonstrates, the Einsatzgruppen and RSHA operated accordingly.<sup>194</sup>

Thus the Karaites were spared during the executions which unfolded in the Crimea in late-November and December of 1941. During this period Einsatzgruppe D reported mass executions in Simferopol, Evpatoria, Alushta, Karasubazar, Kerch, and Feodosia, noting that “the shooting of Jews has been positively received [by the local population].”<sup>195</sup> The massacre at Simferopol is particularly revealing. According to Heinz Schubert, who had served as a second lieutenant on Ohlendorf’s staff, the 11<sup>th</sup> Army under General Erich von Manstein gave specific orders that the mass execution at Simferopol take place by the end of December at the latest.<sup>196</sup>

As was standard procedure the army provided fuel and ammunition, and in order to expedite the Simferopol massacre the 11<sup>th</sup> Army also supplied additional vehicles and manpower.<sup>197</sup> Concerning his role and that of his fellow defendants Heinz Schubert recalled, “Ohlendorf and the local commando leader of Simferopol, Dr. Braune, themselves inspected these executions repeatedly and beyond that I had received instructions also to inspect various phases of the entire events, not merely to look at them to see whether they were carried out at all, but in what way they were carried out in detail.” His task, as Schubert admitted in court, had been to make sure that the mass

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<sup>194</sup> Record Group 238, Microfilm Publication M895, Roll 4, Frame 363 (Biberstein).

<sup>195</sup> Record Group 242, Microfilm Publication T175, Roll 234, *Ereignismeldung UdSSR Nr. 150*.

<sup>196</sup> Record group 238, Microfilm Publication M895, Roll 5, Frame 1031 (Schubert).

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.* The 11<sup>th</sup> Army supplied 2,000 of its own personnel (Stein 275).

execution at Simferopol was in his words, “Carried out in a clean and thorough manner.”<sup>198</sup>

Unlike at Lvov and Kiev, in the Crimea the officers no longer bothered to “justify” their actions with trumped up criminal accusations. Instead, in each city and town they took time to establish an infrastructure of destruction, including a *Jüdische Ältestenrat* or Jewish Council of Elders, through which instructions were passed to the Jewish communities of the Crimea.<sup>199</sup> The methodical approach taken by the officers of Einsatzgruppe D in the Crimea confirms that in short time the men thought less about the moral implications which had troubled Erwin Schulz and more about matters of efficiency and thoroughness. In the Crimea not only were women and children killed as a matter of course, the goal now was to leave no Jew alive. Thus in April 1942 Lieutenant Colonel Willi Seibert, another member of Ohlendorf’s staff, wrote in a report to Berlin; “The Crimea is freed of Jews. Only occasionally some small groups are turning up. In cases where single Jews could camouflage themselves by means of forged papers, etc. they will, nevertheless, be recognized sooner or later, as experience has taught.”<sup>200</sup>

By the close of 1941 the subjects of this study were not only working toward the extermination of the Soviet Jews, they were approaching their mission with a great deal of determination. As the men concerned themselves less with the moral implications of killing defenseless men, women, and children, and more with the technical aspects of their mission, the ratio of dead to the total Jewish population increased dramatically. The

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<sup>198</sup> Record Group 238, Microfilm Publication M895, Roll 5, Frame 1032 (Schubert). The Simferopol execution alone took the lives of approximately 11,000 Jews (Stein, 273).

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., Roll 2, Frames 700-701 (Ohlendorf). The *Jüdische Ältestenräte* were later termed *Judenräte*.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., Roll 11, Frames 836-837 (Seibert). While the vast majority of Crimean Jews had been killed by the turn of the year, the city of Sevastopol, supported by the Soviet Black Sea Fleet, held out against the German 11th Army until March 1942, when the city’s Jews fell into the hands of the men of Sonderkommando 11a (Krausnick and Wilhelm, 1981, 204).

number of victims of the July mass execution at Lvov, seven thousand, fell far short of the total Jewish population of that city. The same was true for the September massacre in Kiev, though the death toll was much higher, thirty-four thousand, including women and children. In the Crimea the officers took time to put into place a thoroughly organized infrastructure of destruction, and the result was total extermination. Of the more than fifty thousand Crimean Jews none but four thousand Karaites were left alive, this because they were found to be of non-Jewish blood.

What stands out most in the defendant's testimony concerning the years 1941-42 is the contrast between the men's belief in the necessity of the undertaking, which even Erwin Schulz never questioned, and their desire not to be personally involved in carrying it out. Indeed only a sadist would have welcomed such an assignment, and the subjects of this study certainly were not sadists. They were true Nazi believers with the skills necessary to manage such an unprecedented, large scale undertaking – the right men for the job, as the history of their time as Einsatzgruppen officers demonstrates. The technical process which the officers developed and the results of this process, namely a dramatic increase in the percentage of the Jewish population killed, demonstrate how the men's political beliefs, based on their own form of reason, far outweighed their moral instincts. In the end what motivated the subjects of this study in their mission was best summed up by the former commander of Einsatzgruppe B, Brigadier General Erich Naumann, who in an unusual moment of courtroom clarity admitted simply, "It was my conviction that it had to be done."<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> Record Group 238, Microfilm Publication M895, Roll 2, Frame 926 (Naumann).



## Conclusion

On April 8-9, 1948, the three judge panel which presided over Case IX returned guilty verdicts for each of the subjects of this study. Mathias Graf and Felix Rühl were found guilty only on count three – membership in a criminal organization. Both men had held relatively low ranks,<sup>202</sup> and Graf in particular had been less committed to Nazism than his fellow defendants. Felix Rühl was sentenced to ten years in prison while Mathias Graf was released on time already served. The judges found the other twenty defendants guilty on all three counts and handed down the death sentence to thirteen of the men, though ultimately only four of the death sentences were carried out.<sup>203</sup>

Two months earlier, on February 13, each of the accused had been allowed to make a final statement before the court. None of the men offered an apology, as a matter of fact, not one of them even mentioned the more than one million victims of their efforts. Speaking of the defendants as a whole, in his final statement Otto Ohlendorf confirmed the argument which I have presented, and raised an important point which goes to the heart of the recent historiography on the Holocaust. In Ohlendorf's words the defendants had "felt that their work was necessary even if it opposed their own inner tendencies and interests, because the existence of their people was in deadly peril. They were the same good average citizens as you find them by the million in all countries."<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> Graf had been a master sergeant and was the only defendant who had ranked as a non-commissioned officer.

<sup>203</sup> Aside from the five men who were put to death, during the 1950s each of the sentences of the remaining men were shortened (see Appendix B for details). John J. McCloy, the U.S. High Commissioner for Germany from 1949 to 1952, had the power to alter the sentences of those convicted by the U.S. military tribunals, and he set a precedence of lenience which conformed to German public opinion and the demands of the then developing Cold War (Bird, 359-375). Following McCloy's tenure lenience remained the norm, and by 1959 each of the surviving subjects of this study had been released from prison.

<sup>204</sup> Record Group 238, Microfilm Publication M895, Roll 7, Frame 503 (Ohlendorf).

The men had indeed been motivated in their mission by a dearly held set of political beliefs, but were the subjects of this study as Ohlendorf stated, “good average citizens” – “ordinary men?”

It is certainly correct to say that each of the men had ordinary origins; they came from middle-class families and up to the mid-1920s there is no indication that they were in any way extraordinary. However, beginning with the dawn of Nazism on the German political stage the subjects of this study increasingly distinguished themselves from other Germans through the individual decisions which they made. Under the influences of the Weimar Era many of their countrymen chose to oppose Nazism, to remain aloof from the movement, or to limit their support of the Nazi Party to the confines of the ballot box. Unlike the millions of ordinary Germans who sympathized with Hitler’s world view, the future officers of the Einsatzgruppen took up the Nazi cause with an energy and determination which their superiors in the party, and later the state, quickly recognized as extraordinary. Thus, by the time Adolf Hitler came to power in 1933 they were neither “ordinary men” as Christopher Browning concluded of his subjects, nor were they “ordinary Germans” as in Daniel Goldhagen’s formulation.

How, then, does my work compare with that of Browning and Goldhagen, in the context of the larger Holocaust? In contrast to Christopher Browning’s findings, I have found that the assignment of my subjects as officers of the Einsatzgruppen was by no means a matter of chance, but a result of their professional skills and proven political allegiances. The orders which the officers received and their wartime experiences, far from being the driving force behind their actions, only served to confirm what they had long believed. I agree that immediate situational factors were important in surmounting

moral barriers which faced the officers of the Einsatzgruppen and the men of Battalion 101. However, concerning motive – the driving force behind the actions of our subjects – I believe that anti-Semitism deserves a much more prominent place in the historiography of the Holocaust than Browning’s argument allows.

In his analysis of the same sources, Daniel Goldhagen argues in favor of an “eliminationist anti-Semitism” rooted specifically in German culture. While I agree with the importance which Goldhagen’s assigns to anti-Semitism, I disagree with his cultural emphasis. Certainly German culture had its own peculiarities but anti-Semitism was not among them. As Goldhagen’s critics note, prior to the rise of Nazism anti-Semitic violence had by no means been confined to Germany, and during the Holocaust the native peoples of the lands Germany conquered played a significant role in the destruction of the European Jews. In contrast to Daniel Goldhagen, I have argued in favor of a political anti-Semitism, the roots of which lie in the socio-economic dislocation of Weimar Germany. It was the Weimar milieu, in my view, which made the Nazi explanation of “the Jews” so appealing to Germans of that time.

Among those Germans to whom Nazism appealed was Adolf Eichmann, who contrary to Hannah Arendt’s portrayal actually had much in common with the subjects of this study. Born to a middle-class family in 1906, Eichmann came of age during the Weimar years. He joined the Austrian Nazi Party and SS in 1932 and later found his calling as Reinhard Heydrich’s Jewish expert in Nazi Germany’s most politically oriented institution, the Reich Security Main Office. Like the officers of the Einsatzgruppen, Eichmann made individual decisions which ultimately resulted in him being entrusted with a key aspect of the Holocaust. Far from the pliable yes-man

described by Arendt, in his task of organizing the transport of Europe's Jews to their deaths Eichmann showed significant managerial skill and went about his duties with determination and efficiency. Indeed as Heinz Höhne demonstrated in his landmark study of the SS, when Nazi Germany's end appeared imminent Eichmann actually increased his efforts to send as many Jews as possible to their deaths, this at a time when his colleagues and superiors in the SS were considering a halt to the extermination program.<sup>205</sup>

Two important factors separate men such as Eichmann and the officers of the Einsatzgruppen from Christopher Browning's subjects and the German Army officer corps, as studied by Helmut Krausnick. First, the army officer corps and Battalion 101 were composed largely of middle-aged men who were more established in society. Many of them had lived their formative years prior to the dawn of the Weimar Era, and nearly all came of age before Nazism became a major factor in German politics. Second, unlike Eichmann and the officers of the Einsatzgruppen, neither the officers of the German Army nor the men of Battalion 101 had their origins in the middle-class, which provided the base of Nazi support.

The army officer corps, drawn almost exclusively from the upper class, objected to aspects of the Nazi program which threatened their traditional class interests. Yet as Helmut Krausnick demonstrated, by 1941 many of the army's top officers had come to adopt the Nazi view that a Judeo-Communist conspiracy existed and that it presented a grave threat to Germany and the Volk. Thus the generals not only allowed the SS direct access to the civilian populations in areas under army administration, at times army

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<sup>205</sup> Heinz Höhne, *The Order of the Death's Head: The Story of Hitler's SS*, trans. Richard Barry (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 563-566.

officers also involved themselves directly in the extermination process, setting deadlines for Einsatzgruppen executions and providing manpower to aid Heydrich's overburdened extermination squads.

If the officer corps could object to parts of the Nazi program which threatened their traditional class interests yet adopt other aspects of Hitler's world view which were of no threat to them, perhaps a similar phenomenon took place among the predominantly working-class men of Battalion 101. As noted, my main criticism of Christopher Browning's "ordinary men" thesis is that it focuses too heavily on situational factors, which undoubtedly lightened the psychological burden on the perpetrators, but are not in my view a sufficient explanation of the driving force behind the Holocaust. I would therefore argue that like the army officer corps, under the influences of the Weimar Era many of the working-class men of Battalion 101 also came to adopt the Nazi view of "the Jews" as an imminent danger, without actually considering themselves Nazis.

A second important historiographical consideration, functionalism versus intentionalism, predates the Browning-Goldhagen Debate by thirty years. Functionalists emphasize a chain of related events, each individual link representing another step in the direction of what we know today as the Jewish Holocaust. In this interpretation the impetus behind the Holocaust came not from Hitler and his inner circle, but from men such as Adolf Eichmann and the officers of the Einsatzgruppen. This "twisted road to Auschwitz," as Karl Schleunes termed it, lies in contrast to the intentionalist or "straight road to Auschwitz" interpretation. In the intentionalist view, Adolf Hitler and his control of Nazi political doctrine and the resources of the German nation-state play a central role. Intentionalists see the Holocaust from its earliest beginnings as a conscious effort to

exterminate the Jews of Europe, and explain Hitler's military forays at least partly in terms of his desire for a final solution to the Jewish question in Europe. My own view on this point falls between these two opposite interpretations of the Holocaust.

Adolf Hitler's role in what became the Jewish Holocaust was especially important in the years before his ascension to power. Hitler's persona served as the guiding force in the formation of the Nazi world view and the central role it attributed to Jewish influence. Setting the tone for the entire Nazi movement, he categorically refused to compromise his radical anti-Semitism. And with a flair for public spectacle and unmatched oratory skills, Hitler very effectively brought his anti-Semitic polemics to the German masses, transforming his party from its beer hall origins into the largest party in the Reichstag in a matter of ten years. While I would not argue that Adolf Hitler had a single, detailed plan for the destruction of the European Jews before or even after his rise to power, his Weimar Era speeches and writings leave little doubt that from the beginning a violent and comprehensive solution to the Jewish question was a key part of his vision for the future.

As functionalist scholars correctly emphasize, following Hitler's rise to power in 1933 the destruction of the European Jews developed in stages. During the 1930s Nazi anti-Semitism most frequently found its expression in the form of legal restrictions such as the Nuremberg Laws and in pogroms, for example Kristallnacht, the impetus for which came as much from the local and regional levels as from the national level. As Karl Schleunes emphasized, during the 1930s Hitler was faced with a number of pressures, chief among them the reactions of foreign powers, which temporarily limited his freedom of action on the Jewish question. Thus in the late 1930s Hitler and his inner circle settled on a policy of encouraging Jewish emigration, while Himmler's experts explored

possibilities for forced resettlement.<sup>206</sup> However, there is no indication that the anti-Semitic measures and the emigration and resettlement plans of the 1930s were considered as anything but interim, the best which could be accomplished under the then current conditions. As time would tell, neither Hitler and his inner circle nor his committed followers viewed these initial measures as a satisfactory long-term solution to the Jewish question.

As for the war, I would argue that a desired solution to the Jewish question was only one of many factors which informed Hitler's bid for control of the continent. World War II cannot be boiled down to a "war against the Jews,"<sup>207</sup> but the fact remains that war freed Hitler from foreign considerations involving the Jewish question and brought the vast majority of Europe's Jews under Nazi domination. By 1941, with the war well underway and plans in place for the invasion of the Soviet Union, a final solution to the Jewish question in Europe became a possibility for the first time. In my view, it was at this point that the trusted functionaries of the Nazi state took the initiative, transforming Hitler's long-time intentions into reality. With little guidance, Heydrich's experts at RSHA adjusted to the new opportunities presented by the war, scrapping the resettlement schemes of the late 1930s in favor of Jewish ghettoization and plans for systematic murder.

The first bold step into the realm of extermination came with the establishment of the Einsatzgruppen in the spring of 1941. With practically no instructions as to how the extermination of the Soviet Jews was to be carried out, the officers of the Einsatzgruppen

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<sup>206</sup> Karl A. Schleunes, *The Twisted Road to Auschwitz: Nazi Policy Toward German Jews, 1933-1939* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1970), 92-213, 224-240.

<sup>207</sup> The title of Lucy Dawidowicz' intentionalist interpretation of the Holocaust.

were left to develop their own methods in the field. Soon after crossing the line from political ideologue to mass murderer, each of the subjects of this study (save Erwin Schulz) went to work honing their technique in a determined effort to carry out their assigned mission in as thorough a manner as possible. As Raul Hilberg observed of the perpetrators of the Holocaust more generally, the officers of the Einsatzgruppen “displayed a striking pathfinding ability in the absence of directives... a fundamental comprehension of the task even when there were no explicit communications.”<sup>208</sup>

It is probably no coincidence that little more than one month after the Einsatzgruppen departed Pretzsch for the East, Reinhard Heydrich received official permission to begin planning a continent-wide extermination effort, in the parlance of the day a “final solution to the Jewish question in Europe.”<sup>209</sup> In the summer of 1941 the officers of the Einsatzgruppen were demonstrating that a final solution to the Jewish question would be perfectly feasible from a technical standpoint. And Einsatzgruppen operations also cleared up the crucial question of how those involved would react to a comprehensive program of mass murder. Heydrich’s experts learned that the victims would offer little resistance, that the German Army and native populations of the East would aid in the extermination effort, and as Hilberg and Browning emphasize, that psychological acclimation and rationalization go a long way toward making the moral implications of mass murder bearable for those assigned to carry it out.

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<sup>208</sup> Hilberg, vol. 3, 993.

<sup>209</sup> On July 31, 1941 Hermann Göring, certainly acting at Hitler’s behest, ordered Reinhard Heydrich to begin preparations for a European-wide extermination of the Jews. After several postponements, at the Wannsee Conference of January 20, 1942, Heydrich met with representatives of the major state ministries and departments in order to coordinate their participation in the Holocaust.



A major contribution of my work, I believe, is that it draws together highly regarded features of the most important literature on the Holocaust. This study confirms the importance of psychological factors which enabled the perpetrators to surmount the significant moral obstacles which faced them in the field. More central to my thesis, however, is that the actions of my subjects were informed by a unique form of reason, based on a political framework which explained every evil as arising from Jewish influence and held the destruction of “the Jews” as common sense from a political standpoint. In emphasizing the conditions which gave birth to the Nazi movement, Adolf Hitler’s role in establishing the Nazi world view, and the role of his followers in making Hitler’s vision a reality, I hope that this study has made a second contribution to understanding why the Holocaust happened when and where it did, and what motivated its perpetrators.

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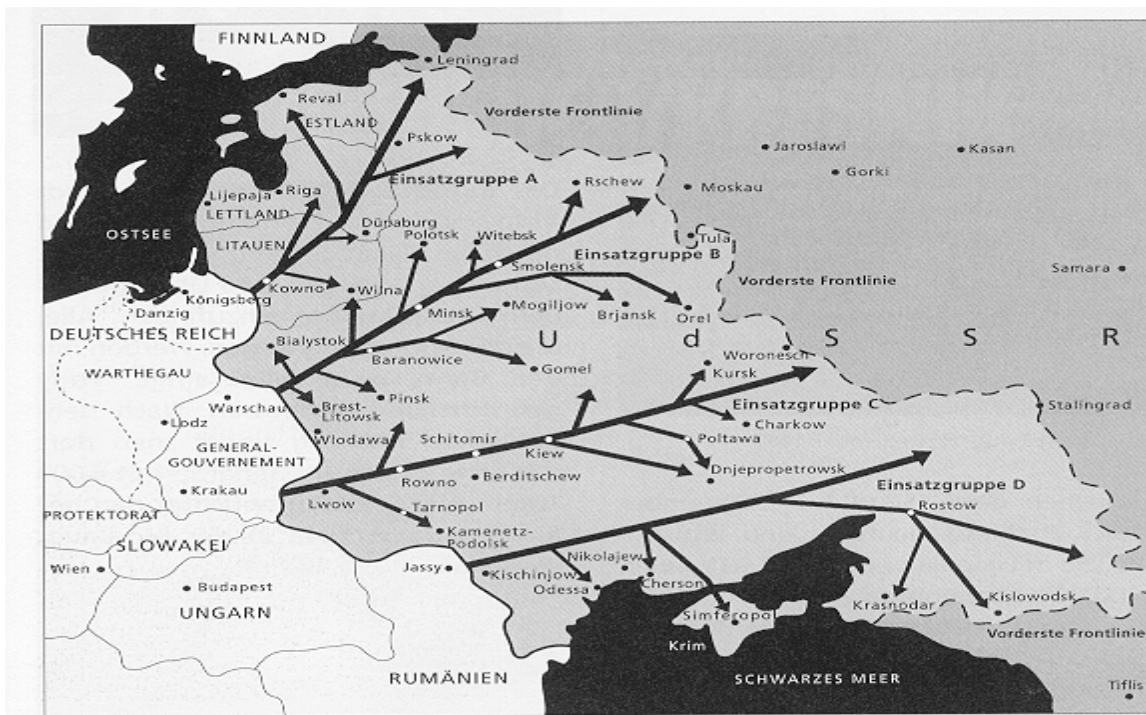
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Appendix A

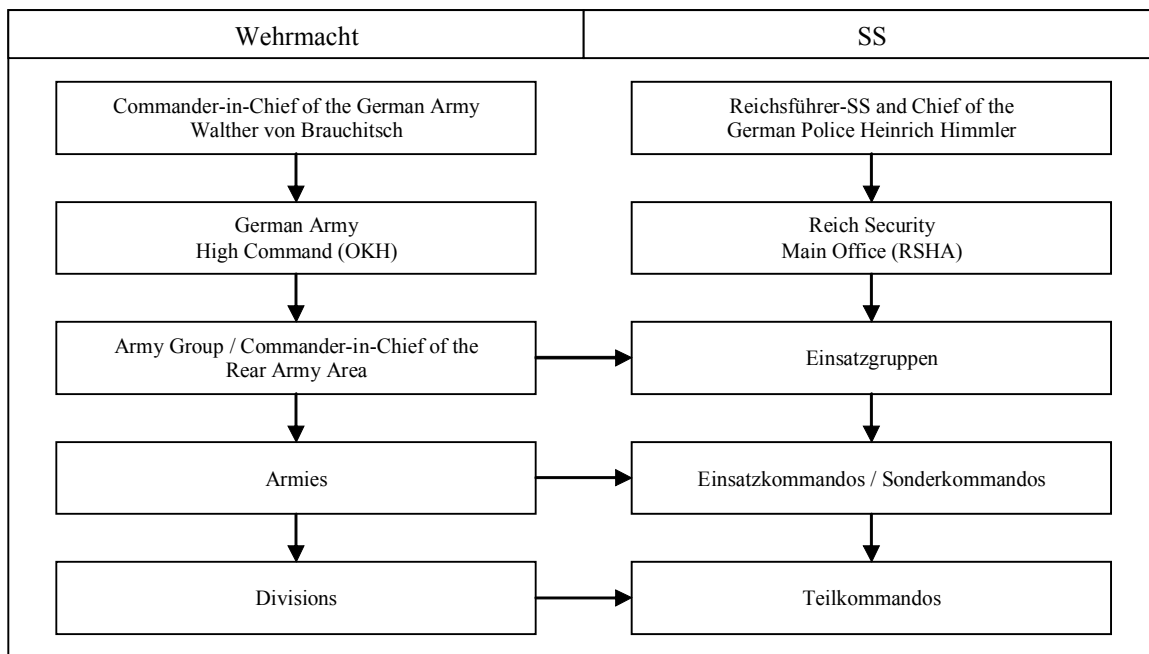
Figures 1 and 2

Figure 1. Route of the Einsatzgruppen



Permission of: *Gedenk-und Bildungsstätte, Haus der Wannsee-Konferenz.*

Figure 2. Command Structure, Einsatzgruppen Operations

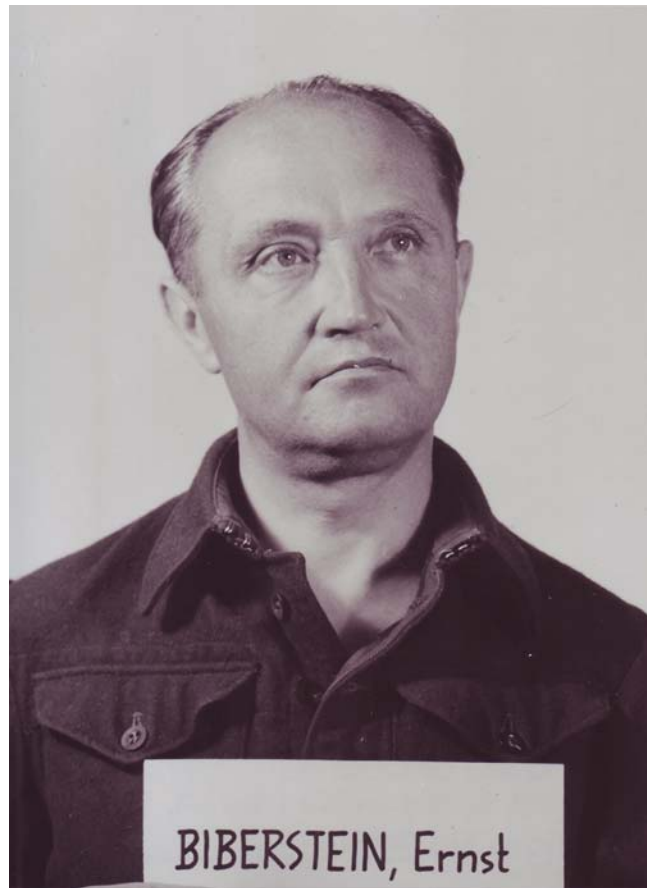


Based on the graphic 'Kooperation zwischen Wehrmacht und SS' in *Verbrechen der Wehrmacht: Dimensionen des Vernichtungskrieges, 1941-1944* (Hamburg: Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, 2002), 85.

## Appendix B

### Biographical Data





Name: Biberstein, Ernst (Birth name: Szymanowski)

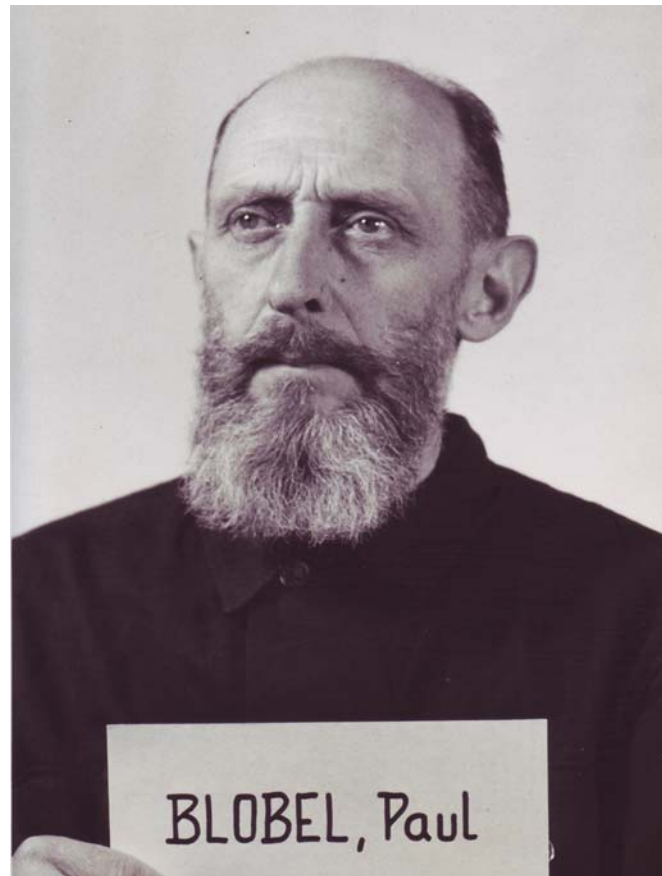
Born: 1899, Hilchenbach (Westphalia)

Nazi Party: 1926

SS: 1936

Rank: Major, commander of Einsatzkommando 6  
(Einsatzkommando C)

Sentence: Death (commuted to life in prison, released in 1958)



Name: Blobel, Paul

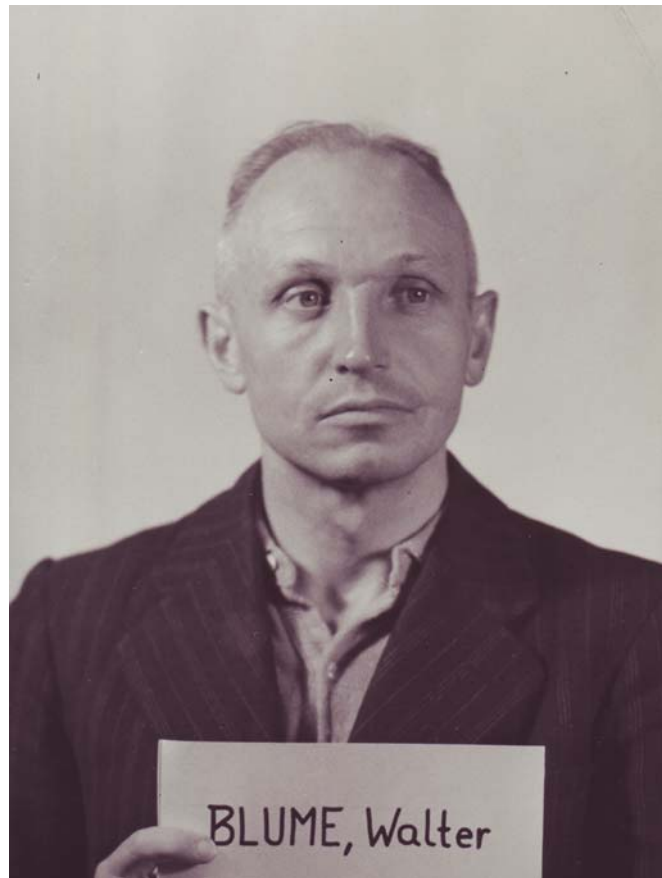
Born: 1894, Potsdam

Nazi Party: 1931

SS: 1932

Rank: Colonel, commander of Sonderkommando 4a  
(Einsatzgruppe C)

Sentence: Death (executed June 7, 1951)



Name: Blume, Walter

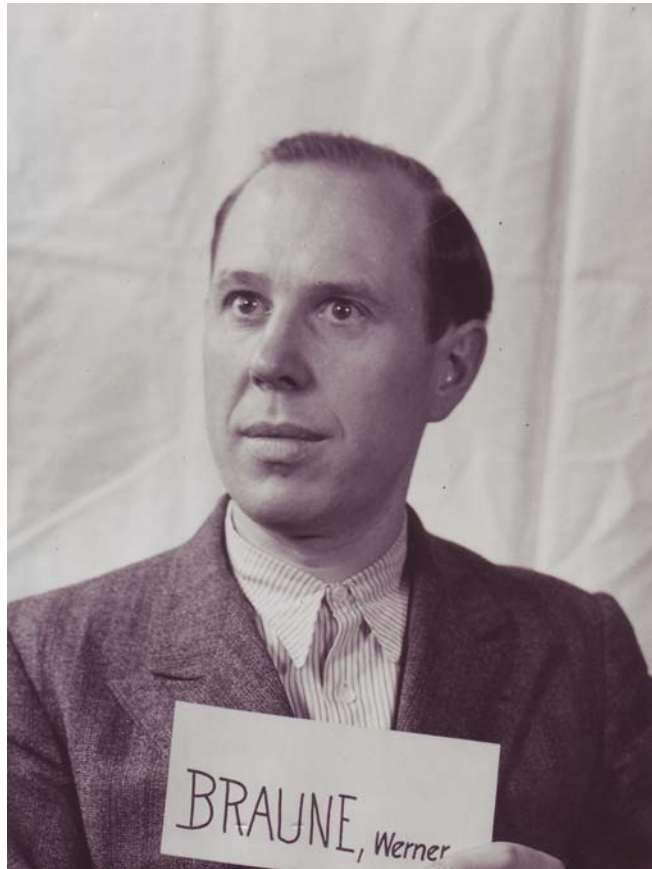
Born: 1906, Dortmund

Nazi Party: 1933

SS: 1934

Rank: Lieutenant colonel, commander of Sonderkommando 7a  
(Einsatzgruppe B)

Sentence: Death (commuted to 25 years, released in 1958)



Name: Braune, Werner

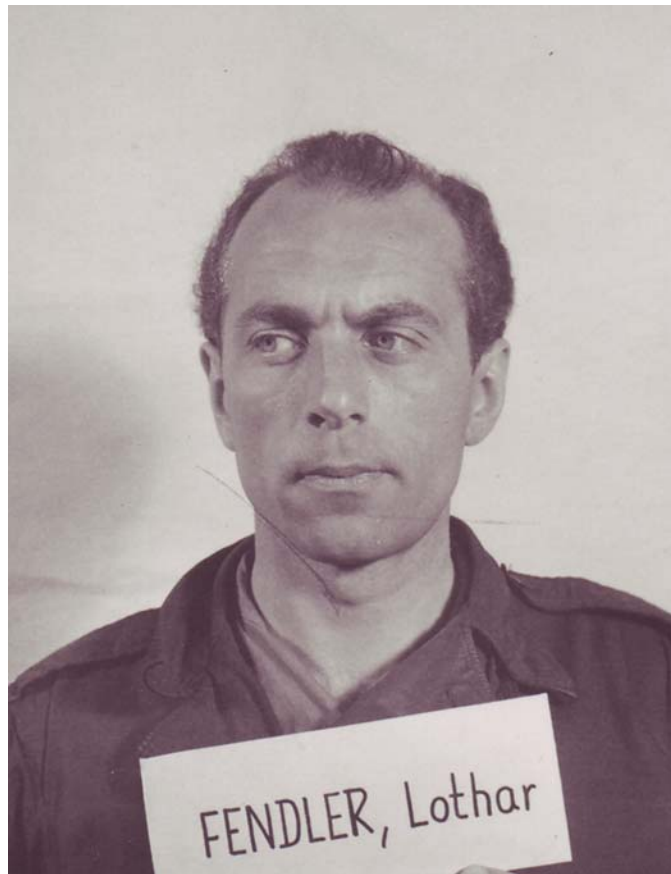
Born: 1909, Mehrstedt (Thuringia)

Nazi Party: 1931

SS: 1934

Rank: Major, commander of Sonderkommando 11b  
(Einsatzgruppe D)

Sentence: Death (executed on June 7, 1951)



Name: Fendler, Lothar

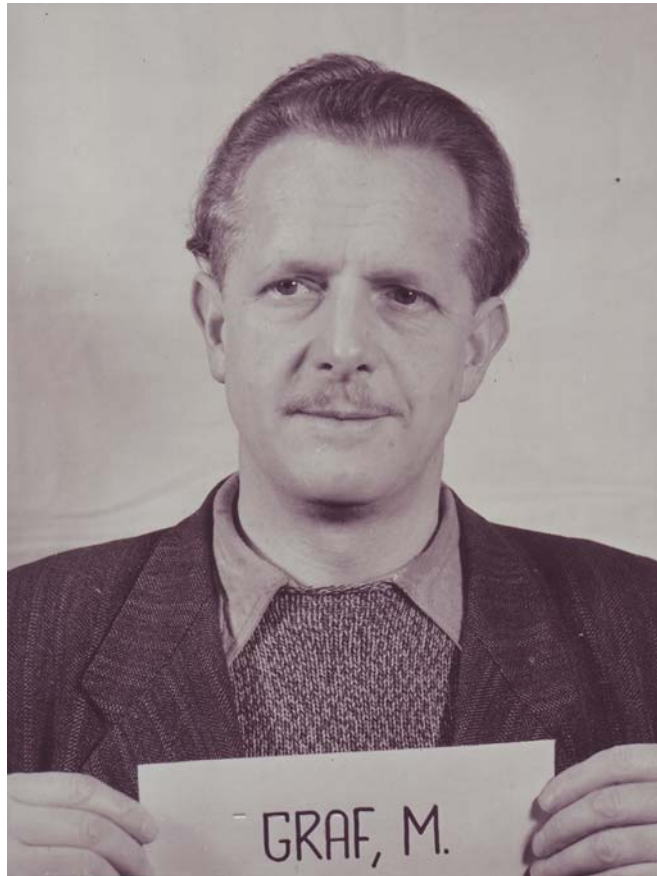
Born: 1913, Breslau (Wroclaw)

Nazi Party: 1937

SS: 1933

Rank: Captain, Sonderkommando 4b (Einsatzgruppe C)

Sentence: 10 years (commuted to 8 years, released in 1951)



Name: Graf, Matthias

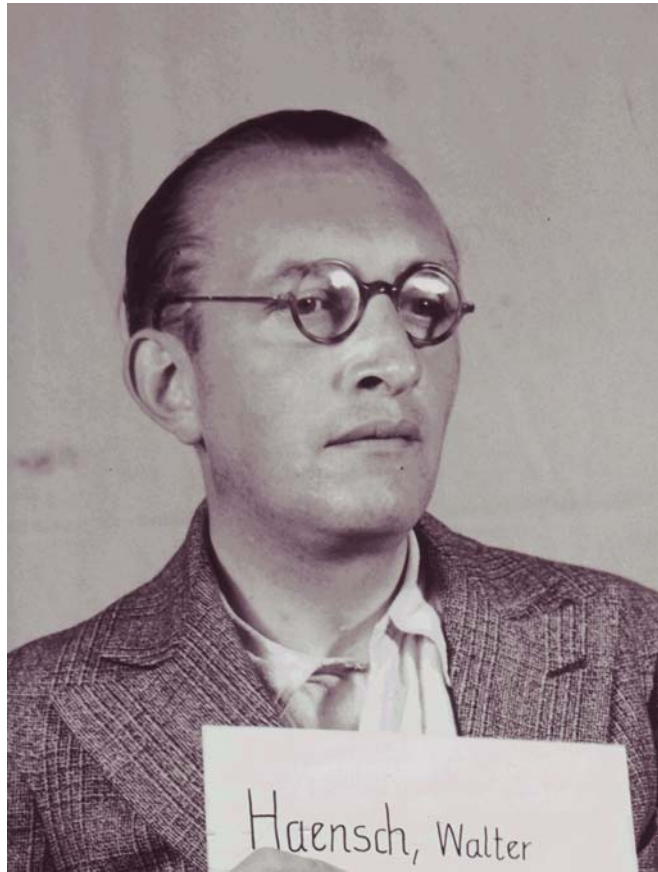
Born: 1903, Kottern (Saxony)

Nazi Party: 1933

SS: 1933

Rank: Master sergeant, Einsatzkommando 6 (Einsatzgruppe C)

Sentence: Time served



Name: Haensch, Walter

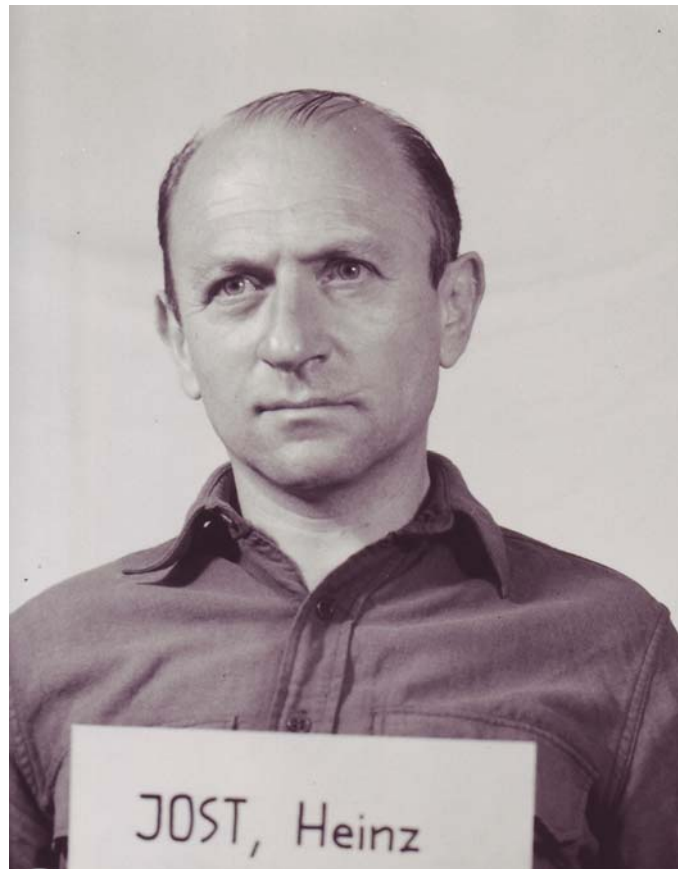
Born: 1904, Hirschfelde (Saxony)

Nazi Party: 1931

SS: 1936

Rank: Lieutenant colonel, commander of Sonderkommando 4b  
(Einsatzgruppe C)

Sentence: Death (commuted to 15 years, released in 1955)



Name: Jost, Heinz

Born: 1904, Holzhausen (Hesse)

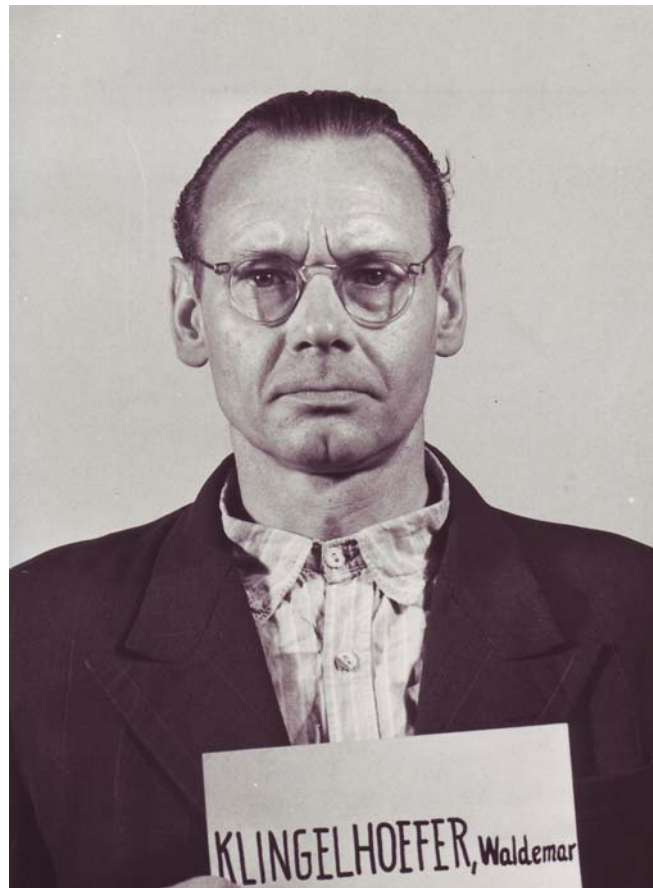
Nazi Party: 1927

SS: 1934

Rank: Brigadier general, commander of Einsatzgruppe A

Sentence: Life in prison (commuted to 10 years, released in 1951)





Name: Klingelhöfer, Woldemar

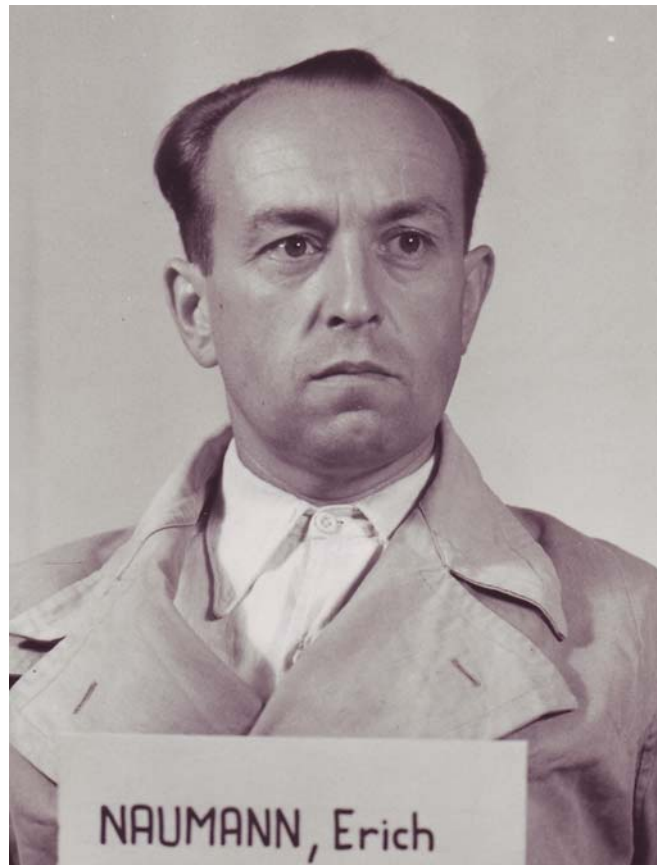
Born: 1900, Moscow

Nazi Party: 1930

SS: 1933

Rank: Major, commander of Vorkommando Moskau  
(Einsatzgruppe B)

Sentence: Death (commuted to life in prison, released in 1956)



Name: Naumann, Erich

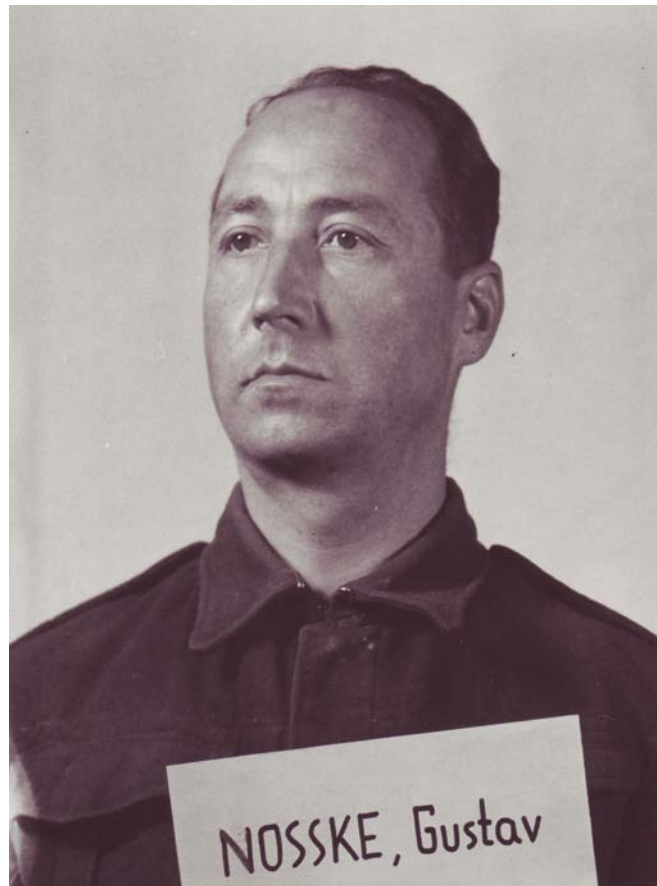
Born: 1905, Meissen (Saxony)

Nazi Party: 1929

SS: 1935

Rank: Brigadier general, commander of Einsatzgruppe B

Sentence: Death (executed on June 7, 1951)



Name: Nosske, Gustav

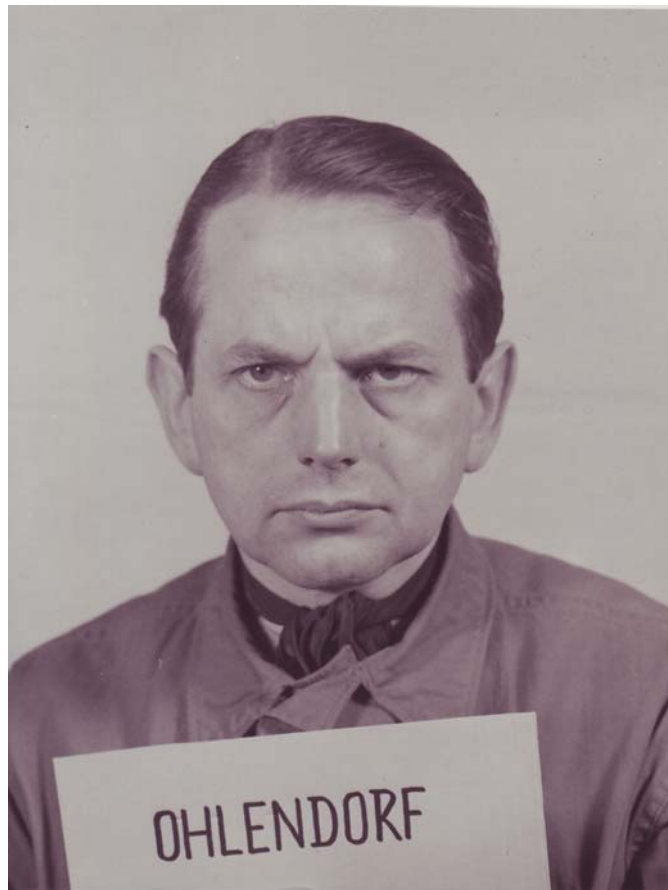
Born: 1902, Halle

Nazi Party: 1933

SS: 1937

Rank: Major, commander of Einsatzkommando 12  
(Einsatzgruppe D)

Sentence: Life in prison (commuted to 10 years, released in 1951)



Name: Ohlendorf, Otto

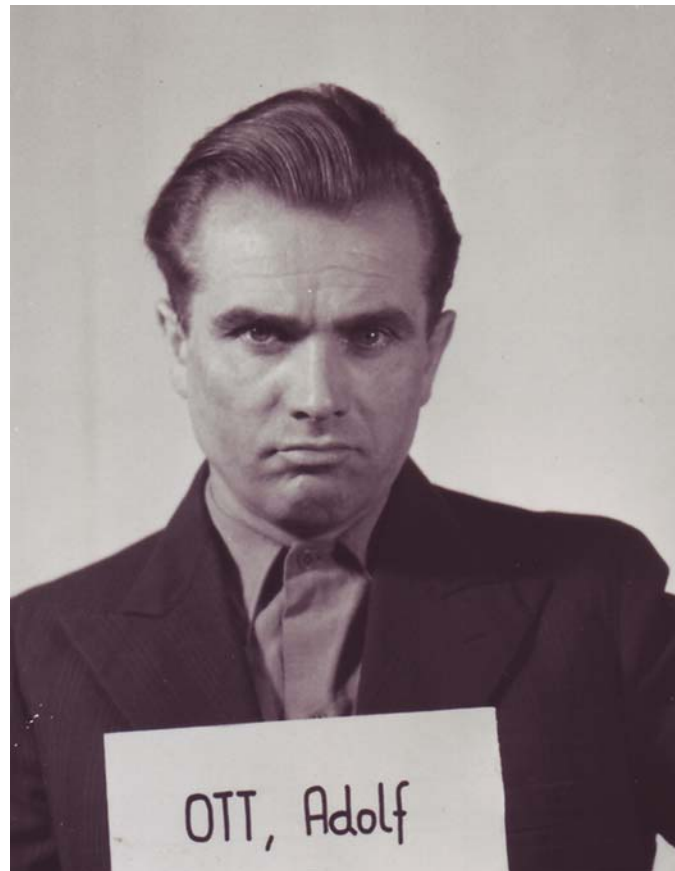
Born: 1907, Hoheneggelsen (Saxony)

Nazi Party: 1925

SS: 1926

Rank: Brigadier general, commander of Einsatzgruppe D

Sentence: Death (executed on June 7, 1951)



Name: Ott, Adolf

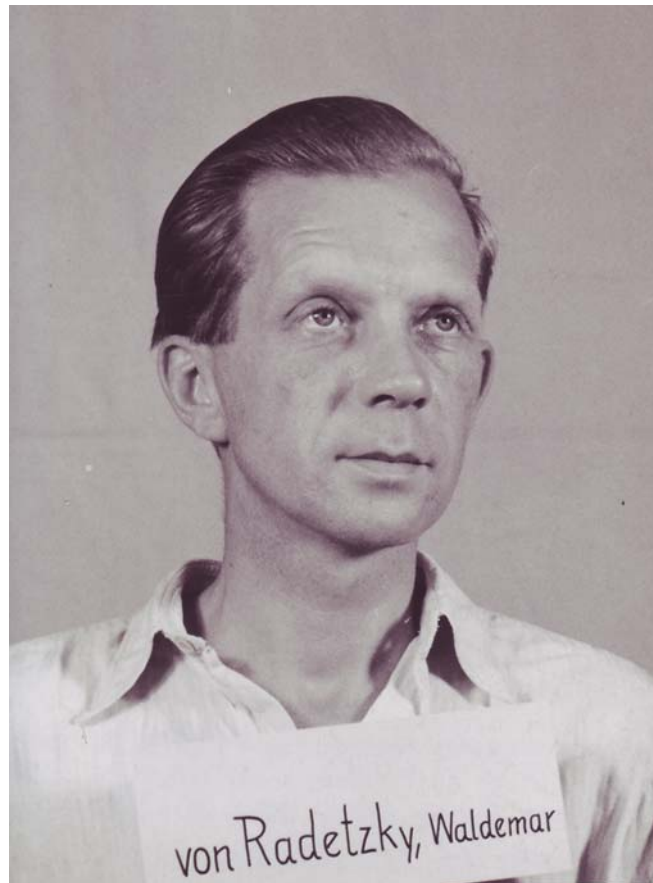
Born: 1904, Waidhaus (Bavaria)

Nazi Party: 1922

SS: 1931

Rank: Lieutenant colonel, commander of Sonderkommando 7b  
(Einsatzgruppe B)

Sentence: Death (commuted to life in prison, released in 1958)



Name: von Radetzky, Waldemar

Born: 1910, Moscow

Nazi Party: 1940

SS: 1940

Rank: Captain, Sonderkommando 4a (Einsatzgruppe C)

Sentence: 20 years (commuted to time served, released in 1951)



Name: Rühl, Felix

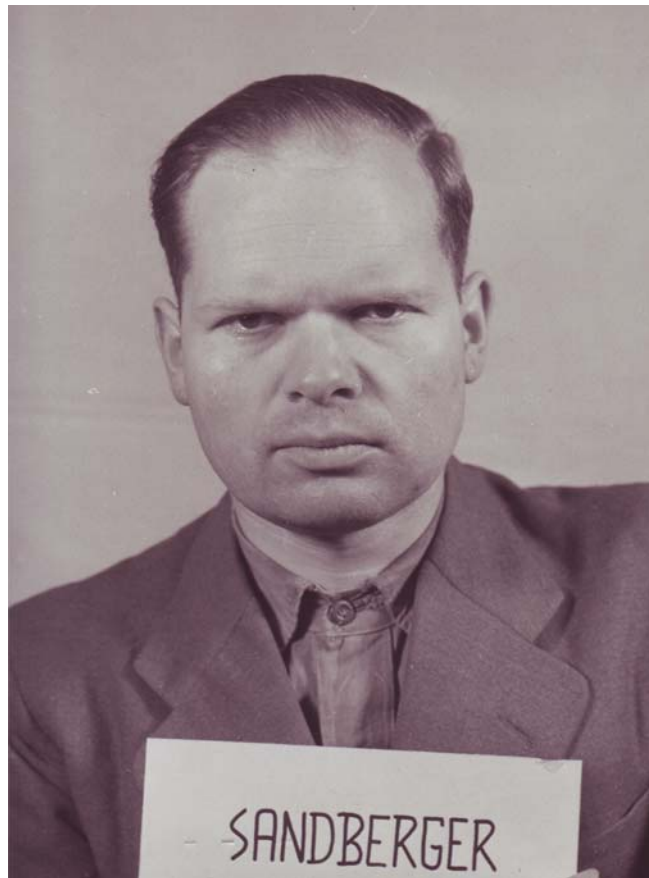
Born: 1910, Neheim (Westphalia)

Nazi Party: 1930

SS: 1932

Rank: First lieutenant, Sonderkommando 10b (Einsatzgruppe D)

Sentence: 10 years (commuted to time served, released in 1951)



Name: Sandberger, Martin

Born: 1911, Berlin

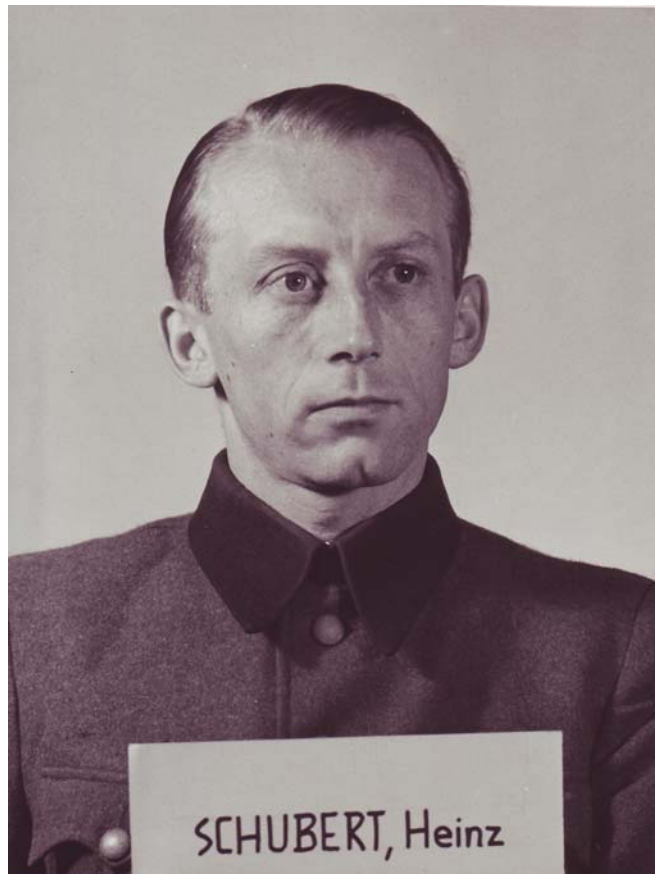
Nazi Party: 1931

SS: 1936

Rank: Lieutenant colonel, commander of Sonderkommando 1a  
(Einsatzgruppe A)

Sentence: Death (commuted to life in prison, released in 1958)





Name: Schubert, Heinz

Born: 1914, Berlin

Nazi Party: 1934

SS: 1934

Rank: Second lieutenant, staff of Einsatzgruppe D

Sentence: Death (commuted to 10 years, released in 1951)



Name: Schulz, Erwin

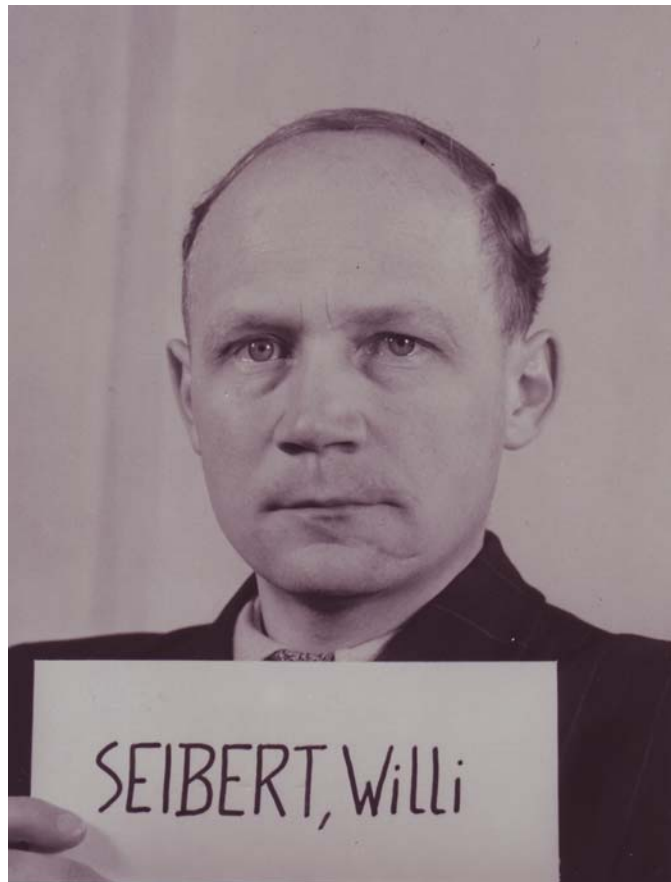
Born: 1900, Berlin

Nazi Party: 1933

SS: 1935

Rank: Colonel, commander of Einsatzkommando 5  
(Einsatzgruppe C)

Sentence: 20 years (commuted to 15 years, released in 1954)



Name: Seibert, Willi

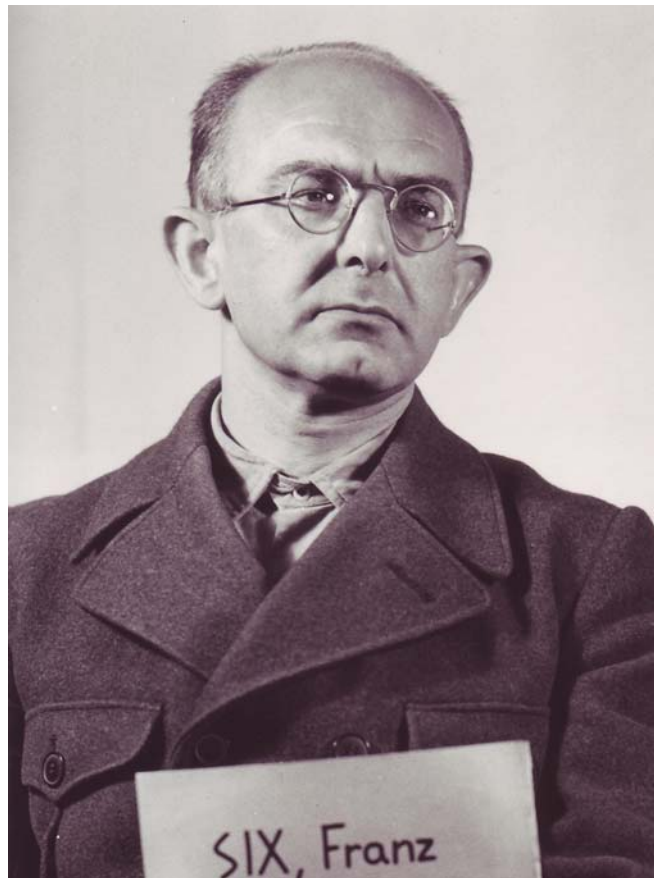
Born: 1908, Hannover

Nazi Party: 1933

SS: 1936

Rank: Lieutenant colonel, Staff of Einsatzgruppe D

Sentence: Death (commuted to 15 years, released in 1955)



Name: Six, Franz-Alfred

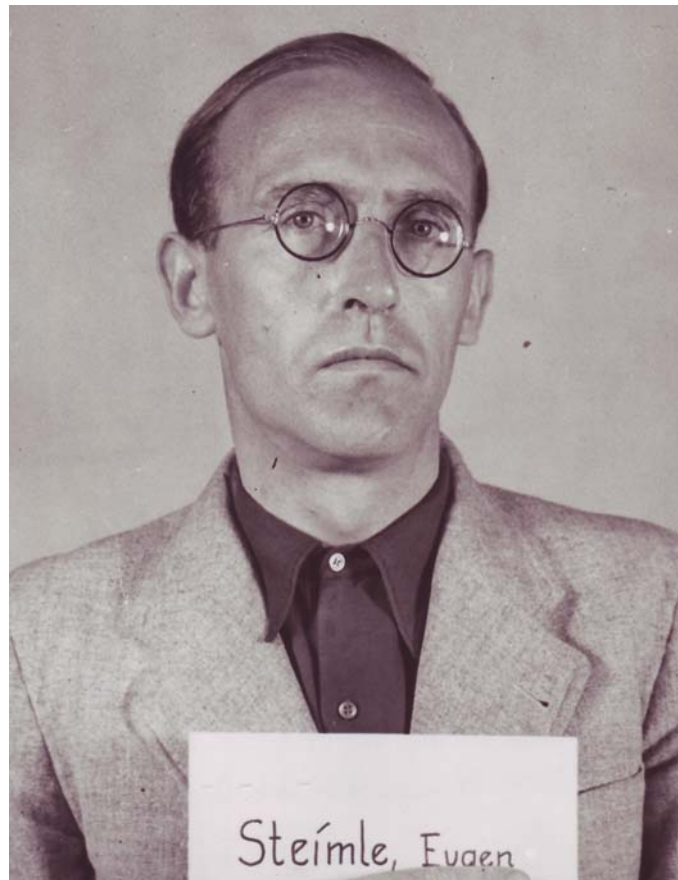
Born: 1909, Mannheim

Nazi Party: 1930

SS: 1935

Rank: Colonel, commander of Vorkommando Moskau

Sentence: 20 years (commuted to 10 years, released in 1952)



Name: Steimle, Eugen

Born: 1909, Neubulach (Wurttemberg)

Nazi Party: 1932

SS: 1936

Rank: Lieutenant colonel, commander of Sonderkommando 7a  
(Einsatzgruppe B) and Sonderkommando 4a  
(Einsatzgruppe C)

Sentence: Death (commuted to 20 years, released in 1954)



Name: Strauch, Eduard

Born: 1906, Essen

Nazi Party: 1931

SS: 1931

Rank, Lieutenant colonel, commander of Einsatzkommando 2 and  
Sonderkommando 1b (Einsatzgruppe A)

Sentence: Death, extradited to Belgium where he was again  
sentenced to death (commuted to life)