

What is being discussed is a violent nationalist movement whose anti-Polish and antisemitic attitudes were largely influenced by the German Nazism and Italian Fascism. The OUN demanded self-sacrifice to the point of death from their members and regarded murder, pragmatically, as an important part of their so-called revolutionary policy.

From 1941 onward, radicalization meant employing a mass-murder strategy for the creation of a pure Ukrainian society. Because of the collaboration with the Nazis, the primary goal, besides the fight against the Red Army, in the first weeks of the war against the Soviet Union was to murder the Jews.

The Ukrainian Militia in the Beginning of the War in 1941

After the Red Army retreated from Western Ukraine, pogroms started in many cities. The perpetrators of these pogroms were often unidentified segments of the Ukrainian population. In many cases it was a Ukrainian militia that had been set up independently of the Germans. Indeed, there are many documents that point to OUN direct responsibility for the establishment of this militia. For example, an order dated 4 July 1941, from the Rava Ruska region, asserts i.e. “The whole population is acting according to the orders of the Ukrainian National Militia, which has been established on the order of the OUN [...]”

Yaroslav Stecko, the leader of the independent Ukrainian state, during the first days of Nazi occupation of Western Ukraine, proclaimed: “We have built a militia which helps to get rid of the Jews and protect the population.” In addition, a report of the OUN’s main propaganda base in Lviv to the security service of the OUN (Sluzhby Bezpeky) dated 28 July 1941, declared: “Our militia is now arresting together with the Germans numerous Jews. Before their liquidation the Jews are defending themselves with all kinds of methods, mainly with money.”

In numerous survivors’ reports one can find examples of how the militia on their own initiative or together with the Germans tortured and murdered Jews.

The Battalion Nightingale

Prior to Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union, two Ukrainian battalions were established under the guidance of the German Military Counterintelligence. These battalions were made up of OUN-B (OUN Bandera) members and sympathizers. The battalions were given the names "Roland" and "Nightingale." The Ukrainian chief commander of Nightingale was the OUN-B leader Roman Shuchevych; the German commander was Theodor Oberlander.

I found an autobiographical text of a member of the Nightingale Battalion in an archive in Kijiv. It describes how the battalion left Lviv in the direction of Vinnytsia in the middle of July 1941: "During our march we saw with our own eyes the victims of the Jewish-Bolshevik terror, which reinforced our hatred of Jews. Therefore in two villages we shot all the Jews that we met."

In contrast to the interwar period, when Barbarossa started, the main target of the mass murder strategy were the Jews, not the Poles. Why was that?

Within the context of Nazi antisemitic policy, Bandera's OUN activity was very clear in one point: it could act in any murderous way against Jews.

Nevertheless, at the end of August 1941, the OUN and Bandera had to go underground and had to re-structure its cadres due to mass-arrests of some of its top leaders: Bandera and Stecko were sent to Sachsenhausen concentration camp; the wife of Bandera's "comrade in arms" Mykola Lebed was taken to Ravensbrück; and one of Bandera's brothers was sent to Auschwitz. In that situation, the OUN-Bandera decided to establish a military formation, larger than the former structures, which included several thousand people.

The UPA

The UPA (Ukrainian Insurgent Army) was launched in Volhynia and Polesia in late 1942 and the number of its soldiers reached approximately some ten thousand. The UPA was divided into regional structures: UPA North, UPA West and UPA South. The UPA was not a politically



independent structure, but served as the military arm of the OUN-B and its commanders were experienced OUN-B officers, therefore one can speak of the OUN-UPA.

Research into the UPA is difficult. There are not many survivors' reports since most of the Jews did not survive the pogroms in the cities or the attacks on their hideouts in the woods. Often the survivors didn't know exactly who their aggressors were. Their attackers were either not wearing any uniforms or had a diversity uniforms – as in the case of the UPA. The survivors sometimes did not know whether they were being confronted by an “ordinary” Ukrainian gang or by the UPA. So far, no document has been found wherein the UPA leadership identified the Jews in the woods as “enemies” and ordered them killed. However, one can find countless accords for a “purging of the woods of hostile elements,” as well as reports on such actions.

How did the OUN-UPA define “hostile elements”? A leaflet read on the occasion of the anniversary of the proclamation of the Ukrainian State in Lviv, half a year before the first OUN-UPA units went public in 1942: provides the answer. There one finds a statement “Today we see, that there is no class struggle, but a struggle of nations; today we see, that we are not being exploited [...] by the bourgeoisie, but by the enemy of the national order – the German, the Moscal (derogatory term of Russian), the Hungarian, the Jew and the Pole.” At this time the OUN-UPA connected Jews to their main enemies: the Poles and the Soviet partisans.

Using the common stereotype of “Zhydokomuna” (Jewish communism), the OUN-UPA associated the Jews directly with Soviet partisans. In addition, the OUN-UPA reports about the Soviet partisans often emphasized that they are made up of “Gypsies, Moscals and Jews.”

A quote from a March 1943 report shows how Jews were connected to Poles: “The Poles are eager to help the Jews and are hiding them in order to save them from the annihilation by the Germans, because they see the Jews as their natural allies in the struggle against the Ukrainians. The Poles are creating false documents and especially Polish priests are handing Christian identity documents to the Jews.”

One can construe from several such reports, the responsibility of at least some of the OUN-UPA units for the killing of Jews in the woods and other hideouts. To give one example: at the Jewish Institute in Warsaw I read a testimony by Mina Grinzajd, 14 years old at the time, who hid in bunkers near Brody: “We came [...] back and went to the forest. There we found dozens of hideouts. Altogether we were 376 people. We called our valley ‘Europe,’ because Jews from all over the world lived there. They were from Lviv, [...], Brody [...], Luck, and even from Lublin and Warsaw. We lived for five months in ‘Europe’ until an intelligence unit of the Bandera-people turned up at our hideouts and suggested we should join them. With our group of 376 people we left ‘Europe’ and settled in Krytyniw. Here, the Bandera-people gave work to all of us according to our professions. We had tailors, shoemakers and saddlers. With a group of girls I worked making sweaters for the Bandera-people. Others were sewing shirts. [...] Three months went by, when the Bandera-people began to relocate groups to ‘other villages’ (the brigades were made up of 20 to 30 people); they were brought to ‘Europe’ and shot there. In that way, we became less and less, day by day. After the last group had left, we were only 34 [...] Of 376 Jews, only 34 remained!”

In an OUN-UPA report from August 1943 one can read: “Jews have been almost completely liquidated [by the Germans], in small groups they are hiding in the woods and are waiting for a political change of the situation. In the Horny region, we liquidated seven Jews and one Jewess.”

The OUN-UPA was an illegal organization, because the Germans had outlawed them. So they couldn’t perpetrate the Holocaust alongside the Germans. But they hunted the Jews hiding in the forests or with Polish or Ukrainian families, and when they found them, they killed them. This was common practice toward the end of the war.

The OUN-UPA participated in the Holocaust in different manners. They showed their experience in mass murder as they carried out their deadly campaign against Poles in Volhynia in 1943. The main focus of OUN-UPA attacks in Volhynia were Poles; first those Poles who worked



in the German administration and later, Poles as an ethnic group. Beginning in early 1943, the OUN-UPA, attacks against Poles increased. The culminating point was on 11 July 1943. On this day OUN-UPA units attacked dozens of small villages in the areas of Kovel, Volodymyr and Horokhiv, all of them in Western Volhynia. The inhabitants were slaughtered with axes, knives and pitch forks. The massacres in Volhynia went on until the autumn of 1943, but on a smaller scale, they continued, until the arrival of the front-line in the spring of 1944. Tens of thousands of Poles were murdered in these massacres and many fled en masse.

In the UPA's personnel roster, one can find patent overlapping with the perpetrators of the Holocaust. Since the OUN-B was hoping for German military schooling it induced its members to join the Ukrainian police under Nazi command. Later, the OUN-B encouraged members of the Ukrainian police to change sides and come with their weapons to the OUN-UPA units. In March 1943, in Volhynia, about 5.000 members of the Ukrainian police deserted to the OUN-UPA. These policemen had previously participated in mass shootings of Jews and they brought with them the experience that they gained as perpetrators of the Holocaust. This may have been an additional factor in the brutality shown by the Ukrainian Nationalists in Volhynia.

Conclusion

The radical increase in antisemitism by the OUN paralleled the development of the Nazi anti-Jewish policy. In the 1930's, within the OUN, one "only" talked about relocation or expulsion of Jews. However, the option of a "final solution for the Jewish question" became relevant during the Second World War. The OUN agreed to the extermination in as much as it would lead to an "ethnically pure" Ukraine, because it meant that, there was one less "problem" to be solved. How far the OUN-UPA participated in the murder of the Jewish population depended on the political-tactical relations with the Nazis at various points in time, on the development of the war, and on the international balance of powers.

The OUN-UPA participated in different military formations, which were independent from the Germans, or collaborated with them. In the first weeks of the war in Western Ukraine, from late 1942, after going underground, they systematically killed Jews during the so-called “purging the forests of hostile elements”. They also showed their practical knowledge of mass murder during the so-called “anti-Polish action” in 1943 and 1944.

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