

Rehearsing for Murder: The Beginning of the Final Solution in Lithuania in June 1941

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Lithuanian Jews were among the first victims of the Holocaust and likewise their German executioners among the first perpetrators. Konrad Kwiet thus views Lithuania as an ideal case study for the organization and implementation of the Final Solution after the onset of Operation Barbarossa. In this broadly conceived article, he examines both local and German killing initiatives, the chain of command for the Nazis' murderous policies, the role of antisemitic propaganda and the Judeo-Bolshevik myth, and finally the psychological effects on both the Jewish victims and their German killers. Kwiet's research reveals patterns of behavior which, over the course of the next four years, were refined to ensure the success of the Nazi Holocaust.

When the Nazis launched their assault on the Soviet Union in June 1941, they targeted Jews and communists in the Lithuanian border villages for immediate liquidation. The Germans carried out the mass executions, disguised as cleansing operations (*Säuberungsaktionen*) and retaliatory actions (*Strafaktionen*), smoothly and without any interference, thus signaling the beginning of the "Final Solution."¹ The genocide about to be unleashed was the central component of the Nazi plan for a "Greater Germanic Empire" based upon a "new order" in Europe, an order in which there was no place for any person or group defined by the Nazis as a political, racial or social enemy. Indeed, it was the design of a revolutionary society which represented a clear caesura in the history of civilization, abandoning established moral norms and human values.

Antisemitism, long embedded in German and European history and culture, served as an ideological driving force and, hence, precondition for mass murder. The horrific crimes committed by the Nazis were preceded by a process of physical and psychological brutalization achieved through propaganda and indoctrination, a virtual rehearsal for murder. The decision-making processes, transitions, and radicalizations leading up to the "Final Solution" occurred at various bureaucratic levels and at different locations. We thus have to examine them within the context of the large-scale

resettlement projects of Eastern Europe, the murder of asylum inmates in the euthanasia program, and the war of destruction, code-named Operation Barbarossa, waged against the Soviet Union.² The mass shootings in Lithuania, preceded already on a limited scale in occupied Poland, were not the mere by-product of the military campaign, nor simply a stepping stone to Auschwitz. Rather, they served as the testing ground for subsequent killings. The techniques attempted and the practical experiences gained were quickly converted into a general extermination policy. Of the 220,000 Jews living in Lithuania at the beginning of the German attack, only some 8,000 survived.³ Furthermore, mass executions, referred to by Raul Hilberg as the “practice of open-air shooting,” remained the dominant pattern of organized murder in the conquered territories of the Soviet Union, even after the deployment of gassing installations in occupied Poland.⁴

The first *Judenaktion* in Lithuania took place in Gargždai (Garsden), when the Nazis shot 201 people two days after their assault on the Soviet Union. The next day 214 people were killed in Kretinga (Krottingen), and on the 27th of June the Germans executed 111 civilians in Palanga (Polangen).⁵ Of the 526 total victims, there were only two women, who were shot for having refused to be separated from their husbands. The majority of victims were Jewish men, while the remainder were communists and other such “enemies.” Years later, the murderers’ trial caused a sensation in Germany when it revealed crimes that authorities had previously covered up or rigorously denied.⁶ Soon thereafter, the federal government initiated a systematic investigation of Nazi crimes, resulting in the establishment of the Ludwigsburg-based Central Office of State Judicial Authorities (*Zentrale Stelle*).⁷ The defendants, still showing no remorse, used their testimonies to promulgate an historical legend based upon the claim that they had only been acting in accordance with a *Führerbefehl*, or a written order from Hitler to kill all the Jews. They also maintained that the Jewish extermination order (*Judenvernichtungsbefehl*) had been verbally conveyed to them by SS-Brigadier Dr. Walter Stahlecker, commander of Einsatzgruppe A.⁸ While both courts of law and historians long gave credence to these claims, Alfred Streim, the late director of the *Zentrale Stelle*, was the first to wage war against them, sparking off a controversy from which he emerged the victor.⁹ German documents since discovered in former Soviet archives validate Streim’s stance. They shed new light on the first murders of the Jews perpetrated along the East Prussian-Lithuanian borders. From these documents, we can now reconstruct the decision-making process.

Neither Hitler nor Stahlecker actually gave the first killing orders. They were issued instead in the East Prussian city of Tilsit by SS-Major Hans Joachim Böhme, head of the *Staatspolizeistelle* (Stapo) Tilsit. The orders themselves are believed lost. However, we do possess records of the dates and transmissions of the directives that formed the basis of Böhme’s orders.¹⁰ These directives were issued in Berlin by Heinrich Müller, head of the *Gestapo* (Secret State Police, within the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt*, Reich Security Main Office or RSHA), and conveyed down the chain of

command via telex on June 23 and 24. As a regional branch of the RSHA, the *Stapostelle* Tilsit had always known and been involved in the preparations for Operation Barbarossa.¹¹ It was notified, for example, about the *Grenzsperre*, the closure of the border in the event of war, and the deployment of the Security Police and Security Service (*Einsatzgruppen der Sicherheitspolizei und des Sicherheitsdiensts*, or Sipo and SD). Most significantly, *Stapostelle* Tilsit was authorized to extend its jurisdiction beyond the Reich, which meant that it was commissioned with the preparation and promulgation of executive measures (*Exekutivmaßnahmen*) against the civilian population living in the adjoining border districts. The Security Police policy (*sicherheitspolizeiliche Bearbeitung*) prescribed fighting the enemy (*Gegnerbekämpfung*) and special treatment (*Sonderbehandlung*), that is the immediate liquidation of Jews and communists. The area of operation was limited to a twenty-five kilometer-wide strip of land. There were similar allocations of territory and special regulations in other border areas at the eastern front in order to afford the mobile *Einsatzgruppen* the greatest possible freedom of movement.¹² The expected rapid military advance presupposed an ease in crossing borders. To this effect, *Stapostelle* Tilsit received permission from the RSHA to set up its own mobile killing unit, known as *Einsatzkommando* (EK) Tilsit. It crossed the border just after combat troops of the *Wehrmacht* had successfully launched their surprise attack.

On June 22, 1941, the first day of Barbarossa, the Germans captured the Lithuanian border districts. Kretinga fell after only three hours of battle; Palanga after eight. A single exception, the bloody battle waged for Gargždai, lasted fifteen hours and took numerous lives.¹³ But by the battle's end, units of the 291st and 61st divisions had already advanced sixty-five kilometers into Lithuanian territory.¹⁴ The troops following them were attacked by dispersed Soviet soldiers or came under fire from snipers, who had taken up positions behind bushes or in trees, water and even houses. In the headquarters of the regiments and divisions of the 18th Army and the Army Group North, reports came in on the "treacherous" and "insidious" methods employed by the enemy. They culminated in the news that at some locations injured soldiers who had been left behind were later found dead, their bodies mutilated.¹⁵ The Germans used these incidents as a pretext to accuse the Jews of having resisted their advance (none of the military reports from the time contain any reference to the alleged resistance of Jews to the invading German army). The accusations provided a welcome justification for the already planned slaughter of the Jews. In Gargždai, Jews were accused of having supported the Russian border guards in their effort to combat the German attacks.¹⁶ At the pit, the police officer had the execution commando step forward and, in a state of nervous agitation, proclaim that "the Jewish delinquents had resisted German troops."¹⁷ Such pronouncements also were made in Kretinga and Palanga, where Jews were held accountable for the deaths of four soldiers, among them two officers, who had been shot in an "insidious way by the population."¹⁸ They served to justify the murders as *Säuberungs-* and *Strafaktionen*, which had to be

carried out in the interest of security. The Nazis categorized the first Jews they shot as “snipers.”¹⁹ Once the military advance was over, Jews were executed as “looters” or “traitors,” “agitators” or “intellectuals.” At later stages and in other areas they were classified as “partisans,” though after this word was officially banned, “bandits” became the preferred label. In the end, no explanation was required to disguise the practice of liquidation. From the outset, though, language was a key component of the Nazis’ strategy of legitimization, making it easier for the men of *EK Tilsit* to fulfill their mission.

The Nazis recruited into *EK Tilsit*, on an ad hoc basis, numerous persons from various police and SS backgrounds. The scale of the operation as well as its location determined just how many men were required and from where they were to be recruited. Senior officials of the *Stapostelle* filled the positions of leadership and command.²⁰ They belonged to the *Sipo* and *SD* deployed in the Tilsit-based headquarters, and in its local outposts (*Außendienststellen*) of Heydekrug, Insterburg and Memel. Virtually all of these men were in their mid-thirties.²¹ The border police (*Grenzpolizei*) was incorporated as a subordinate police branch. Border policemen deployed in four Border Police commissariats (GPK) and five Border Police posts (GPP) were engaged in tracking down, arresting, and often even murdering Jews. Customs officials (*Zollbeamte*) also cooperated. In Gargždai, customs officials at the border placed Jews under lock and key until the execution commando arrived. The regular *Schutzpolizei*, the Order Police, provided the marksmen. These men, drawn from the Memel Police precincts and consisting of thirty constables and reservists led by a police officer, were assigned to the first firing squad, euphemistically known as the emergency squad (*Alarmzug*).²² Their numbers, however, were not always sufficient, which is why in Kretinga and Palanga the *Wehrmacht* volunteered its services. Soldiers taking part in the Kretinga execution belonged to a military unit of Korück 583, *Kommandant des rückwärtigen Armeegebietes*, or the commander of Rear Army Area within the Army Group North.²³ In Palanga, the German Air Force became an accomplice to murder when twenty-two young conscripts, still undergoing basic training, were ordered to bolster the execution commando. It was a small, but quite remarkable and telling episode in the history of the Shoah.²⁴

Indispensable were the services offered by Lithuanian collaborators. Their cooperation can be traced to the pre-World War II period, when the *SD* and *Stapo* exchanged intelligence information with their Lithuanian counterparts.²⁵ Such information often included lists of common enemies, in particular Jews and communists. Following the Soviet annexation of Lithuania in the summer of 1940, numerous Lithuanians left their posts in the army, police and security service and took refuge in Germany. From their ranks came the *SD* agents and *V-Leute* informers recruited shortly before the invasion of the Soviet Union. Easily recognizable by their white armbands with the inscription *Deutsche Wehrmacht*, these men were commissioned not only to the military combat troops—especially the advancing detachments—but

also to the Police and SS killing units. They served as guides, translators and liaison officers, positions through which they established contact with the local collaborators. From the ranks of the collaborators came those who searched for, rounded up and handed over to the *EK Tilsit* Jews and communists known to them. In Gargždai, Kretinga, and Palanga the victims were brought to collecting points (*Sammelplätze*) where they were kept under guard until the German killing squads arrived.

Once the Germans set the time and place for the extermination, various personnel went about their tasks. They distributed food and special rations, as well as arms and ammunition. The number of bullets fired and the amount of petrol used was carefully recorded, while details searched for suitable murder and burial sites. In Gargždai, a tank trap (*Panzergraben*) located behind the wall of a damaged stable proved an ideal spot. Five kilometers outside of Kretinga was a small forest with a wooded trail that had also served as a trench. In Palanga, on the Baltic, there were dunes and a convenient site shielded by high bushes. From the outset efforts were made—and soon afterwards concrete instructions issued—to reconnoiter terrain which would facilitate a swift and uninterrupted liquidation, while also shielding the crimes. Such locations in the occupied Soviet Union had to be at once remote and accessible by road. Coastal dunes, hill-shaped land formations marked by ditches, slopes or ravines, wooded areas, clearings situated at the edge of forests, all served as potential murder and burial sites. In Gargždai, Kretinga and Palanga, the Nazis made their victims enlarge the pits. Later, during large-scale killing operations, Soviet POWs were forced to carry out this work. During preparations for the liquidation of the Riga ghetto, SS architects and other experts assisted in the design and construction of gravesites that would accommodate up to 30,000 Jews.

After the preparation and sealing off of the killing fields came the final stage in the procedure of mass murder: the Nazis confiscated valuables, collecting and registering them as part of the coveted *Juden-Nachlaß*, the Jewish bequest, from which many filled their own pockets. Women and children remained behind under local guard at specified “collection points” like barns or other compounds, while the selection of the victims took place. (But the women and children soon came to be regarded as a “burden” both to the local administration and residents, and in July the Germans decided to dispose of them as *unnütze Esser*, or useless eaters.)²⁶ Now the Germans began to incorporate Lithuanians into the execution commandos of *EK Tilsit*. In Gargždai, the victims were driven on foot to the murder sites, whereas in Kretinga and Palanga trucks were used. A group of ten men was forced to take up position at the edge of the pit with their faces turned towards the execution commando. The twenty-man strong firing party stood at a distance of twenty meters from the pit’s edge. Two marksmen aimed their rifles at one victim, as SS officers gave the order to shoot. After each round a new group was driven to the edge of the pit and forced to push into it any corpses that had not fallen in on their own. Bodies that were still moving were given the *Gnadenschuß*—the coup de grace. Further layers of corpses



Members of a Lithuanian militia force a group of Jewish women to undress before their execution (Saulius Berzinis collection, courtesy of USHMM Photo Archives)

were then stacked on top of the lifeless forms. This killing procedure, euphemistically known as the “sardine method,” ensured efficiency through a higher success rate on the first shot and thus savings in ammunition, as well as a better utilization of the pit. Once the pits were covered with sand (lime was considered unnecessary in the beginning), little time passed before neighboring villagers detected the telltale smell of rapidly decomposing flesh. For months afterward, Lithuanian health authorities had to monitor the murder sites for the danger of infection, and to arrange for additional layers of earth and lime to be heaped upon them.²⁷ Frequently, German officials had to remind the local authorities to secure the killing fields with appropriate fencing.

The first murders of the Jews were discussed at length at the highest level of Nazi leadership and in close proximity to the murder sites. In the days following the onset of Operation Barbarossa, Adolf Hitler; Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler; the Chief of the *Sipo* and *SD*, Reinhard Heydrich; the Chief of the Order Police, Kurt Daluege; along with a number of other high-ranking functionaries, hurried to East

Prussia and took up command posts in the newly established headquarters there.²⁸ Surrounded by a massive buildup of army, SS, and police troops, they were well-situated to assess and direct both the military and murderous campaigns. From their assembly points, SS and Police commanders whom Heydrich and Daluge had already instructed verbally of their “special tasks” made haste to Tilsit to discuss and coordinate the prelude to the “Final Solution.” The line of communication ran via the *Stapostelle* Tilsit to SS-General Hans-Adolf Prützmann, Higher SS and Police Leader (HSSPF) for Northern Russia. Installed as Himmler’s subordinate on June 22, 1941, Prützmann took over command of all SS and Police units operating in the area.²⁹ Whenever a large-scale *Judenaktion* required the deployment of several SS and Police units, the HSSPF issued the liquidation order.

Lithuania fell under the jurisdiction of the HSSPF for Northern Russia. It was in the path of *Einsatzgruppe* A, commanded by Stahlecker, and was traversed by *Sonderkommando* (SK) 1a under SS-Major Dr. Martin Sandberger; SK 1b under SS-Lieutenant-Colonel Dr. Erich Ehrlinger; EK 2 under SS-Major Rudolf Bätz, closely followed by EK 3 under SS-Colonel Karl Jäger.³⁰ Stahlecker arrived in Tilsit on the evening of June 24 to be briefed by Böhme and his staff on the first *Judenaktion* just concluded in Gargždai. As the report of July 1 attests, Stahlecker “declared himself in basic agreement with the action” that had been planned and carried out. This response suggests that it was not Stahlecker, but rather Böhme who had initiated the first killing operation. On June 25, Stahlecker established contact with Sandberger and they agreed “to carry out all further actions deemed necessary in the border strip along the same lines.”³¹ Two days later, SK 1a commenced its killing operations in small villages outside the twenty-five-kilometer-wide strip of land.³² En route to Estonia, SK 1a continued its shooting of adult Jewish males and communists. SK 1b arrived in the Lithuanian capital of Kovno on June 28. After being briefed by Stahlecker, Dr. Ehrlinger gave orders to select the racial and political enemies for immediate liquidation.³³ On its way to Latvia, EK 2 made a stopover in Tilsit, where leaders of sub-units (*Teilkommandos*) were verbally instructed on the necessity of carrying out “ruthless measures” (*rücksichtsloses Vorgehen*).³⁴ Böhme hastened to establish contact with Jäger, who as commander of EK 3 was to take control of Lithuania.

Of vital importance for both was the expansion and securing of the operational areas allocated to them. A dispute over the sphere of jurisdiction, a common feature of competing Nazi functionaries and agencies, emerged quickly, manifesting itself not only in animosities and conflicts,³⁵ but also through efforts to speed up the process of liquidation in order to declare the areas free of Jews (*judenfrei*) as quickly as possible. EK Tilsit then intensified its murderous campaigns. On June 29 a squad dispatched to Darbiani (Dorbianen, a village thirteen kilometers north of Kretinga) executed 250 Jews, an action not mentioned in Nazi records or German war crimes investigations.³⁶ The *Stapostelle* Tilsit extended its activities beyond the Lithuanian border strip. It

instructed the Border Police Commissariat Suwalki to carry out “retaliatory actions” in Augustowo (Augustenburg), a Polish city some 150 km south of Tilsit. During June 26–30, 316 persons were killed there, including 10 women.³⁷ One week after the start of Barbarossa, *EK Tilsit* had thus distinguished itself by performing over a thousand executions.

On June 30, Himmler and Heydrich arrived in Augustowo.³⁸ They had already received telegraphic messages concerning the location and death toll of the first mass shootings, and after examining a detailed report, “they both approved unreservedly of the measures” taken by *EK Tilsit*.³⁹ Less satisfactory was their visit to neighboring Grodno on July 1, where they were frustrated to learn that killing had not yet been initiated. Immediately the SS leaders gave orders to make up the lost ground, and the *Einsatzgruppen* leaders were instructed to dispatch their advancing units (*Vorauskommandos*) to relevant *Einsatzorte* as quickly as possible, and to demonstrate “the greatest mobility in the tactics of their mission.”⁴⁰ Such early inspection tours were undertaken not only by the chief architects of the “Final Solution,” but also by senior officers serving in the various SS and Police units. These inspection tours covered all the conquered areas, from the Baltic to the Black Sea. At this level there were frequent information exchanges about the mass executions, their progress and anticipated escalation, as well as the experiences and lessons learned. Himmler, Heydrich, Daluge and their representatives continued their tours to relevant *Einsatzorte*. The records reveal that these visits were always linked to two events: martial speeches held before assembled troops, and the issuing of new killing orders discussed behind closed doors and distributed as “top secret” to those units carrying out the *Judenaktionen*.⁴¹ None of the killing orders and subsequent reports contain any reference to a *Führerbefehl*. In all probability, such an order was never given, indeed not required. The “will” or “wish” of the *Führer*, documented and often quoted, ensured that decisions and directives on the preparation and implementation of the “Final Solution” could be conveyed from top to bottom via clear, official channels of command.

One fundamental decision which precipitated the genocidal campaign was taken in the spring 1941 at the highest level of Nazi leadership. Within the course of preparations for Barbarossa, Hitler had entrusted Himmler with “special tasks” that resulted, as the famous OKW-guidelines of March 13, 1941 had put it, “from the final struggle between two opposing political systems which must now be acted out.”⁴² With no opposition, the army had accepted the arrangement with the SS, confirmed in writing on April 28, 1941, that special command groups (*Sonderkommandos*) of the *Sipo* and *SD* were entitled to take “executive measures” against the civilian population “in the context of their mission and on their own responsibility.”⁴³ Himmler had referred to a “special commission from the Führer” in announcing the deployment of HSSPF “to carry out the special instructions I have been given by the Führer in the area of political administration,” simultaneously determining both the task and the

chain of command.⁴⁴ It had been left to Himmler, then to Heydrich and Daluge and subsequently to Müller and other heads of relevant agencies and personnel offices, to make the necessary arrangements for assembling the special task forces for deployment in the East (*Osteinsatz*). Once the process of recruitment, training and installation had begun in April 1941, *EK Tilsit* found itself in the same position as all other Police and SS units.

In the summer 1941, the *EK Tilsit* and the *Einsatzgruppen* of the *Sipo* and *SD*, the brigades of the *Waffen-SS*, and the Order Police battalions embarked on their journey to the conquered territories in the East. They were equipped with guidelines and directives describing their mission and the target groups to be immediately liquidated. Additionally, there is evidence to suggest that on the middle level of leadership the SS and Police leaders were granted sufficient leeway to initiate more “energetic,” “radical,” “draconian,” and “ruthless” measures. Several such as Stahlecker, Jäger and Böhme in fact distinguished themselves in this regard. They did this not only with the knowledge that at the highest level of leadership a “fundamental” or “territorial” solution of the “Jewish Question” had already been envisaged, but also with a view to enhancing their own careers. Their deployment in the East offered the opportunity to demonstrate initiative and flexibility, spearheading Nazi racial doctrines and policies. It was the SS and Police commanders who, at the very scenes of the crimes, dared to go beyond general guidelines, resulting in a further radicalization of the steps leading to extermination. It quickly became apparent that even at the lowest levels in the chain of command, there would be no resistance to the shooting orders. On the contrary, the rank and file of the murderous apparatus offered through their actions the clearest evidence of the feasibility of the “Final Solution.”

Within this context, another closely related pattern emerges that is characteristic of the Nazi policy towards Jews. Instructions which initially were conveyed verbally began to find expression in written directives. A classic example is Heydrich’s famous “principal guidelines” and “operational orders,” which were dispatched in late June 1941, only after firsthand experiences of the murders of the Jews in Lithuania. Addressed to the commanders of the *Einsatzgruppen* and the *HSSPF*, they prescribed the liquidation of communist functionaries and Jews in state and party positions, along with “other radical elements” defined as “snipers, agitators, propagandists,” or “saboteurs.” They also contained instructions to encourage secretly “anticommunist” and “anti-Jewish circles” in the conquered territories to instigate pogroms, referred to by the euphemism “self-cleansing measures” (*Selbstreinigungsbestrebungen*) taken by the indigenous population.⁴⁵

Beginning with the German invasion of the Soviet Union, Lithuanian antisemitism manifested itself in pogroms spanning over forty cities and villages, or fully one-quarter of all Jewish communities.⁴⁶ Some five to ten thousand Jews died in these massacres, the outbreak of which occurred in a country in which Jews had lived for generations and where they felt at home.

The interwar Lithuanian Republic had granted Jews “autonomy,” allowing them to establish flourishing centers of religious and cultural life.⁴⁷ It took dramatic events to alter this relatively peaceful landscape. In August 1940, Lithuania ceased to exist as an independent state, a national catastrophe that was a foregone conclusion once Germany and the Soviet Union entered into a strategic, short-lived alliance that divided Poland and much of eastern Europe into separate spheres of interest. It was of little help to the Lithuanian Republic that it declared its neutrality at the beginning of World War II. In October 1939, a treaty between Lithuania and the Soviet Union returned Vilnius, the historical capital, to Lithuania, but in return granted the Soviets the right to set up military bases in the country. The collapse of the Lithuanian Republic was imminent. In June 1940 the government was forced to abdicate, and two months later came the inevitable annexation. Soviet rule and repression, “restructuring” and “re-education,” affected all sectors of society. As for the Jewish community, Sovietization meant the nationalization of Jewish-owned enterprises, stores and properties; the closure of Hebrew schools; the suppression of religious and cultural values, and Zionist and political activities; as well as the arrest of numerous individual Jews. Among those arrested were some five to six thousand Jews and 25,000 Lithuanians whom the government branded “anti-Soviet elements” and deported on the eve of the Nazi invasion to Siberia and other parts of the Soviet Union.⁴⁸

In the wake of the Soviet annexation, numerous Lithuanians left their posts in the army, police, and security police, and took refuge in Germany.⁴⁹ They assisted German preparation and execution of Operation Barbarossa, determined to re-establish the Lithuanian state. This was especially true of a group of anticommunist emigrants who formed in November 1940 a “National Committee of Lithuania,” headed by the former diplomat Kazys Skirpa. Skirpa saw himself as the future leader of a liberated Lithuania which was to be incorporated into Hitler’s “New Europe.” His “committee” shortly became engaged in a variety of activities, including renewing contacts with German agencies such as the Reich Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Foreign Department of the Nazi Party, the *Abwehr*, (intelligence section of the *Wehrmacht*), and above all the RSHA.⁵⁰ They also distributed diverse literature proclaiming the struggle for national liberation, and linking the re-establishment of Lithuania to the removal of Lithuanian Jews.⁵¹ Such pronouncements encouraged Heydrich and his experts to design the strategy of “self-cleansing operations,” which promised the distribution of the work involved in solving the “Jewish Question,” at least early into the “Final Solution.” The channels of communication led from Berlin via regional and local branches of Stapo and SD operating in East Prussia and occupied Poland, to Lithuania, where an extensive underground network had developed under the “Lithuanian Activist Front” (LAF). Within this political-intelligence network the *Stapostelle* Tilsit played an important role, including not only the recruitment and guidance of Lithuanian couriers, agents and informers, but also the surveillance of events in neighboring Lithuania. Relevant reports sent at regular intervals to

Berlin were studied and initialed by Himmler and Heydrich, and even Hitler himself displayed a keen interest in learning about “the behavior of the Soviets in the former Baltic states.”⁵² At the end of May 1941, Hans Joachim Böhme dispatched such a report in which he referred to the widespread rejection of Soviet-style communism amongst Lithuanians.⁵³ Böhme also falsely asserted that Lithuanian communists had been sacked from state and party positions to pave the way for the appointment of more “reliable” Russians and Jews. Most significantly, on the eve of the German invasion Böhme, soon to be installed as head of *Einsatzkommando* Tilsit, placed special emphasis on the role played by the Jews: “The Jews in Soviet Lithuania are largely agents for the Soviet Union.” In this key sentence the myth of the “Jewish-Bolshevik conspiracy” finds its clearest expression, a myth used to help justify the “Final Solution.” On the eve of the pogroms in Lithuania, legends of Jews as the agents of the Soviet Union, especially as representatives of the NKVD, spread amongst wide sections of the population, and spilled over into neighboring Byelorussia and Ukraine.⁵⁴

According to the Judeo-Bolshevik myth, Jews were responsible for the Soviet annexation and occupation, and thus needed to be punished accordingly. Alongside this timeless desire to take revenge on a scapegoat, there was another determining factor for launching the attack against the Jewish population. As Jürgen Matthäus put it, the pogroms served as “a clear signal to the Germans as well as to the indigenous population, that activists and partisans, rather than waiting passively for the supposed German liberation, were perfectly capable of disposing of their most ardent suppressors themselves, namely Jews and communists. By doing so, they were staking a moral claim on national self-determination.”⁵⁵

Readiness to instigate and participate in the pogroms was by no means universal. At various places Lithuanians condemned the acts of violence, turned away from the cruelty and murder, and even stood up in the defense of Jewish lives. Nevertheless, wide sections of the population greeted the “self-cleansing operations” with approbation and the invading German troops as liberators. “*Säuberungsaktionen*” initiated by the Germans met with “sympathetic understanding.”⁵⁶ For example, public book burning was staged at the marketplaces while antisemitic literature was dispersed widely. The burning of Jewish books and Torah scrolls symbolized not only the attempt “to set fire to the spirit,” but also the intention of taking the logical next step to burning bodies.⁵⁷ Lithuanian authorities completely ignored both the arsonists (as in Germany and Poland, several synagogues were burned down) and other Lithuanian tormentors of Jews, who robbed, assaulted, raped, shot, hanged, and even beat their victims to death. In little time, news spread of the first German mass executions in Gargždai. In Kretinga, curious townsfolk hurriedly made their way to the marketplace, jostling each other for a good vantagepoint and demanding that those arrested be hanged. The scene in Palanga was virtually identical.

In Kaunas (Kovno), the diabolic fervor of the antisemitic crowds rivaled anything known about the possibilities for human cruelty.⁵⁸ Before the German forces

entered the city in the late afternoon of June 24, Lithuanian “activists” had already murdered several Jews. The following evening Stahlecker arrived with a small advance detachment of his *Einsatzgruppe*, which immediately established contact with local “partisan” leaders. That night “effective pogroms” began “without any visible indication to the outside world of a German order or any German suggestion,” as Stahlecker later boasted.⁵⁹ Over a period of three days, 3,500 Jews were killed. One particularly gruesome slaughter at the garage complex of the main agricultural cooperative attracted a large audience. Women with children on their arms pushed their way to the front rows, while laughter and shouts of “bravo!” echoed to the sound of the iron rods and wooden clubs used to beat the Jews to death. At intervals, one of the killers struck up the national anthem on his accordion, adding to the festive mood of the day.⁶⁰ The pavement was washed down regularly with hoses, as German soldiers calmly observed the bloodbath. Some of the soldiers took pains to capture the events of the day on film. Yet only a few fleeting, almost incidental references can be found to these events in the official war diaries and reports of the time. At German military headquarters, news of these spectacular scenes were greeted with a mere shrug of the shoulders.⁶¹ After all, we recently learned that the German High Command of the Army (OKH) itself had issued the order not to hinder in any way the participation of Lithuanians in “cleansing operations.” This order went to the Eighteenth Army on June 24, 1941.⁶² On the same day, military authorities received yet another directive, a *Führerweisung* directly from Hitler, not to take any notice of the Lithuanian Provisional Government which had declared itself in Kaunas on June 23.⁶³

From the outset, the Nazi regime opposed the establishment of independent states in the newly conquered territories. In the case of Lithuania, the *Reichsministerium für die besetzten Ostgebiete* had decided to establish a *Reichskommissariat Ostland*, in which Lithuania was to be incorporated as a *Generalbezirk*. This civil occupational regime clearly illustrated that Lithuania was eventually to be annexed as part of the “Greater German Empire.” Lithuanian institutions were quickly subordinated to German military, civil, SS and police authorities. In an effort to restore “law and order,” the “activists” and “partisans” were converted into a force completely conforming to the German requirements. On June 28, the German *Feldkommandantur*, the local garrison command in Kaunas, ordered their disarming and disbandment. Simultaneously, measures were underway to organize a more disciplined formation, initially called the “Battalion for the Defense of National Labor,” and including former soldiers deemed reliable and trustworthy by the Germans. The new *Hilfspolizisten*, or auxiliary policemen, assisted in the systematic implementation of Nazi racial policy,⁶⁴ while the German army continued to offer its services to the campaign against the “Jewish-Bolshevist” enemy.⁶⁵ Directives also existed to “render harmless” as quickly as possible the “bands” of Soviet soldiers, communists, and Jews hiding in the forests.⁶⁶ Commissioned with the task of “securing” and “pacifying” the newly conquered territories, military authorities introduced laws concerning the yellow badge, ghettoization, and forced labor.



Lithuanian nationalist poses with the iron bar he used to kill Jews at the Lietukis garage, June 27, 1941
(Zentrale Stelle der Landesjustizverwaltungen, courtesy of USHMM Photo Archives)

In many places, regular units of the *Wehrmacht* continued to take part in the mass shooting of Jews and, from autumn 1941 onwards, Gypsies as well. The difference, however, was that, unlike in the Lithuanian border districts, they no longer volunteered, but only assisted when requested by the SS or when a direct order came through the military chain of command. Time and again, the military authorities felt compelled to impress upon soldiers and officers that it was not within their jurisdiction to take unauthorized or independent action against “politically and racially unreliable elements.” In other words, as the directive of July 5, 1941 indicated, soldiers required more justification for shooting civilians than that they were Jews or communists.⁶⁷ The clear defining of areas of jurisdiction meant that this task fell to the SS and police. The “close cooperation” with the army, to which the SS repeatedly laid claim, as well as its “pleasingly positive attitude” towards the “Jewish Question,” can be illustrated by the following episode.

In early July 1941, General Franz von Roques, Commander of Rear Army Area North, discussed the pogrom in Kaunas with General Field Marshal Ritter von Leeb, Chief Commander of Army Group North. Von Leeb noted in his diary: “We cannot influence the course of these measures. The only thing left to do is to keep away. Von Roques made a valid point when he said that the Jewish question cannot be solved in this way. The most effective means would be to sterilize all male Jews.”⁶⁸ The consensus between these men that the elimination of the Jews would best be attained through mass sterilization rather than mass murder is a clear indication of how deep-seated antisemitism and genocidal aims had already become in the thinking of high-ranking conservative army officers. This helps to explain too why military leaders as well as all other social elites in Nazi Germany offered no resistance to the “Final Solution.” Indeed, it was the sheer absence of a significant oppositional force both before and after the outbreak of World War II that made possible and even assisted the implementation of the “Final Solution.”

Also in early July 1941 *EK3*, headed by Jäger, arrived in Kaunas with the intention of solving the “Jewish Question” in Lithuania once and for all. Lack of manpower and the method of “open-air shooting” restricted its killing capacity. Although preparations were underway for the introduction of more efficient, modern technologies such as mobile gas vans and stationary gassing installations, geographic and climatic factors, particularly in light of the coming winter, dictated a longer time span. Economic interests continued to play a role as well. Civilian and military authorities hastened to recruit and exploit Jewish forced labor. By autumn, the Lithuanian countryside had been systematically cleared of Jews. District by district, the Nazis extinguished the centers of Lithuanian Jewry, while the approximately 35,000 Jews who had survived this first wave of killing were incarcerated in the ghettos of Kaunas, Vilnius, Siauliai and Svencionys. Virtually all of them would eventually fall victim to the “Final Solution.” In September 1941 *EK Tilsit* had accomplished its mission: it had cleared the small Lithuanian border zone of Jews and communists, conducting more than 6,000 executions.⁶⁹

Within the “machinery of mass destruction” representatives of many walks of life carried out their assigned killing duties in the most efficient manner.⁷⁰ Neither national nor ideological, social or professional, religious or institutional ties can adequately explain, in my view, the ability to commit mass murder and the satisfaction that often derived from it. Christopher Browning has coined the notion of “ordinary men,” to describe the individual Germans who became perpetrators as a result of primarily situational forces: peer group pressure, blind obedience, career advancement and the war situation.⁷¹ Daniel Goldhagen has presented another explanatory model which triggered a heated, international debate.⁷² The cornerstone of his thesis is that a special brand of German antisemitism, which he termed “eliminationist antisemitism,” emerged in the nineteenth century and not only equipped the perpetrators with an eagerness to kill the Jews, but also created a willingness on the part of “ordinary Germans” to accept the murder of six million Jews as a “national task,” and even to applaud the slaughter. Clearly, Goldhagen’s controversial book has posed a challenge for further research, despite the largely critical and even angry verdict of many scholars.

As for the members of *EK Tilsit*, and the same applied to the vast army of Hitler’s Willing Executioners, virtually none of them knew prior to their recruitment that they would be asked to kill Jews. It was only en route from Memel to Gargzdai that the policemen learned that they would be sent to take part in the execution of Jews. The news was met with surprise. One policeman declared upon hearing about the task ahead: “*Du bist ja verrückt!*” (You must be mad!). His informant responded: “*Ihr werdet ja sehen!*” (Wait and see!). When upon his arrival in Gargzdai the police officer was informed that not “snipers” but rather Jews were to be shot, the old *Partei-kämpfer* and *SS-Oberführer* declared: “Good gracious! These are consequences of the assault against Russia that nobody thought of.”⁷³ Yet with little more than a ripple of recalcitrance, the policemen followed the order to shoot, fully aware that they were killing innocent civilians. They soon even became accustomed to the routine, and designed a clear and consistent genocidal strategy to familiarize themselves with the practice of liquidation. As already mentioned, the language employed disguised the killing, the orders given sanctioned the murder. In the beginning, Jewish men were liquidated, in July the women followed, and from mid-August children were included as a final, “logical” step. The survival of Jewish orphans was out of the question. Although there were variations according to time and place, this sequence within the killing operations can be regarded as a basic pattern.⁷⁴ The Nazis also chose it because it denied the victims any chance of resistance. The gradual process of rehearsing for murder was further facilitated by exercises that aimed to strengthen group bonds and ensure conformity to Nazi ideology, particularly antisemitism. In all police and SS units, special emphasis was placed on ideological indoctrination by means of regular political instruction. Within this training program, there was comprehensive exposure to antisemitic literature, incendiary speeches, and above all anti-Jewish films and documentaries, often screened on the eve of *Judenaktionen*.

These strategies did not go unrewarded. After the first experiences with killing, perpetrators displayed reactions and modes of behavior which excluded any feeling of sympathy for the victims and were symptomatic of the destruction of all moral and human values. It was these reactions, this process of brutalization and dehumanization, which in the final analysis explains the ability and willingness to commit murder. The responses of perpetrators varied. The specific factors which determined a particular response cannot always be clearly established. And yet some general statements can be made which illustrate the various responses.⁷⁵

In the *EK Tilsit*, as in all SS and Police units, the men took it for granted that everyone would prove his worth at least once in an execution commando. This unwritten regulation led both to an entanglement of collective guilt as well as a sense of relief. Three groups can be distinguished by their varied responses. The first was composed of those men who displayed particular zeal and brutality, and were proud of their achievements as killers and the honor and rewards they had bestowed upon them. They soon became known as the *Dauer-Schützen*, or permanent shooters. Alongside these zealous executioners were those who let no opportunity pass to give vent to their antisemitic and sadistic inclinations. Blows and other physical abuse, together with verbal threats, accompanied the victims to their death. Quite common were shouts in which the familiar form of German address was used: "*Du da!* Hurry up! The quicker you are the earlier we can knock off work today."⁷⁶ Or: "Isidor! The faster you go, the sooner you will be with your God."⁷⁷ In the second group, the largest, were those who experienced a feeling of discomfort, uneasiness, or even pangs of conscience at the task before them. They needed more time to acclimate themselves to murder. Some policemen from Memel did not have much difficulty overcoming a problem which other German marksmen hardly encountered. They were asked to shoot Jews whom they knew, some since childhood, and some with whom they had even been friends. After the Nazi annexation of the *Memelland* in March 1939, approximately 9,000 Jews fled their homes there. Many found refuge in the neighboring Lithuanian border villages. In Palanga, one victim recognized a former friend at the edge of the pit. At the Ulm trial, the marksman recalled his friend's final cry: "*Gustav, schieß gut!*" ("Gustav, shoot well!").⁷⁸ Others remembered hearing: "You Germans, what kind of barbarians are you!"⁷⁹ Victims who had only been wounded often asked the German marksmen to put a quick end to their pain. Others requested that they be shot together with family members in order to avoid facing death alone.

After the killing frenzy, the Germans found numerous excuses to justify the murder. One marksman responded to the question of why so many Jews had to be shot with: "How should I know? After all, I am only here to take orders."⁸⁰ Later, during the trials, the accused made reference to group loyalty or peer pressure, declaring that they had not wished to look cowardly and had offered each other encouragement to go on. Private discussion after the first *Judenaktion* in Gargzdai cul-

minated in the most extraordinary declaration: "For God's sake! Don't you see? One generation has to go through all of this, so that our children have it better."⁸¹

These perpetrators could register the final gestures of their victims only with bewilderment. In Kretinga, they observed a rabbi attempting to calm his congregation huddled together at the marketplace. In Gargždai, they came across an old rabbi and other Jews whose manner was "conspicuously calm." On the short journey to the pits, some Jews cried or moaned quietly to themselves. Others protested their innocence and begged for mercy. The murderers were surprised at this behavior. Some even reported mockingly during their testimonies in court that the Jews had offered no resistance. In the Ulm verdict one can read: "[The Jews] succumbed to their fate with remarkable composure. When they realized what lay ahead, they prayed, wrung their hands, and walked stoically towards death."⁸²

Jews in Kovno found the strength to pray during the pogroms. As a lance corporal serving in a German bakers company recalled upon witnessing the slaughter:⁸³ "Before being beaten to death the Jews murmured to themselves. Some even said prayers as they were knocked to the ground."⁸⁴ A farewell letter from Darbiani contained the following lines: "We are dying because we are Jews, and still we are praying for the coming of the Messiah. Keep well, remember us. Our only hope is to rise from the dead when the Messiah comes."⁸⁵ Orthodox Jews in Lithuania and elsewhere sought refuge from the onslaught in the religious teachings and traditions of their forefathers. They interpreted the last journey to the murder sites as "death to glorify God", and an act of "sanctifying the name of God." Right up to the end, they maintained their traditional attitude of faith and sacrifice, practicing "*Kiddush hashem*" in a manner unknown to any "ordinary man."

The third and smallest group of perpetrators included the *Drückeberger* or *Verweigerer*, those who tried to get relieved from execution commando duty or who objected to a killing order. However, not one single member of *EK Tilsit* refused an order to shoot male Jews. Only when women and children were included in the executions at a later stage was there any resistance to the command. In late summer of 1941, after a bestial slaughter of women and children, a police officer declared: "I am not doing that again in the future as there are women and children involved." Böhme responded: "You will be put in an SS uniform, and you will receive an official order," adding later: "Fine, you can leave, you do not have to do this, you have a wife and children."⁸⁶ Such exchanges took place at many locations, though here there was a particular difference in Lithuania. While members of other killing units had to wait for *Heimaturlaub* (holiday or special leave) to visit their families, executioners of *EK Tilsit* returned after each slaughter to their wives, children and friends. No one who protested against the murder of Jews or who disobeyed a killing order was ever sentenced to death by the special SS and Police courts. As a rule, such persons were demoted, transferred, or dismissed. Conversely, SS and policemen, military personnel and civilians, Germans and non-Germans who killed Jews independently, that is

without being authorized or instructed to do so, risked trial and punishment not for their act of murder, but for infringement of SS jurisdiction.⁸⁷

Though no sanctions were imposed upon perpetrators incapable of carrying out designated murderous tasks, the attrition rate from psychological problems connected to the killings was not insignificant. Some marksmen in *EK Tilsit* succumbed to feelings of nausea and nervous tension during the massacres. In Palanga, the young Air Force men proved to be poor shooters, trembling with anxiety and closing their eyes while shooting.⁸⁸ Similar reactions were recorded at many other killing sites. There appear to have been repeated scenes in which the shots of inexperienced, nervous, or poorly trained marksmen tore open the heads of their victims, spraying bone, brain matter, and blood into the faces, hands and uniforms of the murderers. In many cases killers suffered vomiting attacks or developed severe eczema or other psychosomatic disorders. These patients were cared for in special wards and later sanatoriums and holiday resorts run by the SS. From the outset the architects of the “Final Solution” showed concern for the well-being of the executioners.

Despite the mental anguish that the killing often aroused, a festive atmosphere surrounded the murders. In Gargždai, Kretinga and Palanga, coveted Schnapps rations were distributed following each *Judenaktion*, and as a lasting memento group photographs were taken. Jovial and noisy gatherings often took place in the evenings, with local inns celebrating Lithuanian “sakustas,” or prebooked and prepaid (typically with Jewish money) dinner parties.⁸⁹ Killing orders issued in July 1941 instructed the SS and Police commanders to ensure that members of the execution commandos came to no harm.⁹⁰ Within the framework of *seelische Betreuung* (pastoral care), social get-togethers in the evenings as well as excursions and other forms of entertainment took place in order to wipe out the impressions of the day. Having experienced the symptoms of nervous collapse firsthand while witnessing model executions, Himmler issued a secret SS-order on December 12, 1941, in which he proclaimed:

It is the holy duty of senior leaders and commanders personally to ensure that none of our men who have to fulfill this heavy duty should suffer emotional or personal damage thereby. This task is to be fulfilled through the strictest discipline in the execution of official duties, through comradesly gatherings at the end of the days which have included such difficult tasks. The comradesly gathering must on no account, however, end in the abuse of alcohol. It should be an evening in which they sit and eat at a table, as far as possible in the best German domestic style, with music, lectures and an introduction to the beauties of German intellectual and emotional life to occupy the hour.⁹¹

On later occasions in both speeches and conversations, Himmler spoke of the “heaviest task” the SS ever had to perform, and of the *Anständigkeit*, the “decency,” that had been preserved in spite of it. Indeed, it is this monstrous linking of murder and morality, of criminal behavior and self-fashioned decency, which is at the core of the perpetrators’ mentality. Within the framework of this particular brand of Nazi ethics, a completely new understanding of decency was created. Hannah Arendt

spoke of the banality of evil, others of the normality of crime. The Israeli psychologist Dan Bar-On introduced the term “paradoxical morality,” a concept based upon the assumption that the perpetrator has erected a protective wall between the crimes that he committed and his own sense of morality:

Acknowledging moral responsibility for all of one’s former atrocious activities, [however], threatened a perpetrator’s psychological integrity. Totally repressing all the atrocious memories could be evidence of not being moral at all. Therefore, only a paradoxical morality could resolve this conflict. By remembering a single vignette of an atrocious activity—and feeling guilty about it all these years—a self-perception (or deception) of morality could be maintained.⁹²

Indeed, almost all-ordinary men developed the ability to make a smooth transition back into their day-to-day existences, and to lead “normal lives” after they had been protagonists in brutalities and mass murder. Expressed differently, with few exceptions the murderers were spared the lifelong symptoms of trauma that were and remain the very legacy of the surviving victims.

Notes

1. See also, Konrad Kwiet, “The Onset of the Holocaust: The Massacres of Jews in Lithuania in June 1941.” Annual lecture delivered as J. B. and Maurice Shapiro Senior Scholar-in-Residence at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum on December 4, 1995. Published under the same title but expanded in *Power, Conscience and Opposition: Essays in German History in Honour of John A Moses*, ed. Andrew Bonnell et al. (New York: Peter Lang, 1996), pp. 107–21. The present article is largely based upon these contributions. A recent publication that gives an excellent account of the beginnings of the “Final Solution” in Lithuania is Jürgen Matthäus, “Jenseits der Grenze: Die ersten Massenerschießungen von Juden in Litauen (Juni–August 1941),” *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 2 (1996), pp. 101–17. I am very grateful to Dr. Matthäus for his support and advice. I should also like to acknowledge the assistance and critical comments I received from Richard Breitman (American University), Raul Hilberg (University of Vermont), Michael MacQueen and Robert Waite (U.S. Office of Special Investigations), and Danny Jacobson (Sydney).

2. Relevant recent studies are Richard Breitman, *The Architect of Genocide: Himmler and the Final Solution* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991); Peter Longerich, “Vom Massenmord zur Endlösung,” *Zwei Wege nach Moskau: Vom Hitler-Stalin Pakt zum Unternehmen “Barbarossa,”* ed. Bernd Wegner (München und Zürich: Piper, 1991), pp. 251–74; Christopher R. Browning, *The Path to Genocide: Essays on Launching the Final Solution* (Cambridge: Canto edition, 1995); Philippe Burrin, *Hitler und die Juden: Die Entscheidung für den Völkermord* (Frankfurt/Main: S. Fischer, 1993); Gerald Fleming, *Hitler and the Final Solution* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994); David Cesarani, ed. *The Final Solution: Origins and Implementation* (London, 1994); Götz Aly, “Endlösung”: *Völkerverschiebung und der Mord an den europäischen Juden* (Frankfurt/Main: S. Fischer, 1995); Henry Friedlander, *The Origins of Nazi Genocide: From Euthanasia to the Final Solution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Ralf Ogorreck, *Die Einsatzgruppen und die “Genesis der Endlösung”* (Berlin: Metropol, 1996).

3. Relevant studies dealing with the "Final Solution" in Lithuania are: Yitzhak Arad, "The Final Solution in Lithuania in the Light of German Documentation," *Yad Vashem Studies* 11 (1976), pp. 234–72; idem., *Ghetto in Flames: The Struggle and Destruction of the Jews in Vilna in the Holocaust* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1982); Dov Levin, *Lithuanian Jewry's Armed Resistance to the Nazis, 1941–1945* (New York, 1985); idem., "Lithuania," in *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, vol. 3, ed. Yisrael Gutman (New York: Macmillan, 1990), pp. 895–99; Avraham Tory, *Surviving the Holocaust: The Kovno Ghetto Diary*, ed. Martin Gilbert (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1990). Dinah Porat, "The Holocaust in Lithuania. Some Unique Aspects," Cesarani, p. 69; Zvi Koltiz, "The Physical and Metaphysical Dimensions of the Extermination of the Jews in Lithuania," *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union*, eds. Lucijan D. Dobroszycki, Jeffrey S. Gurock (New York, 1993).
4. Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1985), p. 338.
5. Special Archives Moscow (Osobi), 500–1–758, fol.2, Report of Stapostelle Tilsit to Heinrich Müller, head of the Gestapo, within the Reich Security Main Office (RSHA), 1 July 1941. In Berlin parts of the report were incorporated in the Ereignismeldung UdSSR (Events in the USSR, EM), and distributed by the RSHA. See EM 4, 6.7.41. Federal Archives Koblenz R 58/217 (thereafter BAK).
6. Jörg Friedrich, *Die kalte Amnestie: NS-Täter in der Bundesrepublik* (Frankfurt/Main, S. Fischer, 1984), pp. 324–29. The trial was held in the West German city of Ulm in 1957–58.
7. See Albert Rückerl, *The Investigation of Nazi Crimes, 1945–1978: A Documentation* (Hamden: Archon Books, 1980). *Die Normalität des Verbrechens: Bilanz und Perspektiven der Forschung zu den nationalsozialistischen Gewaltverbrechen*, eds. Helge Grabitz, Klaus Bästlein, Johannes Tuchel. Festschrift für Wolfgang Scheffler (Berlin: Hentrich, 1994).
8. Trial records are kept at the Staatsanwaltschaft Ulm, KS 2/57. Bd.10, pp. 2461–72, statement Hans-Joachim Böhme, 28.2.57. Copies are kept at the Ludwigsburg-based Zentrale Stelle for the Investigations of Nazi Crimes: ZSL 207 ARZ 14/58. The verdict of the Ulm trial is published, *Justiz und NS-Verbrechen: Sammlung deutscher Strafurteile wegen nationalsozialistischer Tötungsverbrechen 1945–1966*, Bd.15, Nr.465 (Amsterdam, 1976), pp. 1–274. Verdicts of other trials dealing with the murders of the Jews along the Lithuanian borders are published in Bd. 14, Nr. 444, pp. 107–34; Nr. 485, pp. 153–64; Bd.17, Nr. 509, pp. 417–95; Nr. 521, pp. 749–88.
9. See Alfred Streim, "The Tasks of the SS-Einsatzgruppen," *Simon Wiesenthal Centre Annual* 4 (1987), pp. 309–29. This is a continuation of the debate with Helmut Krausnick in the correspondence section of SWCA 6 (1988), pp. 311–47.
10. Report *Stapostelle Tilsit*, 1.7.41.
11. *Justiz und NS-Verbrechen*, Bd.14, p. 51.
12. EM 11, 3.7.41.
13. The German military records are kept in the Federal Archives—Military Archives Freiburg (BA-MA). Relevant are the records of 61 Division (RH—61), 291 Division (RH 26–291), 18 Army (RH 20–18) and Army Group North.
14. BA-MA. RH 20–18/121. Report, 23.6.41.

15. BA-MA. RH 20–18/86, 958, 967; RH 26–61/121, 130. Reports, 22.6.41 and 23.6.41.
16. Report *Stapostelle Tilsit*, 1.7.41.
17. *Justiz und NS-Verbrechen*, Bd.15, p. 58.
18. *Stapostelle Tilsit*, Report 1.7.41.
19. EM 6, 27.6.41.
20. Osobi Archives Moscow, 500–3–34. *Dienststellenverzeichnis der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD* (April 1943).
21. *Justiz und NS-Verbrechen*, Bd.15, p. 72.
22. Report *Stapostelle Tilsit*, 1.7.41.
23. Attempts to identify the military unit involved in the first killing remained in vain. Records of Korück 583 are regarded as lost.
24. *Justiz und NS-Verbrechen*, Bd. 15, p.153; Bd. 17, p. 351.
25. KS 2/57, Bd.10; pp.2461–72. Statement Böhme, 28.2.57.
26. KS 2/57, Bd.10, pp.2727–46. Statement Pranas Lukys/Jakys, 21.2.57; pp. 2756–60. Statement, 28.2.57.
27. Information provided by Michael MacQueen (OSI).
28. See Breitman, *Architect*, p. 170, and Matthäus, *Jenseits der Grenze*, p. 150ff.
29. See Ruth Bettina Birn, *Die Höheren SS- und Polizeiführer: Himmler's Vertreter im Dritten Reich* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1986).
30. Hans-Heinrich Wilhelm, *Die Einsatzgruppe A der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD 1941/1942* (Frankfurt/Main: Lang, 1996).
31. Report *Stapostelle Tilsit*, 1.7.41.
32. EM 7, 28.7.41; EM 9, 1.7.41.
33. EM 8, 30.6.41; EM 11, 3.7.41, Lagebericht EK 1b, 1.7.41, BAK, R 70/15 Sowjetunion.
34. Landgericht Hannover, 2 KS 3/68. Verdict against Grauel et al., p. 69.
35. ZSL 207 AR—Z 14/58, Bd. 1, p. 45ff. Statement Harms, 18.10.56; Bd. 7, pp. 59–69. Statement Hersmann, 31.10.56.
36. Mr. Danny Jacobson (Sydney) has provided me with material documenting the liquidation of the Jewish community in Darbiani.
37. *Justiz und NS-Verbrechen*, Bd. 15, pp. 146–49, see also EM 19, 11.7.41.
38. See Breitman, *Architect*, p. 170.
39. Report *Stapostelle Tilsit*, 1.7.41.
40. Order no. 3 by Heydrich to Chief of the Einsatzgruppen, 1.7.41, BAK R 70/32 Sowjetunion.

41. 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/Oxford: Berg, 1993), pp. 92–110, modified German version "Auftakt zum Holocaust: Ein Polizeibatallion im Osteinsatz," in *Der Nationalsozialismus: Studien zur Ideologie und Herrschaft*, ed. Wolfgang Benz et al. (Frankfurt/Main: S. Fischer, 1993), pp. 191–208.
42. BA-MA RW 7/985.
43. BA-MA RH 22/155.
44. BA-MA RH 22/155.
45. Einsatzbefehl Nr.1, 29.6.41; Einsatzbefehl Nr.2, 1.7.41; Arbeitsrichtlinien, 2.7.41, BAK R 70/32 Sowjetunion.
46. Levin, *Lithuania*, pp. 895–99; Arad, *Final Solution*, pp. 234–72.
47. Ezra Mendelsohn, *The Jews of East Central Europe Between World Wars* (Bloomington, 1983).
48. Arad, *Ghetto in Flames*, pp. 20–28.
49. Landgericht Ulm, KS 2/57, Bd. X, pp. 2727–46. Statement Pranas Lukys/Jakys, 21.2.57; pp. 2461–72, Statement Hans-Joachim Böhme, 28.2.57. See also *Justiz und NS-Verbrechen*, Bd. XV, p. 136.
50. Material illustrating the cooperation with the Nazi agencies are kept in Political Archives Bonn, Büro des Staatssekretärs Akten betreffend Litauen, 1.5.39–31.8.44.
51. Arad, *Ghetto in Flames*, 35ff, as well as *Documents Accuse*, eds. A. Baranauskas, E. Rozauskas (Vilnius, 1970), 51–59, 123ff.
52. Matthäus, *Jenseits der Grenze*, p. 108.
53. Lithuanian State Archives Vilnius (LSA). R-1173-1-7. Report of Böhme, 23.5.41.
54. See Hans-Heinrich Wilhelm, "Antisemitismus im Baltikum," *Normalität des Verbrechens*, pp. 85–102, as well as "Offene Fragen der Holocaust-Forschung: Das Beispiel des Baltikums," *Die Schatten der Vergangenheit: Impulse zur Historisierung des Nationalsozialismus*, eds. U. Backes, E. Jesse, R. Zitelmann (Frankfurt, Berlin: 1990), pp. 403–25.
55. Matthäus, *Jenseits der Grenze*, p. 109.
56. Latvian State Archives, Riga. 1026-1-3. Undated report of EK 3a. This two-page document, completed in early February 1942, served as an introductory letter to the so-called "Jägerreport" re all executions carried out by EK 3a until 1.12.41. Osobi Archives, Moscow, 500-1-25.
57. Kowitz, *Physical and Metaphysical Dimensions*, p. 199.
58. Kowitz, *Metaphysical*, p. 200.
59. Nuremberg Doc L-180. Einsatzgruppe A: Gesamtbericht bis zum 15. Oktober 1941 (the so-called I. Stahlecker report). See also BAK R 58/217, EM 8, 30.6.41.
60. Information based on Soviet interrogation provided to me by Michael MacQueen (OSI).

61. Exemplary for this: BA MA, RL 7/15, KTB 1. Nachschubstab Luftflotte 1 (Stab Kuttig), 28.6.41, and RH 20–16/45, Bericht über die Kämpfe um Kovno.
62. BA-MA, RH 20–18/1238. Telegram OKH, 24.6.41.
63. BA-MA RH 19/III–668. Telex from OKH to Army Group North, 24.6.41.
64. Osobi Archives Moscow, 500–1; 756, report of Ex16, 10 RSHA, 1.7.41; EM 10, 6.7.41, and LSA, 1444–2–2. Proclamations by Colonel Bobelis, Lithuanian War Commandant of the City of Kaunas, 28.6.41.
65. I list here only some recent studies relevant for this topic, which has moved to the center of a debate in Germany triggered not only by a highly acclaimed exhibition about the crimes committed by the *Wehrmacht*, but also by claims of neo-conservative and military circles that the war of destruction launched against the Soviet Union was in fact only a “preventive measure” against Stalin’s plans of war and aggression. Omer Bartov, *The Eastern Front, 1941–1945: German Troops and the Barbarization of Warfare* (Oxford, 1985); idem., *Hitler’s Army: Soldiers, Nazis and War in the Third Reich* (New York: Oxford, 1992); Paul Kohl, *Ich wundere mich, daß ich noch lebe: Sowjetische Augenzeugen berichten* (Gütersloh, 1991); Theo Schulte, *The German Army and Nazi Policies in Occupied Russia* (Bonn, 1991); Christian Streit, *Keine Kameraden: Die Wehrmacht und die sowjetischen Kriegsgefangenen, 1941–1945* (Stuttgart, 1978); idem., “Ostkrieg, Antibolschewismus und ‘Endlösung,’” in *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 2 (1991), pp. 251; Jürgen Förster, “Die Sicherung des Lebensraumes,” *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg*, Bd. 4 (Stuttgart, 1983); *Erobern und Vernichten: Der Krieg gegen die Sowjetunion 1941–1945: Eine Dokumentation*, ed. Reinhard Rürup (Berlin, 1991); *Vernichtungskrieg: Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941 bis 1944*, eds. Hannes Heer, Klaus Neumann (Hamburg, 1995); *Deutsch-russische Zeitenwende: Krieg und Frieden, 1941–1995*, ed. Hans-Adolf Jacobsen, Jochen Löser, Daniel Proektor, Sergej Slutsch (Baden-Baden, 1995); Hannes Heer, “Killing Fields: The Wehrmacht and the Holocaust in Belorussia,” in *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* II:2 (1997), pp. 79–101.
66. BA MA RH 20–18/90. Directives of Security Division 207, 4.7.41.
67. BA MA RH 20–18/20. Directives of Security Division 207, 5.7.41.
68. Quoted from Förster, *Die Sicherung des “Lebensraumes,”* p. 1045.
69. ZSL 207 AR-Z 14/58. Bd 1, Statement Böhme, 23.8.56.
70. See Raul Hilberg, *Perpetrators Victims Bystanders. The Jewish Catastrophe 1933–1945* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992).
71. Christopher R Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Batallion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York, 1992).
72. Daniel J. Goldhagen, *Hitler’s Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996).
73. *Justiz und NS-Verbrechen*, Bd. 15, p. 58.
74. See Streim, Correspondence, p. 332.
75. Browning, *Ordinary Men*, pp. 177–83.
76. *Justiz und NS-Verbrechen*, Bd. 15, 60, p. 154; Bd. 17, 354.

77. *Justiz und NS-Verbrechen*, Bd. 17, p. 352.
78. *Justiz und NS-Verbrechen*, Bd. 15, p. 61.
79. *Justiz und NS-Verbrechen*, Bd. 17, p. 354.
80. *Justiz und NS-Verbrechen*, Bd. 15, p. 61.
81. *Justiz und NS-Verbrechen*, Bd. 15, p. 61.
82. *Justiz und NS-Verbrechen*, Bd. 15, p. 60.
83. *Justiz und NS-Verbrechen*, Bd. 15, p. 61.
84. Quoted from *Good Old Days*, p. 33.
85. I am very grateful to Danny Jacobson for providing me with a copy of this letter.
86. ZSL 207 ARZ 14/58, Bd. 1, p.46, statement W. Harms, 18.10.56.
87. Ruckerl, *Investigation*, pp. 80–83.
88. *Justiz und NS-Verbrechen*, Bd. 17, p. 353.
89. Landgericht Ulm, KS 2/57, Bd. X, 2756–60, Statement Pranas Jakys, 28.2.57.
90. See Kwiet, *Auftakt zum Holocaust*, p. 205.
91. State Archives Latvia, Riga, 83, 1–80.
92. Dan Bar-On, “Holocaust Perpetrators and their Children: A Paradoxical Morality,” Heimmannsberg, Chr J Schmidt, *The Collective Silence. German Identity and the Legacy of Shame* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1993), p. 202ff.