

# Power, Conscience, and Opposition

Essays in German History  
in Honour of John A. Moses

Edited by  
Andrew Bonnell, Gregory Munro,  
& Martin Travers



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## The Onset of the Holocaust: The Massacre of the Jews in Lithuania in June 1941

Konrad Kwiet

Entrusted with "special tasks" from Adolf Hitler the way was clear in June 1941 for Heinrich Himmler, the *Reichsführer-SS* and the "Architect of Genocide", to embark on the gradual translation into reality of the programme of the "Final Solution".<sup>1</sup> Within this programme there were at this stage still alternative "solutions" but they all had one thing in common: the removal of all Jews living under Nazi rule — and as the final aim — their biological extermination. The decision-making processes, transitions and radicalisations took place at various bureaucratic levels and at different geographic locations and against the background of the war of destruction, code-named *Barbarossa* launched against the Soviet Union, the state-sanctioned *Krankenmord* committed within the secret "Euthanasia" programme and the large-scale and ambitious re-settlement projects, all campaigns designed to establish the "New Order" in Europe based on Nazi doctrines and Nazi domination.

The circle of perpetrators,<sup>2</sup> recruited for the *Osteinsatz*, deployment in the East, consisted of members of the SS *Einsatzgruppen*, of "ordinary men" from the police force, "regular" military men, personnel serving in other German administrative bodies as well as the vast army of indigenous collaborators. Mass executions, referred to by Raul Hilberg as the "practice of open-air shooting", in June 1941 signalled the prelude to the Holocaust and remained the dominant pattern of organised mass murder in the occupied Soviet Union even after the first wave of killing. The first *Judenaktionen* — actions taken against Jews — took place in Lithuanian border villages. On 24 June, two days after the assault upon the Soviet Union, 201 persons were executed in Garsden. 214 deaths are recorded in Krottingen on 25 June, 111 in Polangen on 27 June. Among the 526 victims there were two women who had refused to be separated from their husbands. By far the most easily recognisable group of victims for the perpetrators were the Jews, by virtue of their flowing beards, their hats and caftans. The remaining victims were communists and other persons regarded as "hostile" to the German Reich. When, years later, the murders were uncovered, more or less by chance, the subsequent trial caused a sensation.<sup>3</sup> In the course of the trial, conducted in Ulm in Germany in 1957 and 1958, crimes came to light that had been covered up or rigorously denied until then. Efforts were made to initiate the

systematic investigation of Nazi crimes, resulting in the establishment of the Ludwigsburg-based *Zentrale Stelle*, the Central Office of State Judicial Authorities.<sup>4</sup> As a result of the investigations some 105,000 legal proceedings were instigated, of which not more than 6,500 led to convictions: less than six per cent.<sup>5</sup> The main defendants in Ulm maintained that the killing order on 22 or 23 June 1941 had been conveyed verbally by Dr Stahlecker, Chief of *Einsatzgruppe A*.<sup>6</sup> Their testimonies were the source of a further myth which they had good reason to wish to propagate: that their actions were based on a general, written *Führerbefehl* — order from Hitler — prescribing the extermination of all Jews, including women and children. These claims were given credence for years by courts of law as well as by historians. Alfred Streim, the Director of the *Zentrale Stelle* was the first to wage war against these apologetic claims, sparking off a controversy from which he emerged the victor.<sup>7</sup> New Nazi documents, recently discovered in former Soviet archives, validate Streim's stance. They shed new light on the onset of the Holocaust, on the first murders of Jews committed in Lithuania in June 1941.

The first killing orders were given neither by Stahlecker nor by Hitler.<sup>8</sup> They were issued in Berlin by Heinrich Müller, the Head of the *Gestapo* office within the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* — SS Reich Main Security Office (RSHA) — and conveyed via telex on 23 and 24 June 1941 to the *Stapo*-Office in Tilsit.<sup>9</sup> In other words, they were passed down through the official channel of command. As the regional branch of the RSHA, the *Stapo* Tilsit had all along been commissioned with the task of preparing and carrying out *Säuberungsaktionen* — cleansing operations — along the former Soviet-Lithuanian border. Its area of operation was limited to a twenty-five kilometre wide strip of land. There were similar allocations of territory and special regulations in other border areas in an effort to afford the mobile SS *Einsatzgruppen* "the greatest possible freedom of movement".<sup>10</sup> The rapid military advances envisaged and the planned conquest of the "new living space" presupposed an ease in crossing borders. To this effect, the *Stapo* Tilsit, under the leadership of *SS-Sturmabführer* Böhme, received permission from the RSHA to set up its own mobile killing unit, known as *Einsatzkommando Tilsit*.

Numerous persons were recruited representing several SS and police agencies and wearing an array of different uniforms sporting various insignia. Officials of the *Gestapo*, the *Security Police* (Sipo) and the *Security Service* (SD) filled the positions of leadership and command. As well there were border policemen serving in four *Border Police Commissariats* (GPK) and five *Border Police Posts* (GPP) who were engaged in tracking down, arresting and guarding as well as the murder of the victims. Subordinate to the *Stapo-Stelle* the border police requested help from customs officers. In Garsden Jews captured by

Lithuanian collaborators remained in the custody of customs officials until the execution commando arrived. The regular *Schutzpolizei*, the Order Police, provided the marksmen, "ordinary men" stationed in Memel. Under the leadership of a police officer the execution commando consisted of thirty constables and police reserves. This was not always enough. In Krottingen and Polangen the German army offered its services voluntarily. In Krottingen twenty soldiers took part in the shootings.<sup>11</sup> They belonged to a military unit which had been serving on the Lithuanian border within the jurisdiction of the *Kommandant des rückwärtigen Armeegebietes* (Korück) 583 of the *Heeresgruppe Nord* (HGr. Nord).<sup>12</sup> In Polangen the German Air Force became an assistant to murder, a small but quite remarkable episode in the history of the Holocaust. Twenty-two Air Force men deployed at the airport which had just been occupied came forward to offer their services in the murder of Jews.<sup>13</sup> Indispensable were the services offered by Lithuanian collaborators. Their cooperation can be traced back to before World War II when the SD, especially the SD posts in Tilsit and Memel, had close contacts with their counterparts in Lithuania.<sup>14</sup> This manifested itself in the exchange not only of intelligence material but also of lists containing the names and addresses of common enemies, in particular Communists and Jews. After the Soviet annexation of Lithuania in June 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*. They were recruited shortly before the beginning of *Barbarossa*. Easily recognisable by their white arm bands with the words *Deutsche Wehrmacht* — German army — they were commissioned not only to the military combat troops — especially the advancing detachments — but also to the police battalions, the *SS Einsatzgruppen* and the *Einsatzkommando Tilsit*. They served as local guides, as translators and liaison-officers, positions through which they established contact with the local collaborators. Within the Lithuanian administration they quickly resumed their old posts or took up new and higher ones. It was also Lithuanian collaborators — agents or informers, "activists" or "partisans", "nationalists" or "militia men" (*Selbstschutz*) who not only instigated local pogroms but who arrested and handed over to the German authorities Jews and Communists known to them. In Garsden, Krottingen and Polangen the victims were brought to *Sammelplätze*, collecting points, and guarded there until the arrival of the German killing squads.

The process of extermination can be reconstructed. Commandos were sent off to search for suitable murder and burial sites. In Garsden a *Panzergraben* proved to be an ideal spot, a tank trap situated behind the wall of a damaged stable. Five kilometres outside Krottingen was a small forest with a wooded trail which had also served as a trench. In Polangen on the Baltic Sea there were dunes and a site shielded by high bushes. From the outset efforts were made and very soon concrete instructions

issued to reconnoitre a terrain which would facilitate a swift and uninterrupted liquidation while at the same shielding the crimes. Such locations determining the topography of the Holocaust in occupied Soviet Union had to be remote but easily accessible by road. Dunes along the coastlines, in the hinterland hill-shaped land formations marked by ditches, slopes or ravines or in wooded areas clearings or spots situated at the edge of forests served as murder and burial sites. In Garsden, Krottingen and Polangen victims were selected and forced to deepen and widen the pits. Later, during large-scale killing operations, such as the ghetto liquidation at Riga, SS architects and other experts were called in to assist in the design and construction of grave sites that would accommodate up to 30,000 corpses.

After the preparation and sealing off of the killing fields came the final stage in the exacting procedure that would end in mass murder. At the collecting points the examination and selection of the victims took place. Valuables were confiscated, collected in boxes and registered on lists. They formed part of the coveted *Judennachlass* — the Jewish bequest — from which many filled their own coffers. Women and children stayed behind. They were accommodated in barns or other compounds, guarded by Lithuanians and exposed to ill-treatment, forced labour and starvation. They soon came to be regarded as a “burden” both by the local administration and by the indigenous population. Soon the decision was taken to dispose of them as *unnütze Esser*.<sup>15</sup> At this point the green light was given to recruit Lithuanians as killers. In Garsden the males were sent on foot to the *Panzergraben*. In Krottingen and Polangen trucks were used. With no loss of time the victims were driven forcibly — accompanied by beatings and verbal threats — to the pits. 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-strong commando stood at a distance of twenty metres from the pit's edge. Two marksmen were instructed to take aim with their rifles at one victim. SS officers gave the word to shoot after they delivered this final message to the victim: “On order of the Führer you are to be executed for crimes against the German army”.<sup>16</sup> After each round a new group was driven to the edge of the pit and forced to push any corpses into the pit that had not fallen in. Bodies that were still moving were given the *coup de grace*. Further layers of corpses were then stacked on their lifeless forms. This killing procedure was later streamlined, ensuring a speeding up of operations, a higher success rate on the first shot and savings in ammunition. The pits were covered with sand. The addition of lime was considered unnecessary. Little time passed before neighbouring villagers detected the tell-tale smells of rapidly decomposing flesh. No doctors were present at the executions to certify the deaths. It happened at other sites on occasion that one or two survivors of the executions managed to disentangle themselves from the mass of corpses and emerge in an agonising stupor from the pit.

The first *Judenaktionen* were discussed at length with the highest representatives of the SS and the police. On 24 June 1941 the actions taken in Garsden were discussed with Stahlecker. He declared himself in basic agreement with the procedures employed.<sup>17</sup> One day later contact was established with Sandberger, the Chief of the EK1a in Memel, and it was agreed that "all actions deemed necessary in the future would be carried out in the same way". By mid-July *Einsatzkommando Tilsit* had distinguished itself through its murder of 3,302 persons.<sup>18</sup> On 30 June Himmler and Reinhard Heydrich, Chief of the Sipo and the SD, had appeared in the Lithuanian border district in order to be briefed on the "measures employed". They both "approved unreservedly of the measures taken".<sup>19</sup> Inspection tours of other *Einsatzorte* are also documented.<sup>20</sup> They were always linked up with the issuing of new killing orders. It is doubtless not a coincidence that it was only at the end of June 1941 — after the experiences and lessons of Lithuania — that Heydrich dispatched his famous "Principal Guidelines" and "Operational Orders".<sup>21</sup> Addressed to the Chiefs of the *Einsatzgruppen* and the Higher SS and Police Leaders (HSSPF) they sanctioned the elimination of Jews, Communists and other "radical elements". They also contained clear instructions to encourage "anti-communist and anti-Jewish circles" to instigate pogroms, which were referred to by the euphemistic term of "self-cleansing" measures.

In Lithuania hatred of the Jews had already been expressed through pogroms. Nevertheless pogroms were not a feasible option at all times or in all locations. The wave of pogroms spanned more than forty cities and villages: one quarter of all the Jewish communities. More than 5,000 Jews became the victims of massacres in Lithuania.<sup>22</sup> The pogroms were preceded by the dissemination of anti-Semitic pamphlets and the widespread public chanting of anti-Semitic slogans. Public book-burning ceremonies were held at several market places. The burning of Jewish books and Torah scrolls symbolised — like the infamous Nazi *auto da fé* in May 1933 — not only the attempt "to set fire to the spirit" but also the intention to take the step from burning books to burning bodies.<sup>23</sup> Several synagogues were set on fire. On 26 June in Krottingen the clouds of smoke were visible for some distance. The Fire Brigade, brought in from Memel, had considerable difficulty in bringing the rapidly spreading fire under control. The Lithuanian arsonist was arrested. Identified as an "activist" he was immediately set free.<sup>24</sup> Completely ignored by the authorities were those Lithuanians who abused Jews, tormented them on the streets, robbed or assaulted them, shot, hanged or beat them to death. "Self-cleansing" operations took place publicly for all to see. Wide sections of the local population greeted them with applause and approbation. The German *Säuberungsaktionen* also met with wide-spread "sympathetic understanding".<sup>25</sup> In little time at all news of the first shootings had spread. In Krottingen curious townsfolk made their way hurriedly to the market place, jostling with each other for

a good vantage point and demanding that those arrested be hanged. The scene was little different in Polangen. In Kovno the diabolic fervour displayed defied anything known about the limits of human cruelty.<sup>26</sup> On the evening of 24 June 1941 the battles being waged in the Lithuanian capital were over.<sup>27</sup> One day later Stahlecker arrived with a small advancing detachment of his *Einsatzgruppe*. Contacts were immediately established with local militia leaders. In the same night the actions began "without any visible indication to the outside world of a German order or of any German suggestion", as Stahlecker later boasted.<sup>28</sup> Over a period of three days 3,500 Jews were put to death.

The slaughter attracted large audiences. Women with children in their arms pushed their way through to the front rows. Laughter and shouts of "bravo" could be heard as group after group of victims were beaten to death with iron rods or wooden sticks. At intervals someone would strike up the Lithuanian national anthem to add to the festive mood of the day. The pavement was washed down regularly with hoses. German soldiers stood by and watched the bloodbath. The scenes of horror made an indelible impression on them.<sup>29</sup> Some soldiers were at pains to capture the events of the day on film. In official war diaries and reports of the time, however, there can be found only few, fleeting, almost incidental references to these events.<sup>30</sup> At German Military Headquarters news of the spectacular scenes were greeted merely with a shrug of the shoulders. Something that has remained unknown until today: it was in fact the OKH (High Command of the Army) itself that had issued the order not to hinder in any way the participation of the Lithuanian police in the *Säuberungsaktionen*. This order was issued to the 18th Army on 24 June.<sup>31</sup> It is only one example of the "excellent spirit of cooperation" that had been achieved between the army and the SS in matters relating to the campaign being waged against the common "Jewish-Bolshevist" enemy. The legend of a "clean" and "innocent" German army<sup>32</sup> that had no knowledge of the murder of the Jews and other crimes has long been destroyed. Military orders and actions saw to it that the Commissars of the Red Army were captured and eliminated. Treatment of prisoners-of-war of Jewish origin was no different. Directives existed to "render harmless" as quickly as possible the "bands" of Soviet soldiers, Communists and Jews who had hideouts in the forests.<sup>33</sup> Commissioned with the task of "securing" and "pacifying" the newly conquered territories, military authorities introduced laws for the stigmatisation of the Jews: the compulsory wearing of Yellow Badges, ghettoisation, and forced labour. In many places regular units of the army continued to take part in the mass shootings of Jews and, from the Autumn of 1941 onwards, of gypsies. The difference was that, unlike in the Lithuanian border districts, they no longer did it voluntarily but only when requested by the SS or when a direct order came through the military command channel. Time and time again the military authorities saw themselves compelled to impress upon soldiers and officers that it was not within



their jurisdiction to take unauthorised or independent action against "politically and racially unreliable elements", or, as it was clarified in a directive of 5 July 1941, that the only possible justification for shooting civilians could be that they were Communists or Jews.<sup>34</sup> The clear defining of areas of jurisdiction meant that this task fell to the SS and Police. The "close cooperation" with the army, as repeatedly laid claim to by the SS, as well as its "pleasingly positive attitude" towards the *Judenfrage* can be illustrated by the following episode. During a discussion between General Franz von Roques, commander of the *rückwärtiges Heeresgebiet* (Rear Army North) and General Field Marshall Ritter von Leeb, Chief Commander of the *Heeresgruppe Nord* (Army Group North), the pogrom in Kovno was mentioned. Early in July 1941, Ritter von Leeb noted in his diary:<sup>35</sup> "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 way would be to sterilise all male Jews." The consensus between these two men that the elimination of the Jews should be attained through mass sterilisation rather than mass murder is a clear indication of how deep-seated racial hatred and genocidal aims had already become in the thinking of high-ranking conservative army officers. This helps explain too why military leaders as well as all other social elites offered no resistance to the "Final Solution". Indeed it was the absence of a massive oppositional force both before and after the outbreak of World War II that made possible and even assisted the putting into practice of the programme of the "Final Solution". In an effort to re-establish "law and order", the German *Feldkommandantur* in Kovno ordered the disarming and disbandment of all "partisan" and "self-defence" groups on 28 June 1941. At the same time measures were under way to recruit "reliable elements" as *Hilfspolizisten* (auxiliary policemen) to assist in the ongoing executions. On 28 June the SK 1b arrived in Kovno. On 2 July EK 3, under the leadership of *SS-Standartenführer* Jäger, arrived with the intention of solving the *Judenfrage* in Lithuania once and for all, and through the most "draconian measures". Within a period of a few weeks centres of Lithuanian Jewry were extinguished. Some 170,000 Jews were murdered. The 35,000 Jews still alive were incarcerated in the forced ghettos of Kovno, Vilnius, Schaulen and Svencionys.<sup>36</sup> Most of them fell victim to the "Final Solution" at a later stage.

### THE PERPETRATORS

When the policemen in Memel were assigned to the execution commando it is highly unlikely that any of them knew that they would be asked to kill Jews. It was only when they were already *en route* to Garsden that they learnt that they were being sent to take part in the

killing of Jews. This news was met by surprise. One police officer declared: "Good gracious! These are consequences of the assault against Russia that nobody thought of!"<sup>37</sup> He had the commando step forward and, in a state of nervous agitation, proclaimed that "the Jewish delinquents had resisted the German troops". Such pronouncements were commonplace at the time and served to explain away the murders in terms of *Säuberungsaktionen* and *Strafaktionen* (retaliatory actions). Consequently Jews were categorised as "snipers", "plunderers", "agitators", "traitors", "partisans", "bandits", "suspicious" or "radical elements". The language employed to describe the Jews was and remained a key element of the strategy of legitimisation and made it easier for "ordinary men" to commit murder.<sup>38</sup>

There had indeed been resistance to the invading German army, not only at but also behind the front lines. On the first day of *Barbarossa* the Lithuanian border districts had already fallen into German hands. Krottingen was taken after three hours, Polangen fell after eight hours of battle. The bloody battle waged to gain Garsden lasted fifteen hours, with massive losses.<sup>39</sup> After fifteen hours detachment units of the 291st and 61st Division had advanced sixty-five kilometres deep into Lithuanian territory.<sup>40</sup> 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, in the water or in houses. In the Headquarters of the Regiments and Divisions of the 18th Army and the Army Group North reports were received of the "treacherous" and "insidious" methods employed by the enemy. They culminated in the news that at some locations soldiers who had been injured and left behind had been found murdered and their bodies mutilated.<sup>41</sup>

None of the military reports of the time contain references to the alleged resistance of Jews to the invading German army. Furthermore, there is nothing to be found in the wealth of archival material and historical records that would attest to the existence of a *Führerbefehl*. I am convinced that such an order was never given. When in 1941 the mobile units of the SS, police and military embarked on their journey to the East they were equipped with guidelines, instructions and directives that specified their mission, their channel of command as well as the target groups that were to be liquidated at once. Whatever applied for the first murders of Jews had application too for all subsequent *Judenaktionen*. In each case an order was issued, usually in writing but on occasions verbally first and then followed by a written confirmation. In each case a report had to be submitted. The killing orders and subsequent reports reveal a clear and consistent genocidal strategy. In the first instance there was the murder of all Jewish males of draft age. In August the women and old people followed. Some time afterwards the children were included as the final, "logical" step: the survival of Jewish orphans was out of the question. Although there were variations in regards to time and location and some "overlapping" in the operations,

this sequence within the killing operations can be regarded as a basic, consistent pattern.<sup>42</sup> The procedure was chosen not only because it denied the victims any chance of resistance or survival but also because it was the best method of familiarising the murderers quickly with the practice of liquidation. They soon got used to the routine. The gradual process of rehearsing for murder was facilitated too by exercises in strengthening group bonds and ensuring conformance to Nazi ideology. These were well rewarded. Very quickly the "ordinary men" developed the ability and preparedness to commit mass murder.

In EK Tilsit, as in all SS and police units, it was taken for granted that every member would prove his worth at least once in an execution commando. This unwritten regulation led both to feelings of guilt as well as relief in most individuals. Three groups can be distinguished in terms of their response. The first group included those men who displayed particular zeal and brutality, who were proud of their achievements as marksmen and the honour they had brought them. Later they became known as the *Dauer-Schützen* (their services as marksmen continued to be required). In the second group were those men who experienced a feeling of discomfort, of uneasiness or even pangs of conscience at the task they had been set. Amongst themselves they vented their disquiet. Excuses were found to justify their actions. One marksman answered the question why so many very young and old Jews must be shot with: "How should I know? After all, I am only here to take orders!"<sup>43</sup> Later during court trials many of the accused declared that they hadn't wished to be seen as cowardly and that they had offered each other encouragement to go on. Private discussions after the murder of the Jews in Garsden culminated in the 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!" The third and smallest group included the *Drückeberger* and *Verweigerer* — those who made efforts to have themselves relieved of duty with the execution commando or who objected to a killing order. Not one of them, however, refused an order to shoot male Jews. Only when at a later stage women and children were included in the executions was there resistance by a few to the command. After one bestial slaughter of women and children a police officer declared:<sup>44</sup> "I'm not doing that again in the future. It's not a good calling-card for the police." The Chief of the Gestapo responded, "Fine, then you can leave. You don't need to do this. You have a wife and children." Such exchanges took place at many locations. No one who protested against a "Judenaktion" or 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 authorised or instructed to do so, risked trial and punishment — not for their act of murder but for infringement of SS jurisdiction.

No sanctions were imposed on those perpetrators who were not capable of carrying out designated tasks and had to be replaced. There were some marksmen in Garsden, Krottingen and Polangen who succumbed to feelings of nausea and nervous tension during the massacres. These reactions were recorded at many killing sites. Repeatedly there were scenes of babies being torn from their mothers' arms, tossed up and shot dead in mid-air. Repeatedly there were scenes in which the shots of inexperienced, nervous or poorly-trained marksmen tore open the heads of their victims, spraying bone and brain matter mixed with blood as far as the faces, hands and uniforms of the murderers. In these cases a few of the perpetrators suffered vomiting attacks or developed later severe eczema or other psychosomatic disorders. SS medical experts and "reliable" university professors were asked for their advice and assistance. The patients were cared for in special wards in state clinics and afterwards in sanatoriums and holiday resorts run by the SS. From the outset the architects of the "Final Solution" were concerned about the well-being of its executors. In Garsden, Krottingen and Polangen much coveted rations of schnapps were distributed following each action and, as a lasting memento of the day, group photographs taken. Jovial and noisy get-togethers took place in the evenings. In the local inns there were celebrations in the form of the Lithuanian "Sakustas", convivial dinner parties which had been pre-booked and which were paid for with money taken from the Jews. Killing orders issued in June 1941 contained clear instructions to the SS and Police Commanders to ensure that the execution commandos came to no harm. Within the framework of "pastoral care" further social get-togethers in the evenings as well as excursions and other forms of entertainment were arranged in an attempt, it was claimed, to wipe out the impressions of the day. Having experienced at first hand the symptoms of nervous collapse while witnessing model executions and concerned for the well-being of his men, Himmler issued a secret SS directive on 12 December 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 fulfil this heavy duty should grow coarse or suffer emotional or personal damage thereby. This task is to be fulfilled through the strictest discipline in the execution of official duties, through comradely gatherings at the end of days which have included such difficult tasks. The comradely gathering must on no account however, end in the abuse of alcohol. It should be an evening on which, as far as possible, they sit and eat at table in the best German domestic style, and music, lectures and introductions to the beauties of German intellectual and emotional life occupy the hours. To relieve men at the appropriate stage from such difficult missions, send them on leave or transfer them to other absorbing and fulfilling tasks — possibly even to another area — I regard as an important and pressing matter.<sup>45</sup>

On later occasions as well, in speeches and conversations, Himmler spoke of the "heaviest task" the SS had ever had to perform, and of the *Anständigkeit* ("decency" — a German word which is, as Hans Mommsen has put it, so imbued with connotations of an eroded bourgeois morality that it is almost untranslatable)<sup>46</sup> that had been preserved in spite of it. Indeed, it is this monstrous linking of murder and morality, of criminal behaviour and self-fashioned decency which is at the core of the perpetrator-mentality. Within the framework of this particular brand of Nazi ethics a totally 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 on the assumption that the perpetrator has erected a wall of protection between the crimes he has committed and his 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 those years — a self-perception (or deception) of morality could be maintained.<sup>47</sup>

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

## THE VICTIMS

Invasion and occupation, shootings and pogroms gave rise to a flood of refugees. In June 1941 thousands fled their homes in a state of panic. Many were captured, 15,000 succeeded in reaching safety. More than 200,000 remained in Lithuania, amongst them a number of Jews who had been driven out of Germany by the Nazis. Numerous Jews had to flee when the Memelland was annexed in March 1939. Several of them had found refuge in Garsden, Krottingen, Polangen and other places. They were shot dead by policemen to whom they were often known. Jews tried to go into hiding in the homes of friends or sympathetic neighbours. Closed doors and denunciations meant that this escape route was not open to many. Orthodox Jews sought refuge in the religious teachings and traditions of their forefathers, especially in the face of impending murder. Relying heavily on interpretations of the Torah they explained their fate, their journey to the sites of liquidation as "death to glorify

God", as an act of "sanctifying the name of God". Right to the end they maintained their traditional attitudes of faith and sacrifice, they practised "Kiddush ha-shem". The murderers recognised the martyrs by their beards, hats and caftans. With bewilderment they registered their final gestures. In Krottingen they observed a rabbi attempting to calm his congregation huddled together at the market place. In Garsden they came across an old rabbi and other Jews whose manner was "conspicuously calm". On the short journey to the sites of execution some cried or moaned quietly to themselves. Others protested their innocence and begged for mercy. One old well-dressed man was granted temporary reprieve. While the Jews were assembling and being divided into groups he had introduced himself as a German reserve officer who had been highly decorated during World War I. He was sent to Memel where his identity would be verified. In Polangen the Germans had overlooked a paediatrician who was on duty in a military hospital, working alongside German medical officers. He was picked up in an SS car and executed while still wearing his doctor's white coat. At the pits some of the victims asked to be shot but together with their other family members rather than individually. It even happened that victims who had been wounded by a gunshot asked the marksmen in German to put a quick end to their pain. The murderers were surprised at this behaviour. Some even reported mockingly during their testimonies in court that the victims had offered no resistance. In the Ulm verdict one can read that the Jews "had succumbed to their fate with remarkable composure. When they had recognised what lay ahead, they prayed, wrung their hands and walked stoically towards death".<sup>48</sup> Jews in Kovno and elsewhere found the strength to pray even during the pogroms. One lance corporal serving in a German Bakers Company, upon witnessing the slaughter, recalls: "Before they were beaten to death the Jews prayed and murmured to themselves. Some of them said prayers to themselves as they lay badly beaten on the ground."<sup>49</sup> In one letter of farewell the following words can be found: "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".<sup>50</sup>

## ENDNOTES

- 1 I list here only a few recent studies relevant for the preparation and implementation of the "Final Solution". Richard Breitman, *Architect of Genocide: Himmler and the Final Solution* (New York, 1991); Christopher R. Browning, *The Path to Genocide. Essays on Launching the Final Solution* (New York, 1992); Ralf Ogorreck, *Die Einsatzgruppen der Sicherheitspolizei und des Sicherheitsdienstes im Rahmen der Genesis der Endlösung*. Phil. Diss. FU Berlin 1992; Philippe Burrin, *Hitler und die Juden. Die Entscheidung für den Völkermord* (Frankfurt/M., 1993); Gerald Fleming, *Hitler and the Final Solution* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, 1994); Götz Aly, "Endlösung". *Völkerverschiebung und der Mord an den europäischen Juden* (Frankfurt/M., 1995).
- 2 See Raul Hilberg, *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe 1933-1945* (New York, 1994).
- 3 Jörg Friedrich, *Die kalte Amnestie. NS-Täter in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Frankfurt/M., 1984), pp. 324-7.
- 4 Adalbert Rückerl, *The Investigation of Nazi Crimes, 1945-1978* (Hamden, 1980).
- 5 Zentrale Stelle, Statistik, 1 January 1992.
- 6 Landgericht Ulm KS 2/57. Bd. X, 2465. The verdict is published in *Justiz und NS-Verbrechen. Sammlung deutscher Strafurteile wegen Nationalsozialistischer Tötungsverbrechen, 1945-1966*, Bd. 15 (Amsterdam, 1976). See also Helmut Krausnick/Hans-Heinrich Wilhelm, *Die Truppe des Weltanschauungskrieges. Die Einsatzgruppen der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD* (Stuttgart, 1981), pp. 162f.
- 7 See Alfred Streim, "The Tasks of the SS-Einsatzgruppen", *Simon Wiesenthal Centre Annual* 4 (1987): 209-328, as well as the continuation of the debate in *ibid.* 6 (1989): 311-47.
- 8 Verdict, p. 51f.
- 9 The orders themselves are regarded as lost. Dates and transmission of the orders, however, are recorded in a report on the execution of the action. Dated 1.7.1942 the report was sent by the Stapo Tilsit to the Berlin Gestapo office addressed to Müller. Copies were sent to Stahlecker, to Rasch, the Inspector of the Sipo and SD in Königsberg, and to Sandberger, the leader of the Einsatzkommando 1a (EK 1a). The report is kept in the SS record collections of the (former) Special Archives, Moscow: 500.1.748. In Berlin parts of the report were incorporated in the Ereignismeldungen (EM) compiled and distributed by the RSHA. See EM 4, 6.7.41.
- 10 EM 11, 3.7.41
- 11 Report Stapo Tilsit, 1.7.41
- 12 Attempts to identify the military unit involved remained in vain. The records of Körtick 583 are regarded as lost.
- 13 Report Stapo Tilsit, 1.7.41.
- 14 KS 2/57, X, 2791, X, 2461-72.
- 15 KS 2/57, X, 2649, X, 2444, 2454.

- 16 Verdict, pp. 59, 120, 154.
- 17 Report Stapo Stelle Tilsit, 1.7.41.
- 18 EM 26, 18.7.41.
- 19 Report Stapo Tilsit, 1.7.41.
- 20 See Breitman, *Architect of Genocide*, p. 170.
- 21 BA Koblenz R 58/214. Heydrich to the HSSPF Jeckeln, v.d. Bach, Prützmann and Korsemann, 2.7.41 as well Heydrich to the Chiefs of the Einsatzgruppen, 29.6.41.
- 22 See Dov Levin, "Lithuania", in Yisrael Gutman, ed., *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, vol. 3 (New York, London, 1990), pp. 895-9; Yitzak Arad, "The 'Final Solution' in Lithuania in the Light of German Documentation", *Yad Vashem Studies* 11 (1976): 234-72.
- 23 See Zvi Kolitz, "The Physical and Metaphysical Dimensions of the Extermination of the Jews in Lithuania", in Lucjan Dobroszycki and Jeffrey S. Gurock, eds, *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union* (New York, 1993), p. 199.
- 24 KS 2/57, vol X, 2443, 2483, 2488.
- 25 National Archives Latvia, Riga. PSR CVVA P-1026-1-3. Undated report of EK 3a. This 11 page document, completed in early February 1942, served as an introductory letter to the so-called Jäger-report re all executions carried out by EK 3a until 1.12.41. The 4th and 5th copies are kept at the Special Archives, Moscow: ZSSM 500-1-25, 109-127. A copy of the 5th copy is kept at the Zentrale Stelle Ludwigsburg: USSR no 108, Bild Nr. 27-38.
- 26 See Kolitz, "Physical and Metaphysical Dimensions", p. 200
- 27 BA-MA Freiburg RH 20-16/45. Bericht über die Kämpfe um Kowno.
- 28 Nbg. Doc L-180. Einsatzgruppe A: Gesamtbericht bis zum 15. Oktober 1941, 22. ("Stahlecker-Report").
- 29 See the reports and recollections published in E. Klee, W. Dressen and V. Riess, eds, *"The Good Old Days". The Holocaust Seen by its Perpetrators and Bystanders* (New York, 1991), pp. 28-37.
- 30 Exemplary for this are: BA-MA RL 7/15 KTB 1, Nachschubstab Luftflotte 1 (Stab Kuttig I), 28.6.41, and RH 20-16/45. Bericht über die Kämpfe um Kovno.
- 31 BA-MA RH 20-18/1238. OKH Telegram, 24.6.41.
- 32 I list only some recent studies relevant for this topic. O. Bartov, *The Eastern Front, 1941-1945: German Troops and the Barbarisation of Warfare* (Oxford, 1985); O. Bartov, *Hitler's Army: Soldiers, Nazis and War in the Third Reich* (New York, Oxford, 1992); Th. Schulte, *The German Army and Nazi Policies in Occupied Russia* (Oxford, 1989); Chr. Streit, *Keine Kameraden. Die Wehrmacht und die sowjetischen Kriegsgefangenen, 1941-1945* (Stuttgart, 1978); J. Förster, "Die Sicherung des 'Lebensraumes'", in *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg*, Bd. 4 (Stuttgart, 1983); P. Jahn and R. Rürup, eds, *Erobern und Vernichten. Der Krieg gegen die Sowjetunion 1941-1945*, (Berlin, 1991); H. Heer and K. Neumann, eds, *"Vernichtungskrieg". Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941-1944* (Hamburg 1995). See also the review of Karl-Heinz Janßen, "Als



- Soldaten Mörder wurden", *Die Zeit*, Nr. 12, 24.3.95: 13.
- 33 BA-MA RH 20-18/90. Directives of Security Division 207, 4.7.41.
- 34 BA-MA RH 20-18/20. Directives of Security Division 207, 5.7.41.
- 35 Quoted from J. Förster, "Die Sicherung des 'Lebensraumes'", p. 1045.
- 36 For the final stages of the Holocaust in Lithuania see Dov Levin, *Lithuanian Jewry's Armed Resistance to the Nazis, 1941-1945* (New York, 1985); Yitzhak Arad, *Ghetto in Flames: The Struggle and Destruction of the Jews in Vilna in the Holocaust* (New York, 1982); Auraham Tory, *Surviving the Holocaust, The Kovno Ghetto Diary*, edited by Martin Gilbert (Cambridge, London, 1990); Konrad Kwiet, "Juden und Banditen". SS-Ereignismeldungen aus Litauen 1943/1944", in *Jahrbuch für Antisemitismusforschung* 2 (1993), edited by Wolfgang Benz, pp. 405-20.
- 37 Quoted from Friedrich, *Die kalte Amnestie*, p. 324.
- 38 See Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York, 1992), and Konrad Kwiet, "From the Diary of a Killing Unit", in John Milfull, ed., *Why Germany?* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 75-90. Modified German version published under the title "Auftakt zum Holocaust. Ein Polizeibattalion im Osteinsatz", in *Der Nationalsozialismus. Studien zur Ideologie und Herrschaft*, edited by W. Benz, H. Buchheim and H. Mommsen (Frankfurt/M. 1994), pp. 191-208.
- 39 The German military records are kept at BA MA Freiburg, relevant are the record groups RH 26-61, RH 26-291, and RH 20-18.
- 40 BA-MA RH 20-18/1210, Report, 23.6.41.
- 41 BA-MA RH 20-18/86, 958, 967; RH 26-61/128,130, reports, 22.6.41 and 23.6.41.
- 42 See Streim, "The Tasks of the SS-Einsatzgruppen", pp. 311-6.
- 43 Quoted from Verdict, p. 60.
- 44 *Ibid.*, p. 60.
- 45 National Archives Latvia, Riga, P83-1-80.
- 46 Hans Mommsen, "Anti-Jewish Politics and the Implementation of the Holocaust", in Konrad Kwiet, ed., *From the Emancipation to the Holocaust* (Kensington, 1987), p. 63.
- 47 Quoted from "The Good Old Days", p. 33.
- 48 Quoted from Verdict, p. 59.
- 49 Dan Bar-On, "Holocaust Perpetrators and Their Children: A Paradoxical Morality", in Barbara Heimannsberg and Christoph J. Schmidt, eds, *The Collective Silence: German Identity and the Legacy of Shame* (San Francisco, 1993), pp. 202f.
- 50 A copy of this letter, together with other material, was entrusted to me by Mr Jacobsen, Sydney.