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Controlled Escalation: Himmler's Men in the Summer of 1941 and the Holocaust in the Occupied Soviet Territories

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Most scholars who study Holocaust perpetrators have invested more energy in discussing the role of the leadership in the centers of executive power than in investigating the actions of the killers in the field. Research on the latter has focused on identifying personal motives and collective attitudes; comparatively few insights are offered into the synergies between units and agencies or between center and periphery at a specific time. This article explores this interaction for the critical phase of Operation Barbarossa, during which German units, and especially Himmler's SS- and policemen, crossed the line from persecution to the murder of Jewish men, women, and children en masse. The author examines the leadership's expectations and concerns prior to Operation Barbarossa, and analyzes Himmler's response to and interference in his men's actions in the East.

The mechanisms of control and escalation have long been perceived as key to the functioning of the Third Reich.¹ Inherent in the Nazi system since 1933, they became critically important with the launching of Operation Barbarossa. In this article, I argue that the concept of “controlled escalation” provides a framework for analyzing the divergent, multi-layered, and incoherent events of what Raul Hilberg labeled “The First Sweep.” During this decisive phase, German policy crossed the threshold from persecution of Jews to their systematic annihilation. My aim here is to test the usefulness of this concept by applying it to the actions of parts of the SS and police apparatus during the period from June 22 to late September 1941.² Within what Christopher Browning has called the “fateful months,” these were crucial weeks; within the amorphous group of Holocaust perpetrators, Himmler's men were the most involved and visible. The insights gained from looking closely at this short, highly dynamic sequence of key events can help explain how the overall process of destruction unfolded.³

Unknowns of Operation Barbarossa

During the last ten years, it has become widely accepted that the German attack on the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, marked the beginning of a war of annihilation. By the end of 1941, the death toll among non-combatants was staggering. Between 500,000 and 800,000 Jewish civilians had been killed and entire regions were reported *judenrein* (free of Jews); many of the remaining Jews had been confined to ghettos that were set up beginning in August of that year. Also in this period, the murder of Soviet POWs reached its climax. Between the beginning of fall 1941 and the end of spring 1942, more than two million of the 3.5 million Soviet soldiers captured by the Wehrmacht were executed or perished as a result of deliberate neglect or abuse. Further waves of violence accompanied increasingly ferocious German anti-partisan actions. By the time of their final withdrawal in 1944, the Germans had destroyed most of the infrastructure of the occupied territory, burned thousands of villages, and depopulated vast areas. Total Soviet losses are difficult to estimate, but a figure of at least twenty million seems likely.⁴

Equally staggering was the speed with which the wave of mass murder gathered pace. In much of the occupied territory, the threshold of genocide was crossed in the period under discussion with the targeting of women and children. In the three months from the beginning of the campaign until the end of September 1941, the number of victims killed in individual *Aktions*—a term that the murderers used frequently to denote executions—had grown from hundreds to many thousands, and the target group had expanded from men of military age to include Jews of all ages and both sexes. Among the instances of mass murder in the occupied Soviet Union, more than 76,000 were reported dead in Lithuania and more than 44,000 in Ukraine by early September; in Kamenets Podolski almost 24,000 Jews lost their lives between August 27 and 30; and in the Babi Yar ravine near Kiev, more than 33,000 were killed on September 29 and 30.⁵

In the opinion of nearly all specialists today, the murder of the Jews in the Soviet Union marked a quantum leap in the process of genocide. What were the driving forces behind what Hans Mommsen has called the “realization of the unthinkable”?⁶ Hitler and his top leaders envisioned a “Jewish war” that would end in some kind of “final solution,” but as far as historians have been able to establish, prior to the beginning of Operation Barbarossa they issued no order that demanded the killing of all Jews in occupied territories.⁷ The question thus arises: How important were direct or indirect interventions by the Berlin central agencies, as compared to local factors, in influencing German actions on Soviet territory?

Despite growing awareness of the complex mechanics and synergies of perpetration, the prevailing image of the relationship between center and periphery still seems rather too starkly dichotomous. It presents on the one hand a leadership driven by deep-seated antisemitism, fully in control and engaged in megalomaniacal political planning—which nevertheless refrained from issuing

unambiguous orders calling for the murder of all Jews. On the other hand it posits an amorphous mass of executioners who performed unprecedented crimes out of conviction, opportunism, greed, or mere indifference. Are these in fact correct perceptions of the leaders' and the followers' motivations, or can we come to a more nuanced and realistic understanding of the driving impulses behind the actions of these crucial weeks?

Before the unleashing of Operation Barbarossa, the German leadership could not be certain that its political will would be carried out in the field. The lessons learned during the first campaign in the East, the war against Poland in September 1939, were ambiguous. An unprecedented degree of violence had been used in Poland to deal with the civilian population, including Jews; some members of the military and other German forces voiced concerns about the brutalizing effect of mass executions and other atrocities on the men involved.⁸ Discipline—or in Wehrmacht terms, *Manneszucht*—and the maintenance of order among the troops were more critical after the launching of Operation Barbarossa, when roughly three million Germans flooded eastward into the Soviet Union.

Heinrich Himmler had special reason to keep an eye on discipline problems, as his apparatus had grown immensely since 1933 (most notably with the incorporation of the German police in mid-1936 and the formation of the Waffen-SS in 1939–40). Long before the beginning of Barbarossa, the Reichsführer had attempted to foster an esprit de corps among his men by encouraging them to embrace the message of Jew-hatred. Since the mid-1930s, ideological training had been part of the curriculum for Himmler's subordinates. Even before the war, officers of the SS and police had begun to think of themselves as a *Staatsschutzkorps*—a diversified security agency that would defend the Reich against internal enemies—just as the Wehrmacht provided protection against external foes.⁹ These men were exposed to antisemitic messages on a daily basis; they also participated in the execution of anti-Jewish laws and regulations, including the guarding of concentration camps. Gripping images such as those contained in the movies *Jud Süß* (The Jew Süß) or *Der ewige Jude* (The Eternal Jew) dovetailed with the lessons taught in police and SS schools.¹⁰

Under Himmler, the goal of ideological indoctrination was to transmit applicable knowledge. Many teachers and students from SS and police schools later became members of killing units—Einsatzgruppen, police battalions, and others—deployed in the East. Officers involved in “field work” as well as in the planning of the emerging Final Solution, including even Adolf Eichmann, lectured at these schools.¹¹ At the same time, as they began to carry out large-scale executions in Poland, Himmler displayed a remarkably consistent interest in shielding his men from any psychological effect the killings might have. His concern resulted partly from his belief in the elite status of his apparatus, and partly from the function that the SS and police began to play in securing the conquered “living space.” In

August 1940, following a series of random shootings of civilians by SS and Order Police units in Poland, Himmler's deputy in the region reminded his officers of "the Reichsführer's personal wish that the execution commandos should be led after the execution to diversion with mentally valuable content."¹²

The "invisible luggage" that Germans brought with them across the border is difficult to unpack. Attitudes towards the East are best documented for the top Nazi leadership; Hitler himself habitually referred to Eastern Europe as potential German "living space" and to the Soviet Union as the hotbed of "Judeo-Bolshevism."¹³ Yet, despite his calls for drastic measures against those he labeled Germany's archenemies, Hitler remained sensitive to the danger of dissent among the rank and file. In a speech before army leaders on March 30, 1941, in which he called for the "destruction of Bolshevik commissars and the communist intelligentsia," the Führer advised his officers to give orders "in harmony with the sentiment of the troops" (*im Einklang mit dem Empfinden der Truppe*).¹⁴ How this sentiment would play out during Operation Barbarossa was difficult to predict. In mid-September 1941, during one of his nightly musings about the recent past, Hitler conceded that at the time of the attack he had expected expressions of pro-communist sentiment within the Wehrmacht because "no one knew how it really looked over there" or how the troops would behave.¹⁵

Another indication of the Nazi leaders' anxiety about how far they should go in the initial stage of Barbarossa can be found in the propaganda orchestrated by Joseph Goebbels. With the invasion of the Soviet Union, the truce on the propaganda front in the East came to an end. Yet, instead of immediately attacking "Bolshevism and the Jews behind it" (*Bolschewismus und seine jüdischen Hintermänner*), Goebbels instructed his propaganda machine to focus first on portraying the attack as an "act of liberation" intended to preempt imminent Soviet aggression. At the same time, "purely ideological arguments"—including anti-Jewish slogans—were to be played down.¹⁶

Within two weeks after the beginning of the attack, the Wehrmacht had conquered vast areas of the Soviet Union, the Germans and their allies had executed thousands of civilians, and the SD had reported that the popular mood on the home front was good. Only then, on July 5, did Goebbels issue the "starting signal for a very big campaign involving the best authors" that was aimed at denouncing "the criminal, Jewish, Bolshevik regime." Reports on crimes committed by the NKVD before its retreat from Lvov (Lemberg, Lwów) and other places were to exemplify "Jewish-Bolshevist normalcy" and prove the "bloody madness of the Jewish-Soviet rulers." To accelerate the ensuing "antisemitic wave," the German press was to refer to Hitler's notorious "prophecy" of January 31, 1939, according to which a world war would result in the destruction of the European Jews.¹⁷

What explains this time lag between the military campaign and the propaganda war in the East? Immediately after the Germans attacked, it remained

unclear whether the population at large and the troops at the front would embrace a notion of ideological warfare calling for the ruthless destruction of potential “enemies of the Reich.” In the summer of 1941, the Reich leadership’s concern with possible discontent among Germans expressed itself in other ways as well, including the monitoring of public opinion and efforts to ensure stable food rations.¹⁸ Also in this phase, unpopular actions against the Catholic Church were toned down and the so-called “euthanasia killings”—the subject of endemic rumors—were terminated (temporarily, to be continued later in a more clandestine manner).¹⁹ Within Himmler’s apparatus, orders were issued to reduce any potentially unsettling domestic effects of security policy. “The Führer,” Heydrich explained to his Security Police in early September, “has repeatedly stressed that all enemies of the Reich use . . . every opportunity to sow disunity among the German people.” Heydrich urged his officers therefore “to abstain from all measures that can affect the uniform mood of the people”; characteristically, he did not say to which measures he was referring.²⁰ Thus it is clear that, regardless of their assessment of the military situation on the Eastern Front, the highest echelons in Berlin were preoccupied with maintaining quiet on the home front.

Events in the Field

How, then, did the Nazi leadership’s initial insecurity play itself out in the killing fields of Eastern Europe? Himmler and his top officers used three main types of intervention to radicalize—in a controlled manner—treatment of Jews: they sanctioned after the fact aggressive actions taken by men behind the frontline; they pushed for increased violence; and they reprimanded those who deviated from the desired course of action either by showing too little initiative or by going too far beyond their orders. All three strategies are reflected in the documentation available for the initial phase of Operation Barbarossa; yet, a close examination reveals an imbalance that highlights the attitudes and preferences of those at the centers of executive power.

Providing Sanction after the Fact

A frequently quoted SS and police directive concerning the treatment of the Jews that was issued at the onset of the campaign against the Soviet Union called for the execution of Communist Party functionaries, “Jews in Party and state positions,” and “other radical elements (saboteurs, propagandists, snipers, assassins, instigators, etc.).”²¹ Events in the German-Lithuanian border region, where the first mass executions took place, demonstrate that Himmler and his leading officers contributed decisively to the escalation of German violence by sanctioning *ex post facto* the actions of local commanders. Even so, it is difficult to determine whether this or a similar, though undocumented order from Berlin triggered the mass murder of Jewish men, women, and children that soon followed.

On June 23, 1941, in the town of Garsden (Lithuanian: Gargždai), the Leader of the Stapostelle Tilsit, Hans-Joachim Böhme, and the Tilsit SD-Leader, Werner Hersmann, arrested 201 Jews—including a woman and a 12-year-old child—“for crimes against the Wehrmacht.”²² The next day, these Jews were executed by an Order Police unit (Schutzpolizei) from the city of Memel. Some of the victims and perpetrators recognized each other from before the war. Also on that day, the two officers met with SS Brigadier General (SS-Brigadeführer) Franz Walter Stahlecker, the chief of Einsatzgruppe A. After the war, Böhme claimed that Stahlecker (who was killed in 1942) had issued an order to shoot all Jews in the border area, including women and children.²³ However, Böhme’s own wartime account proves that this was not the case. In a report sent to Berlin one week after the first mass execution, Böhme wrote that Stahlecker had given his “general approval for the cleansing actions” that took place close to the German border. Böhme’s unit, now referred to as Einsatzkommando Tilsit, moved on from Garsden. After more than 300 people had been shot in the towns of Krottingen and Polangen for allegedly attacking German soldiers, Böhme’s men met with Himmler and Heydrich in Augustowo.

In this town, the standard operating procedure for the interaction between the center and periphery of the SS and police apparatus took shape. Böhme’s report to headquarters dated July 1, 1941, shows how the center and periphery of the SS and police apparatus interacted in these crucial weeks: “The Reichsführer-SS [Himmler] and the Gruppenführer [Heydrich], who by coincidence were present [in Augustowo], received information from me *on the measures initiated by the Stapostelle Tilsit* and sanctioned them completely.”²⁴ After these early actions, Böhme’s unit continued its killing spree in Lithuania, claiming a total of 3,302 victims by July 18, 1941. The vast majority of the 76,000 Jews murdered in Lithuania by early September fell victim not to Böhme’s men, but to a subunit of Einsatzgruppe A—Einsatzkommando 3, led by SS Colonel Karl Jäger. This unit started the “cleansing” of the region with the help of Lithuanian collaborators.²⁵ The beginnings of the Holocaust in Lithuania suggest that the push for these extreme “measures” came from officers in the field who at the time offered various justifications for their actions; references to specific orders are notably absent. Böhme’s and Jäger’s reports, like those of many other officers, describe anti-Jewish actions in sterile terms.

South of the Lithuanian border strip, equally destructive incidents reveal the underlying motives of the perpetrators. Few of the early killings show as obvious a link to Jew-hatred as the mass murder of Jews in Białystok on June 27, 1941, in which men of Order Police Battalion 309 and other units subordinate to the Wehrmacht’s 221st Security Division killed at least 2,000 Jews. More than 500 people, including women and children, were herded into a synagogue and burned

alive. Those who tried to escape were shot. The massacre, which followed an order to search for Red Army soldiers and Jews, was initiated by a few determined officers who, it appears, inspired others to participate.²⁶

The West German court that investigated the crimes in Białystok identified a platoon leader and a company commander within the ranks of Police Battalion 309 as “fanatic Nazis.” Jewish men whose outward appearance matched antisemitic stereotypes became these perpetrators’ first victims: their men set Jews’ beards on fire, ordered Jews to dance, and shot Orthodox Jews in the streets. A member of a police unit who expressed discomfort about these acts was rebuked with the words: “You don’t seem to have received the right ideological training yet.” Higher-ranking officers—among them the battalion commander and the commanding general of the 221st Security Division—stood by. The general did not take notice that men under his command were running amok until the violence had reached a park next to his headquarters. He later tried to cover up the massacre as a “reprisal.”²⁷

When the Reichsführer-SS arrived in the city on July 8, 1941, the wave of violence had temporarily subsided. While there, Himmler spoke with, among others, the Higher SS and Police Leader (HSSPF) for Russia Center, SS General Erich von dem Bach-Zelewski, and the commander of Police Regiment Center, SS Lieutenant Colonel Max Montua. The following day, Order Police Chief Kurt Daluege came to visit Białystok and delivered a speech on the fight against the “world enemy, Bolshevism.” The chronological proximity of these visits and what followed in Białystok seems to imply a causal connection, but it is equally likely that Himmler’s approval of the earlier actions triggered new violence. Between July 8 and July 11, perhaps beginning on the evening of Himmler’s visit, at least 1,000 Jewish men of military age were driven to the outskirts of the city and shot by members of the Order Police under the direction of the Security Police and the SD.²⁸

Undoubtedly, encouragement from above had the effect of speeding things up. On July 11, 1941, possibly in reaction to the earlier killings by Order Police units in Białystok, Montua transmitted an order from HSSPF Bach-Zelewski for all Jews aged 17 to 45 “convicted” of plunder to be shot. To prevent the emergence of “places of pilgrimage” (*Wallfahrtsorte*), the units had to carry out the executions clandestinely. No photographs or onlookers were allowed.²⁹ The order transmitted through Montua was significant beyond the instance at hand in that it provided a semblance of formal procedure for what had started as random killings. Going forward, his sanctioning of further killings created a new, more radical point of reference for unit commanders in their anti-Jewish actions. Białystok was just one city in the occupied Soviet Union among many that Himmler visited in the first stage of Operation Barbarossa. Here, as elsewhere, the presence of the Reichsführer-SS and his top officers was not required to trigger the murder of Jews, but it helped to establish this type of killing as standard operating procedure.³⁰

Pushing for Increased Violence

Himmler and his top officers played a more active role in other large-scale killings than they had in Białystok and in the region east of the German-Lithuanian border. Elsewhere, they provided direct incentives to step up the violence. Bach-Zelewski's July 11 order calling for the execution of all Jewish "plunderers" aged 17 to 45 was issued in the context of an escalation in the killing process triggered by Himmler himself. These events centered around the Kommandostab Reichsführer-SS, formed in early 1941. Much larger than an Einsatzgruppe, Order Police battalion, or stationary police deployment, the Kommandostab was a special task force comprised of elite units of the Waffen-SS.

The Kommandostab arrived on the scene relatively late in the first phase of Operation Barbarossa and with a clearly defined mission. On July 19, Himmler began the process of reassigning two brigades that belonged to his Kommandostab: the SS Cavalry Brigade (consisting of the 1st and the 2nd SS Cavalry Regiments) was subordinated to Bach-Zelewski, HSSPF for Russia Center, while the 1st SS-Brigade came under the command of Friedrich Jeckeln, HSSPF for Russia South. In conjunction with several Order Police battalions, these more than 10,000 men were to enable the HSSPFs to "pacify" what was perceived as the main trouble spot in the occupied territory. The SS Cavalry Brigade was sent into the Pripet Marshes, a vast, almost impenetrable area that covered parts of Belorussia and northern Ukraine; the 1st SS Brigade was deployed at its southern rim.³¹

The "Pripet-Aktion" demonstrates with particular clarity the crucial role of Himmler's regional representatives—in this case the HSSPF—as relayers and amplifiers of information between center and periphery. Jeckeln and Bach provided the link between Himmler's units and the Wehrmacht's rear area commanders, Karl von Roques in the South, and Max von Schenckendorff in the Center. Apart from general instructions, the Kommandostab units had so far received few indications of what their specific task would be. These men had undergone a thorough indoctrination in antisemitism, and some had had their first lessons in applied violence against Jews either in prewar Germany or in the campaign against Poland.³² Even so, the Reichsführer remained cautious. When Himmler visited the 2nd Cavalry Regiment on July 21, he spoke only in general terms about the "grave task" (*schwere Aufgabe*) ahead of them.³³

On July 27, the commander of the 1st SS Cavalry Regiment, Hermann Fegelein, passed on to his subordinates more concrete orders from Himmler regarding the villagers in the Pripet. "Criminal elements" were to be eradicated, and Jews were to be treated "for the most part as plunderers," which meant that they were to be shot. Exceptions could be made for highly qualified persons such as bakers and doctors; women and children were to be driven out of the destroyed

villages together with the livestock.³⁴ The following day, elaborating on his cavalry units' tasks in the swamps, Himmler reiterated that if the locals were "from the national point of view inimical, racially and individually inferior," they were to be shot and their villages burned down.³⁵

Many historians assume that, in order to learn what Hitler was thinking, it helps to know what Himmler was doing. Indeed, the Reichsführer's actions in this phase illustrate the translation of radical resolve into murderous reality. Between July 29 and 31, Himmler visited Kaunas in Lithuania and Riga in Latvia. We do not know what he discussed there, but it seems that he instantly grasped the significance of the lesson learned in the Baltics for his units farther south. On July 31, Himmler met with Bach-Zelewski and Fegelein in Baranovici to monitor the units under their command and to urge them to perform more violently.³⁶ As a result, Fegelein reminded the officers of his 1st SS-Brigade of the message that Himmler wanted them to take to heart; namely, that only "uncompromising severity, drastic action, and holding fast to the great ideas of the Führer" would ensure victory. The Reichsführer would judge ruthlessly anyone showing weakness or breaking rank.³⁷

Himmler's advice created a ripple effect, at least in parts of the Kommandostab hierarchy. In the early evening of August 1, the commander of the Mounted Unit of the 1st SS Cavalry Regiment, Gustav Lombard, ordered: "Not one male Jew is to remain alive, not one remnant family in the villages."³⁸ Although no order was issued calling for Jewish women and children to be killed, word spread. In the days following, Lombard reported that his unit had taken a new course of action: the "de-Jewification" (*Entjudung*) of several towns and villages. All Jews, including women and children, were murdered. As in Lithuania, the murderers had adopted the more efficient killing practice of shooting victims with automatic weapons.³⁹ By August 11, the riders of the 1st SS Cavalry Regiment had killed at least 11,000 Jewish men, women, and children—on average 1,000 per day, partly in remote villages, over a period of eleven days.⁴⁰

Himmler's role as commander in this escalation of violence in the Pripet marshes in early August seems crucial. Yet, on closer investigation, the issue turns out to be more complex. Lombard's extension of the mass killings to women and children as part of his "de-Jewification" strategy had not been prompted by an explicit order. Farther south, however, the picture looked different. The commander of the 2nd SS Cavalry Regiment's Mounted Unit, Franz Magill, had received what looked like clear-cut directives. On the morning of August 1, the regiment passed on to its units the following stunning communication: "Explicit order by RF-SS. All [male] Jews must be shot. [Adult] female Jews to be driven into the swamps."⁴¹

There was no lack of clarity here, yet the order resulted in confusion. In a report dated August 12, Magill explained why he had not done as he had been ordered: the target group for execution had been restricted to what he called "Jewish plunderers," while skilled Jewish laborers were exempted according to the

Wehrmacht's demand. Magill continued: "Driving women and children into the swamps did not have the success it was supposed to have as the swamps were not deep enough for sinking to occur. After a depth of one meter one for the most part hit firm ground so that sinking was not possible."⁴² Clearly, Magill took a literal approach to Himmler's order, except that he extended its scope to involve Jewish children. He did not get it quite right, though he proved himself to be more adaptable to the circumstances when instructed by Himmler's deputy in the region. On August 6, Bach-Zelewski visited Magill's unit during the execution of 6,000 Jewish men in the city of Pinsk; over the next few days, the scope of murder was expanded to include older men and boys, but stopped short of including Jewish women and children before the unit was relocated on August 9. In these three days, Magill's men collaborated with others in the killing of more than 9,000 Jews in Pinsk.⁴³ Those who remained alive—roughly 20,000 people—were targeted a year later in another killing sweep.⁴⁴

August 13 marked the end of the first massive German descent on the Pripet, with 13,788 reported "plunderers"—predominantly Jews—shot and 714 people taken prisoner. The Kommandostab's cooperation with the security police and SD as well as with the Wehrmacht could not have been better. Military commanders from the Rear Army Areas Center and South applauded the actions of Himmler's men and awarded decorations.⁴⁵ While the most deadly killers received praise, those who in Himmler's eyes had shown a lack of resolve and adaptability felt the brunt of the Reichsführer's displeasure. Gustav Lombard was promoted to commander of the 1st SS Cavalry Regiment; Franz Magill, on the other hand, was assigned to a less prominent position in Poland.⁴⁶ No serious fighting had taken place during the Pripet action. The entire SS Cavalry Brigade with its roughly 4,000 men reported only two dead (who had driven over a mine) and fifteen wounded from among its own ranks. Martin Cüppers, author of the first monograph on the Kommandostab, estimates that by the end of 1941, Himmler's cavalry units had killed 40,000 Jews.⁴⁷

Of all the crimes committed by Himmler's Kommandostab in 1941 and after, the action in the Pripet area in early August undoubtedly had the greatest impact on the course of the Holocaust.⁴⁸ And yet, its lessons for the Reichsführer were ambiguous. On the one hand, the Pripet action was successful in expanding the scope of violence to include women and children; on the other, it demonstrated the limits of central intervention. From the top leadership's point of view, explicit orders could be counterproductive if they created confusion, stifled initiative, or did not correspond to the situation on the ground. More subtle calls for action, if received by eager activists such as Lombard, appeared much more effective. Given the enthusiasm of officers in the field, heavy-handed intervention by central agencies was needed not to increase the speed and scope of the killings, it would turn out, but to prevent the process from moving too far too quickly.

Containing Violence and Its Potential Ramifications

The shocking death toll during the first weeks of the war against the Soviet Union is the best indicator of Himmler's keen interest in promoting the anti-Jewish activism of his commanders. Yet, in a few instances during this period, the leadership came down heavily on SS or police officers who displayed excessive zeal in dealing with the "Jewish Question." These cases were addressed within the apparatus, most notably by SS and police courts.

With regard to the level of control that the SS leadership exerted during the unfolding of the Final Solution, it is important to note that Himmler tried to maintain an illusory boundary between legitimate and illegitimate actions against Jews. No sanction was extended, at least in theory, to acts driven purportedly by greed, bloodlust, or sexual motives—all of which were labeled "un-German," or worse still, not "SS-typical" (*SS-mäßig*). The decision about whether a course of anti-Jewish action arose from "correct" or base motives depended on a range of factors, of which the least important seems to have been the nature of the act itself. In fact, SS and police courts usually became involved in cases in which an SS officer had lost support within his peer group, there was heavy infighting for positions or perquisites, or there was a possibility that incriminating information would leak out to the general public. Himmler, as "Oberster Gerichtsherr," often repealed the courts' guilty verdicts. Nevertheless, the possibility of punishment for breaches of discipline remained an important element of control within the SS and police.⁴⁹

Among the few documented SS court cases involving murder and other crimes committed against Jews, only one deals with members of the Kommandostab. Together with several of his subordinates, SS Lieutenant Max Täubner, leader of a workshop platoon in the 1st SS Brigade, had not only exceeded the usual level of brutality in executing more than a thousand Jewish men, women, and children between September and December 1941, but had also taken photographs of the crime scenes. Täubner and his men were charged in mid-1943 by the Highest SS and Police Court in Munich. According to the findings of the court, one of the accused "would tear small Jewish children from their mothers' arms, grab the child in his left hand, and then blast it with a pistol held in his right hand." The court sentenced Täubner to ten years imprisonment for violation of his duties as an officer, insubordination, and homicide (for the killing of a non-Jewish Ukrainian), but did not punish him for his "involvement in operations against Jews." "The Jews," Himmler's judges stated, "must be annihilated; there is no great loss when it comes to any of them." Yet, in the eyes of the SS lawyers, what Täubner and his men had done was "unworthy of a German man and SS officer." The defendants' acts were excessively brutal and thus undermined the illusion of the sterile execution of the Final Solution. Characteristically, Himmler intervened in January 1945 by pardoning Täubner and granting him a two-week

furlough, following which he was sent to the front to prove himself. The most bizarre turn of events took place after the war, when a West German court declined to open proceedings against Täubner, arguing that the SS court verdict prevented them from bringing new charges.⁵⁰

During the war, court cases against men displaying baseness or excessive zeal represented the ultimate fallback line in maintaining discipline within the SS and police. Generally, Himmler used this tool cautiously and, as the Täubner case shows, with great reluctance. He preferred to rely on the mechanisms of empowerment and indoctrination that had characterized his leadership style since before the war. The July 11 order transmitted by Montua not only called for all Jewish “plunderers” aged 17 to 45 be shot; it also reflected Himmler’s obsession with his men’s “mental hygiene” following the executions: “Battalion commanders and company chiefs have to make special accommodations for the spiritual care of the men participating in such actions. The impressions of the day have to be blurred by social gatherings. In addition, the men have to be continuously lectured about the necessity of measures caused by the political situation.”⁵¹ The reality of these evening events after mass executions in no way resembled Himmler’s idyll of German *Gemütlichkeit* (comfortable atmosphere, coziness). Yet, there can be little doubt that his insistence on social gatherings helped his men to keep doing what he expected them to do.⁵²

Ideological indoctrination and its permutations and results—within the SS and police or in the Third Reich generally—remain under-researched. It is not clear, for example, to what degree Himmler’s men were more exposed to antisemitic propaganda than Wehrmacht soldiers or the German population at large.⁵³ What is clear, however, is that indoctrination in Himmler’s apparatus was neither brainwashing nor a purely theoretical exercise. As long as the “job” got done, mass executions did not require the direct involvement of each and every man or the application of pressure to participate. The availability of eager habitual killers such as Max Täubner was as important for genocidal efficiency as it was for providing the rest of the men with the illusion that they were “ordinary” as they performed extraordinarily brutal deeds.

Himmler’s frequent calls for post-execution festivities would allow his men to bond, unwind, and uphold a semblance of normalcy; these get-togethers were not merely expressions of the Reichsführer’s whims but a key component in a deliberate strategy to uphold the immediate and long-term coherence of his apparatus in a new, potentially dangerous situation. In my view, nothing reinforced the relationship between center and periphery as did the transformation of antisemitic propaganda into action. Himmler’s indoctrination program and his men’s eagerness to accept the leadership’s legitimization of anti-Jewish violence mutually reinforced each other. The physical retreat from the Eastern occupied territories toward the end of the war enabled the perpetrators to dissociate themselves psychologically from their crimes and facilitated their more or less smooth integration, shielded by the myth of victimization, into postwar German society.⁵⁴ Even decades after the war, few of those

former SS- and policemen who became suspects or defendants in court cases displayed signs of grasping the significance of what they had done in the East.⁵⁵

Containing aggression required greater resolve and a heavier hand where non-Germans—who were not subject to the bonds established within Himmler's officer corps—were involved in anti-Jewish measures. The role of locals in the extermination of the Jews of Lithuania, Latvia, and Western Ukraine, though largely auxiliary, should not be underestimated. The Holocaust, defined as the organized murder of Jewish men, women, and children, could not have evolved on Lithuanian soil if imported German violence had not harmonized with residual anti-Jewish sentiment among the local population.⁵⁶ At the outbreak of the war, and in some cases prior to the arrival of German troops, pogroms swept the region. According to reports by Einsatzkommando 3, Lithuanians in Kaunas had murdered 3,800 local Jews within days of Barbarossa's launching.⁵⁷

Neighboring Latvia, which the Wehrmacht had occupied entirely by July 10, was the site of similar violence—though on a smaller scale. In Riga, an auxiliary police unit under the nationalist Viktors Arajs, with the approval of Einsatzgruppe A, killed several hundred alleged communists, Jews, and other “undesirable” persons by mid-July.⁵⁸ In Western Ukraine (Vollhynia and Eastern Galicia), approximately 24,000 Jews were murdered by Ukrainians. By the end of July, pogroms supported by the Germans had claimed the lives of at least 5,000 Jews in the Eastern Galician capital Lvov. Smaller-scale killings, such as the one in Jedwabne,⁵⁹ often went unrecorded in German documentation at the time.⁶⁰



A Jew is dragged through a street in Riga by Latvian civilians as a German policeman looks on (July 1941). USHMM, Courtesy of Bernhard Press.

SS and police officers in the East as well as in Berlin viewed the pogroms with a mixture of approval and apprehension. Heydrich encouraged the Einsatzgruppen commanders and the Higher SS and Police Leaders to instigate—as unobtrusively as possible—“self-cleansing measures” on the part of the local population. At the same time, however, he acknowledged that such measures had to be directed “into the right channels.”⁶¹ It was clear that over the longer term, “spontaneous” violence by locals had to be transformed into organized actions. While Hitler remained highly skeptical of non-Germans bearing arms to enforce German rule in the East, Heydrich and Himmler took a more positive attitude toward the creation of auxiliary police units—provided that they remained under tight German control.⁶²

Both Heydrich and Himmler were acutely aware of the shortage of German manpower for the purposes of “pacification.” Yet here again, the tension between political planning and the reality of the occupation was resolved first at the local level. For example, the German security police in Kaunas formed a Lithuanian “Battalion for the Defense of National Labor” in early July; over the next few weeks it grew rapidly and was subordinated to Karl Jäger’s Einsatzkommando 3. As part of a unit referred to in German sources as “Rollkommando Hamann” (after its leader), these men contributed greatly to the astonishing figure of 133,346 murder victims (mostly Jews) reported by Jäger in mid-December 1941.⁶³ Here again we see controlled escalation at work: after local agencies had tested the waters, the Berlin center transformed these isolated initiatives into general policy. As the tasks of the police in the East could not be fulfilled by police- and SS-men alone, on July 25 Himmler ordered the organization of “additional protective units from the ethnic groups suitable to us in the conquered area as soon as possible.”⁶⁴

Himmler’s order marked the official creation of the *Schutzmannschaften*, which became over time a crucial element in the attempt to “pacify” the occupied Soviet territory.⁶⁵ By late 1941, twenty-six battalions of local policemen had been created, with a total of 33,000 *Schutzmänner* serving German interests. By the end of 1942, some 300,000 local policemen were deployed under more or less strict German control in a variety of functions.⁶⁶ Mobile auxiliary police units from Latvia and Lithuania helped to carry out mass murder deep in Belorussia, while Ukrainians (as well as members of other ethnic groups) who had been trained in Trawniki near Lublin served as guards in German death and concentration camps. Stationary police forces ensured control over the area on a day-to-day basis, and beginning in spring 1942 facilitated a second massive killing sweep in which the occupiers targeted the remaining Jews in the occupied Soviet Union. As a means of converting spontaneous violence into systematic persecution, Himmler’s order of July 25, 1941, establishing local auxiliary police units was thus more effective than any of the brutal pogroms.⁶⁷

Getting the Message

How great, then, was the extent of Himmler's intervention, and how controlled was the escalation in the first weeks of the Russian campaign? Himmler's actions during this period focused, in my view, not on pushing ahead at all costs, but on remaining in control. He achieved this goal above all by ensuring that his men in the field would act independently, making use of new opportunities, to advance his policy goals. In the few cases in which he issued killing orders himself, the need for such an order indicates that he had failed to communicate his earlier messages and/or that his officers lacked initiative. Further evidence of the center's preoccupation with control can be found in German documentation that, in the search for unambiguous orders, has been largely overlooked. These documents reveal that in these weeks, Himmler and his top officers displayed an almost obsessive interest in receiving information about events in the field.⁶⁸

During Operation Barbarossa, the leadership required a steady and timely flow of reports from subordinates in order to influence events as they unfolded. This was especially true for the SS and police. Compared to the German military, the prewar orders of these agencies had been less clear-cut. Moreover, their logistical infrastructure was stretched thinner, and there was a greater likelihood among their ranks of officers acting too vigorously against real and imagined "enemies of the Reich."⁶⁹

The SS and police leadership's obsession with control manifested itself in their calls for both information and action. In his order dated June 29, 1941, Heydrich reminded the Einsatzgruppen leaders of the need for "self-cleansing measures" on the part of the local population. At the same time, he demanded that advance unit commanders display "the necessary political sensitivity" and stressed that he expected regular reports.⁷⁰ On July 4, Heydrich reiterated his supreme interest in functioning communications in the context of his announcement that local security police and SD offices in the border region were authorized to perform "cleansing actions" after consultation with the Einsatzgruppen. Heydrich threatened to withdraw this authorization if these units engaged in "further actions" beyond those agreed upon for the purpose of operational coordination.⁷¹

Himmler's emphasis on coordination and integration was essential to the success of the controlled escalation of anti-Jewish violence. Ideological indoctrination and mechanisms such as the "comradely get-togethers" allowed his troops not only to enjoy themselves and to vent frustration, but also to consider themselves members of a community of fate. The degree to which acceptance of this shared fate determined the German military's tolerance of and active participation in the war against Jews, partisans, and others deemed potentially dangerous has yet to be investigated. However, it is evident that to Wehrmacht officers as well as to the majority of Germans deployed in the occupied territories, brutal terror and blatant

disregard for the most basic standards of human behavior seemed much less out of place in the East than anywhere else.⁷²

The fact that the dynamic driving the process of destruction cannot be explained strictly in terms of center-periphery relations further highlights the pivotal function of integration and the need for indirect control. Information was communicated through *vertical* interaction between Himmler and his men in the field (in the form of orders from the top down and reports from the bottom up), as well as through two types of *horizontal* interaction: between separate agencies deployed in the East and within a particular agency across geographical regions. In the latter case, Himmler and his top commanders played a key role by facilitating or speeding the transfer of information between units. Gathering reports from the field, editing them, and conveying their essence back to their men was one way to do this;⁷³ paying visits to the rear areas (just behind the areas of military deployment at the front) was another. Yet, even in areas to which Himmler and his Berlin office heads did not travel, unit commanders of the Security and Order Police got the message about the desired course of action and adapted in order to please their superiors. Clearly, these officers were talking to each other and observing what their colleagues elsewhere were doing. Reports that included astounding execution figures assumed importance as notifications of success; by early August, British intelligence analysts observed on the basis of intercepted German execution reports that the Higher SS and Police Leaders “stand somewhat in competition with each other as to their ‘scores.’”⁷⁴

The pattern observable in the occupied parts of the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941 warrants, in my view, a shift in emphasis away from traditional, polarized understandings of the interactions between center and periphery, between situative and ideological factors, and between personal motivations and social pressures. Our ability to identify the root causes of SS- and policemen’s conduct in these weeks is restricted by the absence of reliable documentation. If we piece together the available fragments of the picture, the process of escalation seems to have been driven not so much by direct intervention from the SS leadership as by the eagerness of subordinate officers to adopt new, more radical measures. Himmler and his top officers and regional commanders—especially the Higher SS and Police Leaders—no doubt played a crucial role. Yet within and beyond the SS apparatus, traditional elements of hierarchical formalism lost their importance. Field officers interacted not only vertically, but also horizontally by exchanging information between agencies or within agencies across regions. The leadership allowed the authority to inflict suffering and death on civilians to become detached from military rank and status as long as violence remained within the ill-defined boundaries of “fulfilling one’s duty.” Junior officers and even members of the rank and file could take the initiative as long as their superiors provided support, encouragement, legitimization, or at least tacit acceptance.

For the SS and police leadership in Berlin, maintaining control required above all monitoring and coordination through reports and visits. As the Kommandostab's experience in the Pripet Marshes demonstrates, direct intervention in the form of orders or clear directives from the center often created more confusion than did vague guidelines that allowed officers in the field to decide how to proceed. For the leadership, the message was clear: given the prevailing German perception of the East, the effects of prewar indoctrination within the SS and police apparatus, and the specific conditions found in occupied Soviet regions, direct interference from Berlin was for the most part not required.

Peter Longerich uses the term "order environment"—*Befehlsklima*—to point to the leadership's reliance on their subordinates' initiative and intuition.⁷⁵ An additional factor was the destructive consensus that defined the milieu within which Himmler's men acted in the occupied Soviet territories in these months.⁷⁶ Yet, the image of uniformity created by Himmler and his officers to integrate their troops has to be seen against the background of real differences in individuals' functions and roles within the apparatus. Far from making the system dysfunctional, these differences added fuel to its inherent dynamic—which explains why the leadership did not try to eliminate them. As in other respects, the SS and police apparatus mirrors German society as a whole in terms of what Jean-Paul Sartre termed in early 1940 "real diversity in a mere affective unity."⁷⁷

After the summer of 1941, the leadership's uncertainty about the course of events in the occupied Soviet Union subsided to the point that it seems to have disappeared. Unit commanders were eager to present as *faits accomplis* what at the beginning of Operation Barbarossa had seemed but a possibility. In summing up their "achievements" for 1941, *Einsatzgruppen* officers asserted that "a radical solution of the Jewish problem"—the murder of all Jews—had been their aim from the start, if only as a "vague notion." The absence of any reference to concrete superior orders is striking in these communications.⁷⁸ Gestapo head Heinrich Müller explained to some of his men in late September 1941 that, in the absence of written orders, they had to "get used to reading between the lines and acting accordingly."⁷⁹ Not only did those committing mass murder learn by doing, but their top commanders and those in planning positions learned as well.

Eight years after the Nazi revolution, Hitler and his top officers could be sure that a tendency toward violent, even murderous anti-Jewish activism was present among their men. What they could not be sure of was whether German elites and the population at large would facilitate the quantum leap towards mass murder by consenting to, or as was the case for the majority of Germans, acquiescing in it. But by the end of the summer of 1941, none of the perceived dangers inherent in the radicalization of anti-Jewish policy had materialized; within German public opinion, preoccupation with the war and its effects on the home front left little room for concern about the treatment of Jews.⁸⁰ In mid-September

1941, German Jews were ordered to wear yellow fabric stars marking them as Jews. The stage was thus set for their deportation to ghettos and killing centers in Minsk, Riga, and Kaunas starting in November—an unambiguous indication that the Reich’s leadership had by then dismissed the possibility of public unrest or systemic malfunction in response to their handling of the “Jewish Question.” What had started out as a possibility—a “final solution” by means of organized mass murder—had become deadly reality.

Notes

1. The idea for this article originated with my involvement in Christopher Browning’s book *The Origins of the Final Solution: The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939–March 1942* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004). The text is based on a lecture presented at the Institut d’histoire du temps présent in Paris on December 13, 2005. I would like to thank Florent Brayard for the invitation to speak, as well as Richard Breitman, Christopher Browning, Konrad Kwiet, Nechama Tec, Claire Rosenson, and the two anonymous peer reviewers for their very valuable comments. The opinions contained in this article are those of the author and not necessarily those of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

2. For related concepts of the gradual evolution of the Final Solution, see for example Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, 3rd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 49 (a “process of sequential steps”); Philippe Burrin, *Hitler and the Jews: The Genesis of the Holocaust* (London: Edward Arnold, 1994), 105 (“escalation by stages”); Ludolf Herbst, *Das nationalsozialistische Deutschland 1933–1945: Die Entfesselung der Gewalt* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1996), 374 (“Die schubweise Entkoppelung des Vernichtungspotentials im ‘Ostfeldzug’”); Peter Longerich, *Politik der Vernichtung* (Munich: Piper 1998), 575ff. (“Die vier Eskalationsstufen der Politik der Vernichtung”); Michael Wildt, *Generation des Unbedingten: Das Führungskorps des Reichssicherheitshauptamtes* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2002), 601–606 (“Entgrenzung”); Browning, *Origins*, 374–423 (“From conception to implementation”). While Saul Friedländer stresses in his new book that “crossing the line from local murder operations to overall extermination required a go-ahead signal from the supreme authority,” he also sees a “constant interaction between Hitler and the system within which he ranted and acted” (*The Years of Extermination Nazi Germany and the Jews, 1939–1945* [New York: HarperCollins, 2007], xix, 287).

3. Hilberg, *Destruction*, 295–327; see also Christopher R. Browning, “German Killers: Orders from Above, Initiative from Below, and the Scope of Local Autonomy. The Case of Brest-Litovsk,” in *Nazi Policy, Jewish Workers, German Killers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 116–42.

4. Longerich, *Politik*, 418; Christian Streit, “The German Army and the Policies of Genocide,” in *The Policies of Genocide: Jews and Soviet Prisoners of War in Nazi Germany*, ed. Gerhard Hirschfeld (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1986), 1–14; Christian Streit, *Keine Kameraden: Die Wehrmacht und die sowjetischen Kriegsgefangenen 1941–1945*, 2nd ed. (Bonn: Dietz, 1997), 105, 128. For a concise introduction to the context of German crimes in the Soviet Union, see Geoffrey Megargee, *War of Annihilation: Combat and Genocide on the Eastern Front, 1941* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006). While dismissing the notion of a war of annihilation, Klaus Jochen Arnold provides ample material to substantiate

the opposite opinion in his *Die Wehrmacht und die Besatzungspolitik in den besetzten Gebieten der Sowjetunion: Kriegführung und Radikalisierung im "Unternehmen Barbarossa"* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot Verlag, 2005).

5. Einsatzkommando (EK) 3, "Gesamtaufstellung der im Bereiche des EK 3 bis jetzt durchgeführten Exekutionen," September 10, 1941. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archive (USHMM) RG 11.001M Reel 183 (Special Archive Moscow [SAM] 500–1-25), fol. 104–107; Browning, *Origins*, 291–93.

6. Hans Mommsen, "The Realization of the Unthinkable: The 'Final Solution of the Jewish Question' in the Third Reich," in Hirschfeld, *Policies*, 73–92.

7. See the recent case studies by Christian Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde: Die deutsche Wirtschafts- und Vernichtungspolitik in Weißrußland 1941 bis 1944* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1999); Karel C. Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair: Life and Death in Ukraine under Nazi Rule* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004); Norbert Kunz, *Die Krim unter deutscher Herrschaft (1941–1944): Germanisierungstypie und Besatzungsrealität* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2005); Wendy Lower, *Nazi Empire-Building and the Holocaust in Ukraine* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2005).

8. See Alexander B. Rossino, *Hitler Strikes Poland: Blitzkrieg, Ideology, and Atrocity* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003); Klaus-Michael Mallmann and Bogdan Musial, eds., *Genesis des Genozids: Polen 1939–1941* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2004); Jochen Böhrer, *Auftakt zum Vernichtungskrieg: Die Wehrmacht in Polen 1939* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2006).

9. See Jens Banach, *Das Führerkorps der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD 1936–1945* (Paderborn: F. Schöningh, 1998); George C. Browder, *Hitler's Enforcers: The Gestapo and the SS Security Service in the Nazi Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

10. See Jürgen Matthäus, Konrad Kwiet, Jürgen Förster, and Richard Breitman, *Ausbildungsziel Judenmord? "Weltanschauliche Erziehung" von SS, Polizei und Waffen-SS im Rahmen der "Endlösung"* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2003). For specific focus on the Order Police, see Edward B. Westermann, *Hitler's Police Battalions: Enforcing Racial War in the East* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005).

11. For examples, see Jürgen Matthäus, "Ausbildungsziel Judenmord? Zum Stellenwert der 'weltanschaulichen Erziehung' von SS und Polizei im Rahmen der 'Endlösung,'" in *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 8 (1999): 673–99.

12. "... persönlichen Wunsch des Reichsführers SS, daß die Exekutionskommandos nach der Exekution einer Zerstreung mit geistig wertvollem Inhalt zuzuführen sind." HSSPF Ost (Krüger), "Anweisung für Exekutionen," August 14, 1940, cited from Martin Cüppers, *Wegbereiter der Shoah: Die Waffen-SS, der Kommandostab Reichsführer-SS und die Judenvernichtung 1939–1945* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2005), 59.

13. See Ian Kershaw, *Hitler 1889–1936: Hubris* (New York: Allen Lane, 1998), 246–48; for a different perspective see Eberhard Jäckel, *Hitler's World View: A Blueprint for Power* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 32–38.

14. Quoted from Streit, *Kameraden*, 34–35.

15. Hitler monologue, September 17–18, 1941, in Werner Jochmann, ed., *Adolf Hitler: Monologe im Führerhauptquartier 1941–1944. Die Aufzeichnungen Heinrich Heims* (Hamburg: Albrecht Knaus, 1980), 61–64.
16. Tagesparole des Reichspressechefs vom 22. Juni 1941, Nachtrag vom 23. Juni, Bundesarchiv (BA) Berlin ZSg. 109/22, Bl. 77, 82, 92. See also Jeffrey Herf, *The Jewish Enemy: Nazi Propaganda during World War II and the Holocaust* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006).
17. Tagesparolen des Reichspressechefs vom 5., 7. und 9. Juli 1941, BA Berlin ZSg. 109/23, Bl. 24–26, 33, 43; 26. Oktober, ZSg. 109/26, Bl. 89f. Elke Fröhlich, ed., *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels*, part 1, vol. 9 (Munich: K.G. Saur, 1998), 421, 427–28 (diary entries for July 3 and 6, 1941). Goebbels discussed this new ‘propaganda line’ on July 9, 1941, with Hitler in his Rastenburg headquarters; see idem, part 2, vol. 1 (Munich: K.G. Saur, 1996), 35.
18. See Browning, *Origins*, 234–40.
19. See John S. Conway, *The Nazi Persecution of the Churches, 1933–45* (New York: Basic Books, 1968), 276–84; Wolfgang Dierker, *Himmlers Glaubekrieger: Der Sicherheitsdienst der SS und seine Religionspolitik 1933–1941* (Paderborn: F. Schöningh, 2002), 522–26. For different interpretations of the reasons for the temporary halt of “Aktion T4” compare Henry Friedlander, *The Origins of Nazi Genocide: From “Euthanasia” to the “Final Solution”* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 111–36; Winfried Süß, *Der “Völkörper” im Krieg: Gesundheitspolitik, Gesundheitsverhältnisse und Krankenmord in nationalsozialistischen Deutschland 1939–1945* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2003), 127–51.
20. Directive by Heydrich to security police agencies, September 3, 1941; quoted from Wolfgang Benz, Konrad Kwiet, and Jürgen Matthäus, eds., *Einsatz im Reichskommissariat Ostland: Dokumente zum Völkermord im Baltikum und in Weißrußland 1941–1944* (Berlin: Metropol, 1998), 68–69.
21. Heydrich to HSSPF, July 2, 1941, quoted from Browning, *Origins*, 262.
22. On the events in Garsden see *ibid.*, 253–56; Hilberg, *Destruction*, 341–42; Konrad Kwiet, “Rehearsing for Murder: The Beginning of the Final Solution in Lithuania in June 1941,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 12, no. 2 (1998): 3–26.
23. See Helmut Krausnick and Hans-Heinrich Wilhelm, *Die Truppe des Weltanschauungskrieges: Die Einsatzgruppen der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD 1938–1942* (Stuttgart: DVA, 1981), 162–63.
24. “Der Reichsführer-SS und der Gruppenführer, die dort zufällig anwesend waren, liessen sich über die von der Staatspolizeistelle Tilsit eingeleiteten Maßnahmen unterrichten und billigten diese in vollem Umfange.” Stapostelle Tilsit to RSHA IV (Müller), July 1, 1941, SAM 500–1-758, fol. 2–5 (my emphasis); reproduced in part in Benz et al., *Einsatz*, 73–74.
25. Ereignismeldung (EM) 26, July 18, 1941, reproduced in part in Yitzhak Arad, Shmuel Krakowski, and Shmuel Spector, eds., *The Einsatzgruppen Reports: Selections from the Dispatches of the Nazi Death Squads’ Campaign Against the Jews in Occupied Territories of the Soviet Union July 1941–January 1943* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1989), 36.

26. See also Browning, *Origins*, 255–57; Gerlach, *Morde*, 542–43; Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), 11–13.
27. Summarized from Longerich, *Politik*, 345–48.
28. Gerlach, *Morde*, 543. On Police Battalion 322 see Konrad Kwiet, “From the Diary of a Killing Unit,” in *Why Germany? National Socialist Anti-Semitism and the European Context*, ed. John Milfull (Providence, RI: Berg, 1992), 92–110. On some of Daluege’s trips to the East, see Richard Breitman, *Official Secrets: What the Nazis Planned, What the British and Americans Knew* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998), 47–48, 261 fn. 8.
29. Browning, *Origins*, 257–58.
30. For the period covered in this article, Himmler’s itinerary is missing for June 25 to August 12, August 21 to 26, August 28 to 30, September 5 to 15, September 18 to 21, September 25, 27, and 30; see Peter Witte et al., eds., *Der Dienstkalender Heinrich Himmlers 1941/42* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1999).
31. For the first detailed study on the Kommandostab see Cüppers, *Wegbereiter*. Earlier references to the Kommandostab can be found in Jürgen Förster, “Das andere Gesicht des Krieges: Das ‘Unternehmen Barbarossa’ als Eroberungs- und Vernichtungskrieg,” in *‘Unternehmen Barbarossa’: Zum historischen Ort der deutsch-sowjetischen Beziehungen von 1933 bis Herbst 1941*, ed. Roland G. Foerster (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1993), 155–57; Ruth Bettina Birn, “Zweierlei Wirklichkeit? Fallbeispiele zur Partisanenbekämpfung im Osten,” in *Zwei Wege nach Moskau: Vom Hitler-Stalin-Pakt bis zum ‘Unternehmen Barbarossa,’* ed. Bernd Wegner (Munich, Zurich: Piper, 1991), 275–90; Yehoshua Büchler, “Kommandostab Reichsführer-SS: Himmler’s Personal Murder Brigades in 1941,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 1, no. 1 (1986): 11–25; Yaakov Lozowick, “Rollbahn Mord: The Early Activities of Einsatzgruppe C,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 2, no. 2 (1987): 221–42; *Unsere Ehre heißt Treue: Kriegstagebuch des Kommandostabes Reichsführer SS. Tätigkeitsberichte der 1. und 2. SS-Inf.-Brigade, der 1. SS-Kav.-Brigade und von Sonderkommandos der SS* (Vienna: Europa Verlag, 1965).
32. Cüppers, *Wegbereiter*, 49–60, 98–107.
33. See Birn, “Wirklichkeit,” 280.
34. SS-Kav. Rgt. 1 Ia (Fegelein) “Regimentsbefehl Nr. 42,” July 27, 1941, NARA, T-175, roll 109; see also Benz et al., *Einsatz*, 75–76.
35. “Kommandosonderbefehl” Himmler, July 28, 1941, reproduced in part in Norbert Müller, ed., *Die faschistische Okkupationspolitik in den zeitweilig besetzten Gebieten der Sowjetunion, 1941–1944* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1991), 175–77.
36. See Cüppers, *Wegbereiter*, 153; Gerlach, *Morde*, 559–60; Witte et al., *Dienstkalender*, 189. It is not clear with whom Himmler met in Kaunas and Riga in addition to HSSPF Prützmann and the chief of the newly established civil administration in the “Reichskommissariat Ostland,” Hinrich Lohse. The reports by the commander of EK 3, Karl Jäger, contain no hint of any meeting with or order from Himmler during this period.
37. “Der RF-SS hat mich nochmals beauftragt, jedem einzelnen Führer ans Herz zu legen, dass nur unbeugsame Härte, scharfes Zugreifen und Festhalten am großen Gedanken des

Führers das russische Reich erobern kann. All die kleinen persönlichen, unsachlichen Schwächen und die charakterlichen Verschiedenheiten Einzelner müssen durch die Gesamtausrichtung des Führerkorps ausgeglichen werden. Der RF-SS erkennt in jeder Beziehung keine Schwächen mehr an und entscheidet eiskalt über diejenigen Führer, die aus der Reihe tanzen.” Quoted in Cüppers, *Wegbereiter*, 139.

38. “Es bleibt kein männlicher Jude leben, keine Restfamilie in den Ortschaften.” SS-Kav. Rgt. 1 Reit. Abt. (Lombard) Abteilungsbefehl Nr. 28, August 1, 1941 (6:30 pm), Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv Freiburg (BA-MA) RS 4/441.

39. See Birn, “Wirklichkeit,” 278–80.

40. Cüppers, *Wegbereiter*, 147–51.

41. “Ausdrücklicher Befehl des RF-SS. Sämtliche Juden müssen erschossen werden. Judenweiber in die Sümpfe treiben.” SS-Kav. Rgt. 2 Reit. Abt., August 1, 1941 (10:00 am), BA-MA RS 4/441, quoted in Gerlach, *Morde*, 560.

42. SS-Kav. Rgt. 2 Reit. Abt. (Magill), August 12, 1941, reproduced in *Unsere Ehre heißt Treue*, 229–30.

43. Cüppers, *Wegbereiter*, 157–61.

44. See Gerlach, *Morde*, 719–21.

45. *Ibid.*, 565–66.

46. Cüppers, *Wegbereiter*, 179.

47. SS-Kav. Brigade 1 (Fegelein) to HSSPF Russia Center, “Betr.: Zu Abschlußmeldung für den RF-SS,” August 13, 1941, USHMM RG 48.004M Reel 1 (Military History Archive [MHA] Prague, KdoS RF-SS), reproduced in *Unsere Ehre heißt Treue*, 214–16; Cüppers, *Wegbereiter*, 203.

48. See Cüppers, *Wegbereiter*, 176 (“Auftakt zur Shoah in der Sowjetunion”); Longerich, *Politik*, 368 (“neue Dimension”); Gerlach, *Morde*, 562 (“neue Qualität des Mordens”).

49. On the SS and police court system, see Bianca Vieregge, *Die Gerichtsbarkeit einer “Elite”: Nationalsozialistische Rechtsprechung am Beispiel der SS- und Polizei-Gerichtsbarkeit* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2002).

50. BDC-file Max Täubner, National Archives, College Park (NARA), A 3343, reel B-171, frames 118–237; Willi Dreßen, “The Role of the Wehrmacht and the Police in the Annihilation of the Jews; The Prosecution and Post-War Career of Perpetrators in the Police Force of the Federal Republic of Germany,” *Yad Vashem Studies* 23 (1993): 304–305; Vieregge, *Gerichtsbarkeit*, 139–44; Cüppers, *Wegbereiter*, 208–209. For the relevance of testimony provided by a former SS judge during the postwar Auschwitz trial in Frankfurt, see Rebecca Wittmann, *Beyond Justice: The Auschwitz Trial* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 160–74.

51. “Die seelische Betreuung der bei dieser Aktion beteiligten Männer haben sich die Batls.-Kdre. und Kompanie-Chefs besonders angelegen sein zu lassen. Die Eindrücke des Tages sind durch Abhaltung von Kameradschaftsabenden zu verwischen. Ferner sind die

Männer laufend über die Notwendigkeit der durch die politische Lage bedingten Maßnahmen zu belehren.” See Browning, *Origins*, 257–58.

52. Klaus-Michael Mallmann presents the best analysis to date of social interactions among German perpetrators in the East. See his “‘Mensch, ich feiere heut’ den tausendsten Genickschuß’: Die Sicherheitspolizei und die Shoah in Westgalizien,” in *Die Täter der Shoah: Fanatische Nationalsozialisten oder ganz normale Deutsche?* ed. Gerhard Paul (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2002), 109–36. See also Alexander V. Prusin, “A Community of Violence: The Sipo/SD and Its Role in the Nazi Terror System in Generalbezirk Kiew,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 21, no. 1 (2007): 21.

53. For other target groups of indoctrination during the Third Reich, see Frank Vossler, *Propaganda in die eigene Truppe: Die Truppenbetreuung in der Wehrmacht 1939–1945* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2005); and Michaela Kollmann, *Schulbücher im Nationalsozialismus: NS-Propaganda, “Rassenhygiene” und Manipulation* (Berlin: VDM Verlag, 2006).

54. See Norbert Frei, *Adenauer’s Germany and the Nazi Past: The Politics of Amnesty and Integration* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

55. Konrad Kwiet, “Von Tätern zu Befehlsempfängern: Legendenbildung und Strafverfolgung nach 1945,” in Matthäus et al., *Ausbildungsziel*, 114–38.

56. On Lithuanian antisemitism during this period, see Dov Levin, *Pinkas Hakehillot: Lita* (Encyclopedia of Jewish Communities: Lithuania) (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1996), 75–87.

57. See EK 3, “Gesamtaufstellung der im Bereiche des EK 3 bis jetzt durchgeführten Exekutionen,” September 10, 1941, USHMM RG 11.001M Reel 183 (SAM 500–1-25), fol. 104–7. See also Dina Porat, “The Holocaust in Lithuania: Some Unique Aspects,” in *The Final Solution: Origins and Implementation*, ed. David Cesarani (London: Routledge, 1994), 159–74. For later Allied reports see Richard Breitman et al., eds., *US Intelligence and the Nazis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 23–24.

58. See Robert G. Waite, “‘Reliable Local Residents’: Collaboration in Latvia, 1941–1945,” in *Latvia in World War II: Materials of an International Conference* (Riga: Latvijas vēstures institūta apgāds, 2000), 115–44.

59. This massacre was famously described by Jan Gross in *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

60. Dieter Pohl, “Einsatzgruppe C,” in *Die Einsatzgruppen in der besetzten Sowjetunion 1941/42: Die Tätigkeits- und Lageberichte des Chefs der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD*, ed. Peter Klein (Berlin: Edition Hentrich, 1997), 72.

61. Heydrich to EG-leaders respectively HSSPF, June 29, 1941, and July 2, 1941; reproduced in part in Peter Longerich (with contributions by Dieter Pohl), *Die Ermordung der Europäischen Juden: Eine umfassende Dokumentation des Holocaust 1941–1945* (Munich: Piper, 1989), 116–19.

62. See Browning, *Origins*, 273–74.

63. See Michael MacQueen, “Nazi Policy toward the Jews in the Reichskommissariat Ostland, June–December 1941: From White Terror to Holocaust in Lithuania,” in *Bitter*

Legacy: Confronting the Holocaust in the USSR, ed. Zvi Gitelman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 97–98.

64. RF-SS to HSSPF in Russia, SSPF Lublin (Globocnik), July 25, 1941, NARA, T 454, reel 100, frames 699–700; see also MacQueen, “Nazi Policy,” 99.

65. While opposing the formation of military units in the Baltic States and Ukraine, Hitler agreed to the expansion of the Schutzmannschaft in early 1942 (Himmler to Jeckeln, January 27, 1942, NARA, T 175, reel 127, frame 2654001).

66. “Osteinsatz Polizei,” BDC O 464; report by Daluege, January 1943, Nuremberg Document NO-285, NARA, RG-238; Browning, *Ordinary Men*, 24.

67. See Richard Breitman, “Himmler’s Police Auxiliaries in the Occupied Soviet Territories,” *Simon Wiesenthal Center Annual 7* (1990): 23–39; Martin Dean, *Collaboration in the Holocaust: Crimes of the Local Police in Belorussia and Ukraine, 1941–44* (New York: St. Martin’s Press in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2000).

68. See for example Pol. Rgt. Mitte Ia to Pol. Btl. 307, 316, 322, NSKK-Komp. Berlin, Stuttgart, Nürnberg, 27 July 1941, MHA Prague Pol. Rgt. On communication problems between the SS leadership and the units at the eastern periphery, see Breitman, *Secrets*, 56–57.

69. See Wildt, *Generation*; Banach, *Das Führerkorps*.

70. Cds Amtschef IV (Heydrich) to EG, June 29, 1941, reproduced in Yitzhak Arad, Yisrael Gutman, and Abraham Margalio, eds., *Documents on the Holocaust: Selected Sources on the Destruction of the Jews of Germany and Austria, Poland, and the Soviet Union* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1981), 377–78.

71. Cds (Heydrich) to leaders of Einsatzgruppen, July 4, 1941, quoted from Klein, *Einsatzgruppen*, 329–30.

72. On Wehrmacht crimes, see Rossino, *Blitzkrieg*; Megargee, *War*.

73. The RSHA compiled the so-called “Ereignismeldungen” from the incoming Einsatzgruppen reports, and distributed them to various German agencies. See Ronald Headland, *Messages of Murder: A Study of the Reports of the Einsatzgruppen of the Security Police and the SD 1941–1942* (London: Associated University Presses, 1992); Klein, *Einsatzgruppen*, 9–11.

74. Quoted in Breitman, *Secrets*, 92.

75. Longerich, *Politik*, 417.

76. In recent years, research into perpetrator behavior has stressed the importance of milieu for German crimes in the East. See for example Klaus-Michael Mallmann and Gerhard Paul, eds., *Karrieren der Gewalt: Nationalsozialistische Täterbiographien* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgemeinschaft, 2004); Paul, *Täter*; Wildt, *Generation*.

77. Jean-Paul Sartre, *War Diaries: Notebooks from a Phoney War 1939–40* (London: Verso, 1999), 279, on his experiences in Berlin 1933–34.

78. See fragmentary report by EK 2 (Lange), no date (early 1942), BA R 70 Sowjetunion/20: “The goal of which EK 2 had a vague notion from the beginning was a radical solution

of the Jewish problem through the execution of all Jews” (“Das Ziel, das dem EK 2 von Anfang an vorschwebte, war eine radikale Lösung des Judenproblems durch die Exekution aller Juden”). See also EK 3 (Jäger), “Gesamtaufstellung,” December 1, 1941, USHMM RG 11.001M Reel 183 (SAM 500–1-25, fol. 115).

79. “. . .dass man sich angewöhnen muss, zwischen den Zeilen zu lesen und danach zu handeln.” “Bericht über die Arbeitstagung der Kirchensachbearbeiter beim RSHA am 22. und 23. September 1941,” quoted in Diercker, *Glaubenskrieger*, 533.

80. For the most recent work on the attitude of the German population toward the Final Solution, see Peter Longerich, *“Davon haben wir nichts gewusst!”: Die Deutschen und die Judenverfolgung 1933–1945* (Munich: Siedler Verlag, 2006).