

MESSAGES OF MURDER

A Study of the Reports
of the Einsatzgruppen of the Security
Police and the Security Service,
1941-1943

Ronald Headland



Rutherford • Madison • Teaneck
Fairleigh Dickinson University Press
London and Toronto: Associated University Presses

© 1992 by Associated University Presses, Inc.

All rights reserved. Authorization to photocopy items for internal or personal use, or the internal or personal use of specific clients, is granted by the copyright owner, provided that a base fee of \$10.00, plus eight cents per page, per copy is paid directly to the Copyright Clearance Center, 27 Congress Street, Salem, Massachusetts 01970. [0-8386-3418-4/92 \$10.00 + 8¢ pp, pc.]

Associated University Presses
440 Forsgate Drive
Cranbury, NJ 08512

Associated University Presses
25 Sicilian Avenue
London WC1A 2QH, England

Associated University Presses
P.O. Box 39, Clarkson Pstl. Stn.
Mississauga, Ontario,
L5J 3X9 Canada

The paper used in this publication meets the requirements
of the American National Standard for Permanence of Paper
for Printed Library Materials Z39.48-1984.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Headland, Ronald, 1946—

Messages of murder: a study of the reports of the Einsatzgruppen of
the Security Police and the Security Service, 1941–1943/Ronald Headland.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-8386-3418-4 (alk. paper)

1. Jews—Soviet Union—Persecutions—History—Sources.
2. Holocaust, Jewish (1939–1945)—Soviet Union—Sources.
3. Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei. Schutzstaffel. Sicherheitsdienst—History—Sources. 4. Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei. Schutzstaffel. Sicherheitspolizei—History—Sources. 5. World War, 1939–1945—Secret service—Germany—Sources. 6. Soviet Union—Ethnic relations—Sources.

I. Title. II. Title: Einsatzgruppen.

DS135.R92H4 1992

323.1'1924'047—dc20

90-56046

CIP

SECOND PRINTING 2000

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

plundering of Jewish property, extra alcohol and cigarettes, avoidance of other "nastier" employment such as heavy labor, or fighting at the front, etc. Revenge also motivated many collaborators. The Kommandos took care often to recruit auxiliary forces whose members had had relatives either murdered or deported by the Soviets.⁸² Such acts were blamed on the Jews and provided strong incentive for helping the Germans carry out the shootings.

The pogroms, described earlier, which took place under the guidance of the Kommandos, were the first occasions of collaboration. These pogroms involved both members of the civilian population and auxiliary police forces established by the Germans. They represented the first violent assault on the Jews and communists and were featured prominently in the early reports.⁸³ The Einsatzgruppen realized at once that in addition to the desirability of pogroms carried out by the local people, it was essential to enlist local collaborators to assist in carrying out their work. Stahlecker, head of Einsatzgruppe A, in his report of 15 October 1941 to Himmler wrote:

In view of the extension of the area of operations and the great number of duties which had to be performed by the Security Police, it was intended from the very beginning to obtain the cooperation of the reliable population for the fight against vermin—that is, mainly the Jews and communists. Beyond our directing of the first spontaneous actions of self-cleansing, which will be reported elsewhere, care had to be taken that reliable people should be put to the cleansing job and that they were appointed auxiliary members of the Security Police. The difference of the situation in each part of the area of operations also had to be taken into account. In Lithuania activist and nationalist people formed themselves into so-called partisan units at the beginning of the eastern campaign in order to take active part in the fight against Bolshevism. According to their own report they suffered 4000 casualties.⁸⁴

The so-called partisans in Kovno and surrounding areas were disarmed on June 28, and an auxiliary police force of five companies was organized to assist the Germans. Two companies were put at the disposal of Einsatzgruppe A and helped in every aspect of the work.⁸⁵ A report by Higher SS and Police Leader Prützmann included in a report dated 11 July 1941, less than three weeks after the beginning of the war, described the general cooperation that the Germans were receiving.

The attitude of the population of Lithuania is so far friendly towards the Germans; they help the German soldiers, the officials of the police and other organizations functioning in this area as much as possible. Their cooperation consists chiefly in the search for and turning over of Lithuanian communists, members of the Red Army who have been separated from their units, and Jews.⁸⁶

The report acknowledged that two thousand five hundred Jews had been killed in Kovno by the population during "a spontaneous uprising" and that a further rather large number of Jews was shot by the auxiliary police making a total of seven thousand eight hundred Jews killed so far. In addition a Sonderkommando of two hundred and fifty Lithuanian partisans were "being employed for possible executions outside the town."⁸⁷ A report issued two days later attested to the existence of a similar situation in Vilna where Lithuanian police units were "instructed to take part in the liquidation of the Jews." One hundred and fifty Lithuanians were appointed for this purpose. They arrested Jews, and put them in concentration camps where, on the same day, the Jews were shot. The report informed that the daily toll of Jewish victims amounted to five hundred.⁸⁸

This report reiterated the pressing need for help from local police units. In Bialystok the security of the city and environs was not completely guaranteed because of the presence of so few White Russian police forces. The original police officials functioning there in 1939 had been replaced by new officials, and these had left with the Soviets, destroying documents and files in the process. Thus it was necessary to form an auxiliary police force from the White Russian and former Polish Criminal Police officials. This force, too, was subordinate to the Kommando in Bialystok.⁸⁹

In Latvia auxiliary forces were also established in Riga.⁹⁰ It was hoped that these forces would "not turn into a Lithuanian militia."⁹¹ An earlier report had said that the Latvians were eager to organize themselves nationally. The report recognized that the Wehrmacht had been forced to use Latvian troops in order to help capture Russian soldiers hiding in the woods. The Kommando leader had urged restraint.⁹² Here was a problem which plagued the Germans throughout the war. On the one hand they needed the help of the local units; on the other they were reluctant to become too much in their debt and thus be obliged to grant autonomy to them.

In Dwinsk on 3 July 1941, the Latvians had also formed a police force and a town administration, both of which were led by a Latvian by the name of Perssons. The Latvians in this group were former army members, policemen, and members of the former Aizsargi organization (organization for self-defense) that had been formed in 1934. Sonderkommando 1b had used this 240-man police force. The Latvians were on duty in the six police districts set up thus far and were arresting Jews and evacuating them from their homes. In Dwinsk, as of July 7, 1,150 Jews had been shot and buried in prepared graves.⁹³

In Latvia and Lithuania the organizing of collaboration was the same. After the initial pogroms had occurred, the auxiliary forces were established mainly from various police units already present in combination with individuals harboring very strong anti-Jewish and anticommunist views.

In Estonia the situation was somewhat different. Here no "spontaneous demonstrations against Jewry" were reported. This, it was claimed, was due to the relatively small number of Jews and the total lack of "substantial enlightenment" of the population. The local collaborators, the Estonian Self-Protection Movement (Selbstschutz), confined themselves at this stage to simply arresting Jews and killing "only some individual communists whom they hated especially." Under the supervision of Sonderkommando la, Estonian self-protection units shot 440 male Jews over sixteen years of age. The remaining Jewesses, estimated between five hundred to six hundred, who were fit for work, were placed in work camps.⁹⁴

In the Baltic countries, therefore, collaboration in the killing operations was immediate and extensive.⁹⁵ Aside from the occasional mention of numbers cited in the above examples, the reports do not provide much in the way of details as to personnel and so on. The units were simply designated as auxiliary forces, self-protection forces, militia, or partisan forces, as in the case of Lithuania. Mention of the participation of these groups did not always appear in the reports, even though it is likely that such participation did take place. Stahlecker reported that in Lithuania the proportion of Germans to auxiliaries in the firing squads was one to eight.⁹⁶ If this was the case, then the collaborators' share in the killing of the 136,421 Jews cited in this report was considerable, but we must always keep in mind that the number of collaborators is not the only issue. Apologists for the people of eastern Europe often emphasize the relatively small numbers of collaborators in relation to the overall population. While this is certainly true, one must remember the terrible consequences of this collaboration brought about by these small numbers of people. Indeed, the four Einsatzgruppen themselves numbered only about three thousand men. This, too, was a relatively small number when compared, for example, to the regular army forces fighting in the east. Yet the Einsatzgruppen, together with other German police agencies and their collaborators, were responsible for the killing of more than one million people. Thus the numbers have little bearing on the magnitude of the killing. It was the particular murderous nature of the collaboration that proved so useful to the Germans; they found others to do their killing for them.

The draft report of Einsatzgruppe A (PS-2273) complained that in Latvia as a whole the pogroms had not been too successful. "Only a few thousand Jews" had been killed by the local forces on their own. This necessitated extensive mopping up operations, which were undertaken by the Einsatzgruppe with the help of Latvian auxiliaries. As of October 1941, thirty thousand Jews had been killed in this way.⁹⁷ Arrests and killings involving both Latvian and Lithuanians were reported throughout the summer and autumn of 1941.⁹⁸ In particular, one report described the slaughter on August 22 of 544 inmates of the Aglona lunatic asylum with