

Hitler's Willing Executioners

*Ordinary Germans and
the Holocaust*

DANIEL JONAH
GOLDHAGEN



Vintage Books

A DIVISION OF RANDOM HOUSE, INC.

NEW YORK

CONTENTS

Introduction: Reconceiving Central Aspects of the Holocaust	3
PART I: UNDERSTANDING GERMAN ANTISEMITISM: THE ELIMINATIONIST MIND-SET	
Chapter 1: Recasting the View of Antisemitism: A Framework for Analysis	27
Chapter 2: The Evolution of Eliminationist Antisemitism in Modern Germany	49
Chapter 3: Eliminationist Antisemitism: The "Common Sense" of German Society During the Nazi Period	80
PART II: THE ELIMINATIONIST PROGRAM AND INSTITUTIONS	
Chapter 4: The Nazis' Assault on the Jews: Its Character and Evolution	131
Chapter 5: The Agents and Machinery of Destruction	164
PART III: POLICE BATTALIONS: ORDINARY GERMANS, WILLING KILLERS	
Chapter 6: Police Battalions: Agents of Genocide	181
Chapter 7: Police Battalion 101: The Men's Deeds	203

Chapter 8: Police Battalion 101: Assessing the Men's Motives	239
Chapter 9: Police Battalions: Lives, Killings, and Motives	263
PART IV: JEWISH "WORK" IS ANNIHILATION	
Chapter 10: The Sources and Pattern of Jewish "Work" During the Nazi Period	283
Chapter 11: Life in the "Work" Camps	293
Chapter 12: Work and Death	317
PART V: DEATH MARCHES: TO THE FINAL DAYS	
Chapter 13: The Deadly Way	327
Chapter 14: Marching to What End?	355
PART VI: ELIMINATIONIST ANTISEMITISM, ORDINARY GERMANS, WILLING EXECUTIONERS	
Chapter 15: Explaining the Perpetrators' Actions: Assessing the Competing Explanations	375
Chapter 16: Eliminationist Antisemitism as Genocidal Motivation	416
Epilogue: The Nazi German Revolution	455
Afterword to the Vintage Edition	463
<i>Appendix 1: A Note on Method</i>	467
<i>Appendix 2: Schematization of the Dominant Beliefs in Germany about Jews, the Mentally Ill, and Slavs</i>	473
<i>Appendix 3: Foreword to the German Edition</i>	477
<i>Pseudonyms</i>	484
<i>Abbreviations</i>	485
<i>Notes</i>	487
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	615
<i>Index</i>	617
<i>Photographic credits</i>	633

*Maps may be found on pages 159, 205,
329, 347, 366, 367, 368, and 413.*

Hitler's Willing Executioners

Introduction

RECONCEIVING CENTRAL ASPECTS OF THE HOLOCAUST

CAPTAIN WOLFGANG HOFFMANN was a zealous executioner of Jews. As the commander of one of the three companies of Police Battalion 101, he and his fellow officers led their men, who were not SS men but ordinary Germans, in the deportation and gruesome slaughter in Poland of tens of thousands of Jewish men, women, and children. Yet this same man, in the midst of his genocidal activities, once stridently disobeyed a superior order that he deemed morally objectionable.

The order commanded that members of his company sign a declaration that had been sent to them. Hoffmann began his written refusal by saying that upon reading it, he had thought that an error had been made, “because it appeared to me a piece of impertinence to demand of a decent German soldier to sign a declaration in which he obligates himself not to steal, not to plunder, and not to buy without paying. . . .” He continued by describing how unnecessary such a demand was, since his men, of proper ideological conviction, were fully aware that such activities were punishable offenses. He also pronounced to his superiors his judgment of his men’s character and actions, including, presumably, their slaughtering of Jews. He wrote that his men’s adherence to German norms of morality and conduct “derives from their own free will and is not caused by a craving for advantages or fear of punishment.” Hoffmann then declared defiantly: “As an officer I regret, however, that I must set my view against that of the battalion commander and am not able to carry out the order, since I feel injured in my sense of honor. I must decline to sign a general declaration.”¹

Hoffmann's letter is astonishing and instructive for a number of reasons. Here is an officer who had already led his men in the genocidal slaughter of tens of thousands of Jews, yet who deemed it an effrontery that anyone might suppose that he and his men would steal food from Poles! The genocidal killer's honor was wounded, and wounded doubly, for he was both a soldier and a German. His conception of the obligations that Germans owed the "subhuman" Poles must have been immeasurably greater than those owed Jews. Hoffmann also understood his parent institution to be so tolerant that he was willing to refuse a direct order and even to record his brazen insubordination in writing. His judgment of his men—a judgment based, no doubt, on the compass of their activities, including their genocidal ones—was that they acted not out of fear of punishment, but with willing assent; they acted from conviction, according to their inner beliefs.

Hoffmann's written refusal sets in sharp relief important, neglected aspects of the Holocaust—such as the laxness of many of the institutions of killing, the capacity of the perpetrators to refuse orders (even orders to kill), and, not least of all, their moral autonomy—and provides insight into the unusual mind-set of the perpetrators, including their motivation for killing. It should force us to ask long-ignored questions about the sort of worldview and the institutional context that could produce such a letter which, though on a tangential subject and seemingly bizarre, reveals a host of typical features of the Germans' perpetration of the Holocaust. Understanding the actions and mind-set of the tens of thousands of ordinary Germans who, like Captain Hoffmann, became genocidal killers is the subject of this book.

DURING THE HOLOCAUST, Germans extinguished the lives of six million Jews and, had Germany not been defeated, would have annihilated millions more. The Holocaust was also the defining feature of German politics and political culture during the Nazi period, the most shocking event of the twentieth century, and the most difficult event to understand in all of German history. The Germans' persecution of the Jews culminating in the Holocaust is thus the central feature of Germany during the Nazi period. It is so not because we are retrospectively shocked by the most shocking event of the century, but because of what it meant to Germans at the time and why so many of them contributed to it. It marked their departure from the community of "civilized peoples."² This departure needs to be explained.

Explaining the Holocaust is the central intellectual problem for understanding Germany during the Nazi period. All the other problems combined are comparatively simple. How the Nazis came to power, how they suppressed the left, how they revived the economy, how the state was structured

and functioned, how they made and waged war are all more or less ordinary, "normal" events, easily enough understood. But the Holocaust and the change in sensibilities that it involved "defies" explanation. There is no comparable event in the twentieth century, indeed in modern European history. Whatever the remaining debates, every other major event of nineteenth- and twentieth-century German history and political development is, in comparison to the Holocaust, transparently clear in its genesis. Explaining how the Holocaust happened is a daunting task empirically and even more so theoretically, so much so that some have argued, in my view erroneously, that it is "inexplicable." The theoretical difficulty is shown by its utterly new nature, by the inability of social theory (or what passed for common sense) preceding it to provide a hint not only that it would happen but also that it was even possible. Retrospective theory has not done much better, shedding but modest light in the darkness.

The overall objective of this book is to explain why the Holocaust occurred, to explain how it could occur. The success of this enterprise depends upon a number of subsidiary tasks, which consist fundamentally of reconceiving three subjects: the perpetrators of the Holocaust, German antisemitism, and the nature of German society during the Nazi period.

FOREMOST AMONG the three subjects that must be reconceived are the perpetrators of the Holocaust. Few readers of this book will have failed to give some thought to the question of what impelled the perpetrators of the Holocaust to kill. Few have neglected to provide for themselves an answer to the question, an answer that necessarily derives usually not from any intimate knowledge of the perpetrators and their deeds, but greatly from the individual's conception of human nature and social life. Few would probably disagree with the notion that the perpetrators should be studied.

Yet until now the perpetrators, the most important group of people responsible for the slaughter of European Jewry, excepting the Nazi leadership itself, have received little concerted attention in the literature that describes the events and purports to explain them. Surprisingly, the vast literature on the Holocaust contains little on the people who were its executors. Little is known of who the perpetrators were, the details of their actions, the circumstances of many of their deeds, let alone their motivations. A decent estimate of how many people contributed to the genocide, of how many perpetrators there were, has never been made. Certain institutions of killing and the people who manned them have been hardly treated or not at all. As a consequence of this general lack of knowledge, all kinds of misunderstandings and myths about the perpetrators abound. These misconceptions, moreover, have

broader implications for the way in which the Holocaust and Germany during the Nazi period are conceived and understood.

We must therefore refocus our attention, our intellectual energy, which has overwhelmingly been devoted elsewhere, onto the perpetrators, namely the men and women who in some intimate way knowingly contributed to the slaughter of Jews.³ We must investigate their deeds in detail and explain their actions. It is not sufficient to treat the institutions of killing collectively or singly as internally uncomplicated instruments of the Nazi leadership's will, as well-lubricated machines that the regime activated, as if by the flick of a switch, to do its bidding, whatever it might have been. The study of the men and women who collectively gave life to the inert institutional forms, who peopled the institutions of genocidal killing must be set at the focus of scholarship on the Holocaust and become as central to investigations of the genocide as they were to its commission.

These people were overwhelmingly and most importantly Germans. While members of other national groups aided the Germans in their slaughter of Jews, the commission of the Holocaust was primarily a German undertaking. Non-Germans were not essential to the perpetration of the genocide, and they did not supply the drive and initiative that pushed it forward. To be sure, had the Germans not found European (especially, eastern European) helpers, then the Holocaust would have unfolded somewhat differently, and the Germans would likely not have succeeded in killing as many Jews. Still, this was above all a German enterprise; the decisions, plans, organizational resources, and the majority of its executors were German. Comprehension and explanation of the perpetration of the Holocaust therefore requires an explanation of the *Germans'* drive to kill Jews. Because what can be said about the Germans cannot be said about any other nationality or about all of the other nationalities combined—namely no Germans, no Holocaust—the focus here is appropriately on the German perpetrators.

The first task in restoring the perpetrators to the center of our understanding of the Holocaust is to restore to them their identities, grammatically by using not the passive but the active voice in order to ensure that they, the actors, are not absent from their own deeds (as in, “five hundred Jews were killed in city X on date Y”),⁴ and by eschewing convenient, yet often inappropriate and obfuscating labels, like “Nazis” and “SS men,” and calling them what they were, “Germans.” The most appropriate, indeed the only appropriate *general* proper name for the Germans who perpetrated the Holocaust is “Germans.”⁵ They were Germans acting in the name of Germany and its highly popular leader, Adolf Hitler. Some were “Nazis,” either by reason of Nazi Party membership or according to ideological conviction; some were not. Some were SS men; some were not. The perpetrators killed and

made their other genocidal contributions under the auspices of many institutions other than the SS. Their chief common denominator was that they were all Germans pursuing German national political goals—in this case, the genocidal killing of Jews.⁶ To be sure, it is sometimes appropriate to use institutional or occupational names or roles and the generic terms “perpetrators” or “killers” to describe the perpetrators, yet this must be done only in the understood context that these men and women were Germans first, and SS men, policemen, or camp guards second.

A second and related task is to reveal something of the perpetrators’ backgrounds, to convey the character and quality of their lives as genocidal killers, to bring to life their *Lebenswelt*. What *exactly* did they do when they were killing? What did they do during their time as members of institutions of killing, while they were not undertaking killing operations? Until a great deal is known about the details of their actions and lives, neither they nor the perpetration of their crimes can be understood. The unearthing of the perpetrators’ lives, the presentation of a “thick,” rather than the customary paper-thin, description of their actions, as important and necessary as it is for its own sake, lays the foundation for the main task of this book’s consideration of them, namely to explain their actions.⁷

It is my contention that this cannot be done unless such an analysis is embedded in an understanding of German society before and during its Nazi period, particularly of the political culture that produced the perpetrators and their actions. This has been notably absent from attempts to explain the perpetrators’ actions, and has doomed these attempts to providing situational explanations, ones that focus almost exclusively on institutional and immediate social psychological influences, often conceived of as irresistible pressures. The men and women who became the Holocaust’s perpetrators were shaped by and operated in a particular social and historical setting. They brought with them prior elaborate conceptions of the world, ones that were common to their society, the investigation of which is necessary for explaining their actions. This entails, most fundamentally, a reexamination of the character and development of antisemitism in Germany during its Nazi period and before, which in turn requires a theoretical reconsideration of the character of antisemitism itself.

Studies of the Holocaust have been marred by a poor understanding and an under-theorizing of antisemitism. Antisemitism is a broad, typically imprecisely used term, encompassing a wide variety of phenomena. This naturally poses enormous obstacles for explaining the perpetration of the Holocaust because a central task of any such attempt is to evaluate whether and how antisemitism produced and influenced its many aspects. In my view, our understanding of antisemitism and of the relationship of antisemitism to

the (mal)treatment of Jews is deficient. We must begin considering these subjects anew and develop a conceptual apparatus that is descriptively powerful and analytically useful for addressing the ideational causes of social action. The first chapter is devoted to initiating such a theoretical reconsideration.

The study of the perpetrators further demands a reconsideration, indeed a reconceiving, of the character of German society during its Nazi period and before. The Holocaust was the defining aspect of Nazism, but not only of Nazism. It was also the defining feature of German society during its Nazi period. No significant aspect of German society was untouched by anti-Jewish policy; from the economy, to society, to politics, to culture, from cattle farmers, to merchants, to the organization of small towns, to lawyers, doctors, physicists, and professors. No analysis of German society, no understanding or characterization of it, can be made without placing the persecution and extermination of the Jews at its center. The program's first parts, namely the systematic exclusion of Jews from German economic and social life, were carried out in the open, under approving eyes, and with the complicity of virtually all sectors of German society, from the legal, medical, and teaching professions, to the churches, both Catholic and Protestant, to the gamut of economic, social, and cultural groups and associations.⁸ Hundreds of thousands of Germans contributed to the genocide and the still larger system of subjugation that was the vast concentration camp system. Despite the regime's half-hearted attempts to keep the genocide beyond the view of most Germans, millions knew of the mass slaughters.⁹ Hitler announced many times, emphatically, that the war would end in the extermination of the Jews.¹⁰ The killings met with general understanding, if not approval. No other policy (of similar or greater scope) was carried out with more persistence and zeal, and with fewer difficulties, than the genocide, except perhaps the war itself. The Holocaust defines not only the history of Jews during the middle of the twentieth century but also the history of Germans. While the Holocaust changed Jewry and Jews irrevocably, its commission was possible, I argue, because Germans had *already* been changed. The fate of the Jews may have been a direct, which does not, however, mean an inexorable, outgrowth of a worldview shared by the vast majority of the German people.

Each of these reconceivings—of the perpetrators, of German anti-semitism, and of German society during the Nazi period—is complex, requires difficult theoretical work and the marshaling of considerable empirical material, and, ultimately, is deserving of a separate book in its own right. While the undertaking of each one is justifiable on its own theoretical and empirical grounds, each, in my view, is also strengthened by the others, for they are interrelated tasks. Together the three suggest that we must substantially rethink important aspects of German history, the nature of Germany during

the Nazi period, and the perpetration of the Holocaust. This rethinking requires, on a number of subjects, the turning of conventional wisdom on its head, and the adoption of a new and substantially different view of essential aspects of this period, aspects which have generally been considered settled. Explaining why the Holocaust occurred requires a radical revision of what has until now been written. This book is that revision.

This revision calls for us to acknowledge what has for so long been generally denied or obscured by academic and non-academic interpreters alike: Germans' antisemitic beliefs about Jews were the central causal agent of the Holocaust. They were the central causal agent not only of Hitler's decision to annihilate European Jewry (which is accepted by many) but also of the perpetrators' willingness to kill and to brutalize Jews. The conclusion of this book is that antisemitism moved many thousands of "ordinary" Germans—and would have moved millions more, had they been appropriately positioned—to slaughter Jews. Not economic hardship, not the coercive means of a totalitarian state, not social psychological pressure, not invariable psychological propensities, but ideas about Jews that were pervasive in Germany, and had been for decades, induced ordinary Germans to kill unarmed, defenseless Jewish men, women, and children by the thousands, systematically and without pity.

FOR WHAT developments would a comprehensive explanation of the Holocaust have to account? For the extermination of the Jews to occur, four principal things were necessary:

1. The Nazis—that is, the leadership, specifically Hitler—had to decide to undertake the extermination.¹¹
2. They had to gain control over the Jews, namely over the territory in which they resided.¹²
3. They had to organize the extermination and devote to it sufficient resources.¹³
4. They had to induce a large number of people to carry out the killings.

The vast literature on Nazism and the Holocaust treats in great depth the first three elements, as well as others, such as the origins and character of Hitler's genocidal beliefs, and the Nazis' ascendancy to power.¹⁴ Yet, as I have already indicated, it has treated the last element, the focus of this book, perfunctorily and mainly by assumption. It is therefore important to discuss here some analytical and interpretive issues that are central to studying the perpetrators.

Owing to the neglect of the perpetrators in the study of the Holocaust, it is no surprise that the existing interpretations of them have been generally

produced in a near empirical vacuum. Until recently, virtually no research has been done on the perpetrators, save on the leaders of the Nazi regime. In the last few years, some publications have appeared that treat one group or another, yet the state of our knowledge about the perpetrators remains deficient.¹⁵ We know little about many of the institutions of killing, little about many aspects of the perpetration of the genocide, and still less about the perpetrators themselves. As a consequence, popular and scholarly myths and misconceptions about the perpetrators abound, including the following. It is commonly believed that the Germans slaughtered Jews by and large in the gas chambers,¹⁶ and that without gas chambers, modern means of transportation, and efficient bureaucracies, the Germans would have been unable to kill millions of Jews. The belief persists that somehow only technology made horror on this scale possible.¹⁷ "Assembly-line killing" is one of the stock phrases in discussions of the event. It is generally believed that gas chambers, because of their efficiency (which is itself greatly overstated), were a necessary instrument for the genocidal slaughter, and that the Germans chose to construct the gas chambers in the first place because they needed more efficient means of killing the Jews.¹⁸ It has been generally believed by scholars (at least until very recently) and non-scholars alike that the perpetrators were primarily, overwhelmingly SS men, the most devoted and brutal Nazis.¹⁹ It has been an unquestioned truism (again until recently) that had a German refused to kill Jews, then he himself would have been killed, sent to a concentration camp, or severely punished.²⁰ All of these views, views that fundamentally shape people's understanding of the Holocaust, have been held unquestioningly as though they were self-evident truths. They have been virtual articles of faith (derived from sources other than historical inquiry), have substituted for knowledge, and have distorted the way in which this period is understood.

The absence of attention devoted to the perpetrators is surprising for a host of reasons, only one of which is the existence of a now over-ten-year-long debate about the genesis of the *initiation* of the Holocaust, which has come to be called by the misnomer the "intentionalist-functional" debate.²¹ For better or worse, this debate has become the organizing debate for much of the scholarship on the Holocaust. Although it has improved our understanding of the exact chronology of the Germans' persecution and mass murder of the Jews, it has also, because of the terms in which it has been cast, confused the analysis of the causes of the Germans' policies (this is taken up in Chapter 4), and it has done next to nothing to increase our knowledge of the perpetrators. Of those who defined this debate and made its central early contributions, only one saw fit to ask the question, Why, once the killing began (however it did), did those receiving the orders to kill do so?²² It ap-

pears that for one reason or another, all the participants in the debate assumed that executing such orders was unproblematic for the actors, and unproblematic for historians and social scientists. The limited character of our knowledge, and therefore our understanding, of this period is highlighted by the simple fact that (however the category of "perpetrator" is defined) the number of people who were perpetrators is unknown. No good estimate, virtually no estimate of any kind, exists of the number of people who knowingly contributed to the genocidal killing in some intimate way. Scholars who discuss them, inexplicably, neither attempt such an estimate nor point out that this, a topic of such great significance, is an important gap in our knowledge.²³ If ten thousand Germans were perpetrators, then the perpetration of the Holocaust, perhaps the Holocaust itself, is a phenomenon of one kind, perhaps the deed of a select, unrepresentative group. If five hundred thousand or one million Germans were perpetrators, then it is a phenomenon of another kind, perhaps best conceived as a German national project. Depending on the number and identity of the Germans who contributed to the genocidal slaughter, different sorts of questions, inquiries, and bodies of theory might be appropriate or necessary in order to explain it.

This dearth of knowledge, not only about the perpetrators but also about the functioning of their host institutions has not stopped some interpreters from making assertions about them—although the most striking fact remains how few even bother to address the subject, let alone take it up at length. Still, from the literature a number of conjectured explanations can be distilled, even if they are not always clearly specified or elaborated upon in a sustained manner. (In fact, strands of different explanations are frequently intermingled without great coherence.) Some of them have been proposed to explain the actions of the German people generally and, by extension, they would apply to the perpetrators as well. Rather than laying out what each interpreter has posited about the perpetrators, an analytical account is provided here of the major arguments, with references to leading exemplars of each one. The most important of them can be classified into five categories:

One explanation argues for external compulsion: the perpetrators were coerced. They were left, by the threat of punishment, with no choice but to follow orders. After all, they were part of military or police-like institutions, institutions with a strict chain of command, demanding subordinate compliance to orders, which should have punished insubordination severely, perhaps with death. Put a gun to anyone's head, so goes the thinking, and he will shoot others to save himself.²⁴

A second explanation conceives of the perpetrators as having been blind followers of orders. A number of proposals have been made for the source or sources of this alleged propensity to obey: Hitler's charisma (the perpetrators

were, so to speak, caught in his spell),²⁵ a general human tendency to obey authority,²⁶ a peculiarly German reverence for and propensity to obey authority,²⁷ or a totalitarian society's blunting of the individual's moral sense and its conditioning of him or her to accept all tasks as necessary.²⁸ So a common proposition exists, namely that people obey authority, with a variety of accounts of why this is so. Obviously, the notion that authority, particularly state authority, tends to elicit obedience merits consideration.

A third explanation holds the perpetrators to have been subject to tremendous social psychological pressure, placed upon each one by his comrades and/or by the expectations that accompany the institutional roles that individuals occupy. It is, so goes the argument, extremely difficult for individuals to resist pressures to conform, pressures which can lead individuals to participate in acts which they on their own would not do, indeed would abhor. And a variety of psychological mechanisms are available for such people to rationalize their actions.²⁹

A fourth explanation sees the perpetrators as having been petty bureaucrats, or soulless technocrats, who pursued their self-interest or their technocratic goals and tasks with callous disregard for the victims. It can hold for administrators in Berlin as well as for concentration camp personnel. They all had careers to make, and because of the psychological propensity among those who are but cogs in a machine to attribute responsibility to others for overall policy, they could callously pursue their own careers or their own institutional or material interests.³⁰ The deadening effects of institutions upon the sense of individual responsibility, on the one hand, and the frequent willingness of people to put their interests before those of others, on the other, need hardly be belabored.

A fifth explanation asserts that because tasks were so fragmented, the perpetrators could not understand what the real nature of their actions was; they could not comprehend that their small assignments were actually part of a global extermination program. To the extent that they could, this line of thinking continues, the fragmentation of tasks allowed them to deny the importance of their own contributions and to displace responsibility for them onto others.³¹ When engaged in unpleasant or morally dubious tasks, it is well known that people have a tendency to shift blame to others.

The explanations can be reconceptualized in terms of their accounts of the actors' capacity for volition: The first explanation (namely coercion) says that the killers could not say "no." The second explanation (obedience) and the third (situational pressure) maintain that Germans were psychologically incapable of saying "no." The fourth explanation (self-interest) contends that Germans had sufficient personal incentives to kill in order not to want to say "no." The fifth explanation (bureaucratic myopia) claims that it never even

occurred to the perpetrators that they were engaged in an activity that might make them responsible for saying “no.”

Each of these conventional explanations may sound plausible, and some of them obviously contain some truth, so what is wrong with them? While each suffers from particular defects, which are treated at length in Chapter 15, they share a number of dubious *common* assumptions and features worth mentioning here.

The conventional explanations *assume* a neutral or condemnatory attitude on the part of the perpetrators towards their actions. They therefore premise their interpretations on the assumption that it must be shown how people can be brought to commit acts to which they would not inwardly assent, acts which they would not agree are necessary or just. They either ignore, deny, or radically minimize the importance of Nazi and perhaps the perpetrators' ideology, moral values, and conception of the victims, for engendering the perpetrators' willingness to kill. Some of these conventional explanations also caricature the perpetrators, and Germans in general. The explanations treat them as if they had been people lacking a moral sense, lacking the ability to make decisions and take stances. They do not conceive of the actors as human agents, as people with wills, but as beings moved solely by external forces or by transhistorical and invariant psychological propensities, such as the slavish following of narrow “self-interest.” The conventional explanations suffer from two other major conceptual failings. They do not sufficiently recognize the extraordinary nature of the deed: the mass killing of people. They *assume* and imply that inducing people to kill human beings is fundamentally no different from getting them to do any other unwanted or distasteful task. Also, none of the conventional explanations deems the *identity* of the victims to have mattered. The conventional explanations imply that the perpetrators would have treated any other group of intended victims in exactly the same way. That the victims were Jews—according to the logic of these explanations—is irrelevant.

I maintain that any explanation that fails to acknowledge the actors' capacity to know and to judge, namely to understand and to have views about the significance and the morality of their actions, that fails to hold the actors' beliefs and values as central, that fails to emphasize the autonomous motivating force of Nazi ideology, particularly its central component of antisemitism, cannot possibly succeed in telling us much about why the perpetrators acted as they did. Any explanation that ignores either the particular nature of the perpetrators' actions—the systematic, large-scale killing and brutalizing of people—or the identity of the victims is inadequate for a host of reasons. All explanations that adopt these positions, as do the conventional explanations, suffer a mirrored, double failure of recognition of the human aspect of the

Holocaust: the humanity of the perpetrators, namely their capacity to judge and to choose to act inhumanely, and the humanity of the victims, that what the perpetrators did, they did to these people with their specific identities, and not to animals or things.

My explanation—which is new to the scholarly literature on the perpetrators³²—is that the perpetrators, “ordinary Germans,” were animated by antisemitism, by a particular *type* of antisemitism that led them to conclude that the Jews *ought to die*.³³ The perpetrators’ beliefs, their particular brand of antisemitism, though obviously not the sole source, was, I maintain, a most significant and indispensable source of the perpetrators’ actions and must be at the center of any explanation of them. Simply put, the perpetrators, having consulted their own convictions and morality and having judged the mass annihilation of Jews to be right, did not *want* to say “no.”

BECAUSE STUDYING THE perpetration of the Holocaust is a difficult task interpretively and methodologically, it is necessary to address a number of issues openly and directly. Consequently, I lay out here central features of my approach to the subject, and specify clearly the gamut of perpetrators’ actions that needs to be explained. The discussion continues in Appendix 1, where I take up some related issues that might not interest the non-specialist—namely the rationale for the choice of topics and cases that are presented in this study, as well as some further items of interpretation and method.

Interpreters of this period make a grave error by refusing to believe that people could slaughter whole populations—especially populations that are by any objective evaluation not threatening—out of conviction. Why persist in the belief that “ordinary” people could not possibly sanction, let alone partake in wholesale human slaughter? The historical record, from ancient times to the present, amply testifies to the ease with which people can extinguish the lives of others, and even take joy in their deaths.³⁴

No reason exists to believe that modern, western, even Christian man is incapable of holding notions which devalue human life, which call for its extinction, notions similar to those held by peoples of many religious, cultural, and political dispensations throughout history, including the crusaders and the inquisitors, to name but two relevant examples from twentieth-century Christian Europe’s forebears.³⁵ Who doubts that the Argentine or Chilean murderers of people who opposed the recent authoritarian regimes thought that their victims deserved to die? Who doubts that the Tutsis who slaughtered Hutus in Burundi or the Hutus who slaughtered Tutsis in Rwanda, that one Lebanese militia which slaughtered the civilian supporters of another, that the Serbs who have killed Croats or Bosnian Muslims, did so out of con-

viction in the justice of their actions? Why do we not believe the same for the German perpetrators?

The manifold problems in writing about the Holocaust begin with the choice of assumptions that are brought to the study of Germany. This subject is taken up at greater length in Chapter 1. Perhaps the most important is whether or not it is assumed, as the rule has been for most interpreters of this period, that Germany was more or less a “normal” society, operating according to rules of “common sense” similar to our own. For people to be *willing* to slaughter others, in this view, they must be moved by a cynical lust for power or riches or they must be in the grip of a powerful ideology that is so self-evidently false that only the disturbed few could actually succumb to it (aside from those who cynically exploit it for power). The majority of modern people, simple and decent, may be pushed around by these few—but not won over.

Alternatively, this period can be approached without such assumptions, and instead with the critical eye of an anthropologist disembarking on unknown shores, open to meeting a radically different culture and conscious of the possibility that he might need to devise explanations not in keeping with, perhaps even contravening his own common-sense notions, in order to explain the culture’s constitution, its idiosyncratic patterns of practice, and its collective projects and products. This would admit the possibility that large numbers of people, in this case Germans, might have killed or been willing to kill others, in this case Jews, in good conscience. Such an approach would not predetermine the task, as virtually all previous studies have done, to be the explanation of what could have forced people to act against their will (or independent of any will, namely like automatons). Instead, it might be necessary to explain how Germans came to be such potential willing mass killers and how the Nazi regime tapped this disastrous potentiality. This approach, which rejects the anthropologically and social-scientifically primitive notion of the universality of our “common sense,”³⁶ guides this inquiry.³⁷

Central and generally unquestioned methodological and substantive assumptions that have guided virtually all scholarship on the Holocaust and its perpetrators are jettisoned here, because such assumptions are theoretically and empirically unsustainable. In contrast to previous scholarship, this book takes the actors’ cognition and values seriously and investigates the perpetrators’ actions in light of a model of choice. This approach, particularly with regard to the Holocaust, raises a set of social theoretical issues that, however briefly, must be addressed.

The perpetrators were working within institutions that prescribed roles for them and assigned them specific tasks, yet they individually and collectively had latitude to make choices regarding their actions. Adopting a per-

spective which acknowledges this requires that their choices, especially the patterns of their choices, be discerned, analyzed, and incorporated into any overall explanation or interpretation. Ideal data would answer the following questions:

What did the perpetrators actually do?

What did they do in excess of what was "necessary"?

What did they refuse to do?

What could they have refused to do?

What would they not have done?³⁸

What was the manner in which they carried out their tasks?

How smoothly did the overall operations proceed?

In examining the pattern of the perpetrators' actions in light of the institutional role requirements and incentive structure, two directions beyond the simple act of killing must be explored. First, in their treatment of Jews (and other victims), the Germans subjected them to a wide range of acts other than the lethal blow. It is important to understand the *gamut* of their actions towards Jews, if the genocidal slaughter is to be explicated. This is discussed in more detail presently. Second, the perpetrators' actions when they were *not* engaged in genocidal activities also shed light on the killing; the insights that an analysis of their non-killing activities offers into their general character and disposition to action, as well as the general social psychological milieu in which they lived might be crucial for understanding the patterns of their genocidal actions.

All of this points to a fundamental question: Which of the gamut of perpetrators' acts constitute the universe of the perpetrators' actions that need to be explained? Typically, the interpreters of the perpetrators have focused on one facet of the Germans' actions: the killing. This tunnel-vision perspective must be broadened. Imagine that the Germans had not undertaken to exterminate the Jews but had still mistreated them in all the other ways that they did, in concentration camps, in ghettos, as slaves. Imagine if, in our society today, people perpetrated against Jews or Christians, Whites or Blacks anything approaching one one-hundredth of the brutality and cruelty that Germans, independent of the killing, inflicted on Jews. Everyone would recognize the need for an explanation. Had the Germans not perpetrated a genocide, then the degree of privation and cruelty to which the Germans subjected Jews would in itself have come into focus and have been deemed an historic outrage, aberration, perversion that requires explanation. Yet these same actions have been lost in the genocide's shadow and neglected by previous attempts to explain the significant aspects of this event.³⁹

The fixation on the mass killing to the exclusion of the other related actions of the perpetrators has led to a radical misspecification of the explanatory task. The killing should be, for all the obvious reasons, at the center of

scholarly attention. Yet it is not the only aspect of the Germans' treatment of the Jews that demands systematic scrutiny and explication. Not only the killing but also *how* the Germans killed must be explained. The "how" frequently provides great insight into the "why." A killer can endeavor to render the deaths of others—whether he thinks the killing is just or unjust—more or less painful, both physically and emotionally. The ways in which Germans, collectively and individually, sought in their actions, or merely considered, to alleviate or intensify their victims' suffering must be accounted for in any explanation. An explanation that can seemingly make sense of Germans putting Jews to death, but not of the manner in which they did it, is a faulty explanation.

If analytical clarity is to be achieved, then the actions that need to be explained must be stated clearly. A classificatory scheme that specifies four types of actions can be mapped in two dimensions. One dimension denotes whether or not a German's action was a consequence of an order to perform *that* action or was taken on his own initiative. The other dimension characterizes whether a German perpetrated cruelty.⁴⁰

THE PERPETRATORS' ACTIONS

Ordered by Authority

		Yes	No
Cruelty	Yes	Organized and "Structured" Cruelty	"Excesses" Such as Torture
	No	Killing Operations and Individual Killings	"Acts of Initiative" Such as Individually Initiated Killings

Acts committed under orders, such as rounding up, deporting, and killing Jews, which were devoid of "excess" or "surplus" cruelty, are acts that in the German context of the times were utilitarian in intent. They were the deeds that the proverbial (mythical) good German who merely slavishly "followed orders" is alleged to have committed. "Acts of initiative" and "excesses" are really both acts of initiative, not done as the mere carrying out of superior orders. Crucially, both are acts of voluntarism on the part of the individual perpetrators. They differ in the dimension of cruelty—the "acts of initiative"

having been the actions of the cool executioner, the “excesses” that of the German who, presumably, took special pleasure in the suffering that he inflicted. The final category of action comprises those actions that Germans undertook under orders, the sole purpose of which was to inflict suffering on the Jews. Such actions are interesting, and some of them are discussed in the case chapters, because they cast doubt on the perpetrators’ retrospective rationales for their actions which they have typically proffered after the war. Although the sorts of sham reasons that were ordinarily offered to the men at the time (and by them after the war) for killing Jews (for example, that the Jews threatened Germany, that they were “partisans” and “bandits,” or that they spread disease) could perhaps have been believed by a Nazified mind in search of some utilitarian reason for the genocidal slaughter, orders to torture victims should have cast doubt on the “legality” and “reasonableness” of the alleged rationale for their overall treatment of the Jews.

The perpetrators’ treatment of Jews, even the act of killing, consisted of different actions, or variables, each of which requires explanation. Any general explanation of Germans’ contribution to genocidal slaughter must account for all of them. Large in number, the sorts of actions that need to be explained include those specified by the two dimensions of actions done with or without authoritative directive, and actions which were or were not cruel:

1. All perpetrator actions carried out under orders without surplus cruelty, the most important of these having been those that contributed to genocidal killing.
2. Perpetrator cruelties committed by dint of authority’s directives. Institutional, structured cruelties are more important than those carried out on an *ad hoc* basis by individuals or small groups.
3. Perpetrator actions that required initiative beyond what was strictly ordered or required by authority, but which were not marked by “excessive” cruelty.
4. Perpetrator cruelties performed on the perpetrator’s own initiative.

This kind of objective characterization of the perpetrators’ actions, as useful as it is, remains insufficient either for adequate description and classification, or as the complete basis for explanation. Unless further qualified, this analytical scheme, like previous interpretations of the perpetrators, suggests that “order following” is an unproblematic category. Yet it must be recognized that other actions—such as an individual’s disobeyal of other orders, although he carries out the lethal ones—may shed light on the meaning of “order following” in this specific context. In other words, if Germans discriminated among the orders that they chose to follow or in how well they chose to execute them, then the mere obeying of orders, as well as the manner of their execution, needs to be investigated and explained. This action

classification also ignores the potential opportunities that perpetrators had to extract themselves from situations or institutions where they were likely to receive tasks that they deemed undesirable.⁴¹ In short, these naïve characterizations of “obeying orders” or of “acting under orders” shear the perpetrators’ actions out of their broader social, political, and institutional context. It is necessary to recapture this context if the actors’ willingness to obey orders is to become intelligible.

In light of this discussion, the following must be considered: The first category of action or variable, obeying orders, is not itself unproblematic. German perpetrators had available to them the options of trying to avoid killing duty or to lessen the suffering of the victims. Why did they exercise these options as they did, not more and not less? Knowledge of the second type of action, authoritative cruelties, should lead us to pose the question of why large-scale institutions in the middle of twentieth-century Europe came to be structured in a manner that would purposely promote, to whatever extent they did, enormous misery for their inhabitants. All the institutions were, for their nature and functioning, dependent upon their personnel. The third type of action, initiative or voluntarism, to the extent that it characterized German conduct, obviously needs to be explained, for it might be supposed that those who opposed mass murder would have done no more than the minimum required of them. The fourth type of action, individual cruelty, must, it goes without saying, be explained.⁴²

An explanation must account for two more aspects of the perpetrators’ actions. The first is the manner in which the perpetrators carried out their assignments, whether half-heartedly or zealously. Even those acts that Germans undertook because of orders should be assessed for their zeal of implementation. An actor can perform a job with various degrees of dedication, thoroughness, and accomplishment. When Germans were searching for hidden Jews, they could have done their utmost to uncover them or could have sought them out in a dilatory, half-hearted manner. The Germans’ zeal of implementation both provides insight into their motivation and itself needs to be explained. A second additional feature that requires explanation relates to the horror of their deeds. Why did the horror, brutality, and frequent gruesomeness of the killing operations fail to stay the perpetrators’ hands or at least substantially daunt them? The horrific nature of the operations was, of course, not a type of action on the part of the perpetrators, but one of the conditions of their actions that might be thought to have been so revolting and off-putting that its failure to have affected the perpetrators significantly is itself in need of explanation.⁴³

Even with these qualifications, this approach must be broadened beyond being an objective categorization of actions to include an investigation of the

motives of those Germans performing acts in a given category, particularly among the "order followers." No matter what category of action a person's act is properly classified as, the person's attitude towards his act, and his motivation to undertake it, is still important, for it renders the act itself one thing or another.⁴⁴ This "objective" categorization needs to be supplemented by a subjective one of motivation. A variety of motives is compatible with acting under orders, with showing initiative, with committing "excesses," or with doing a job well or badly. Most important is the question of whether or not the perpetrators believed their treatment of the Jews to be just and, if so, why.⁴⁵

The motivational dimension is the most crucial for explaining the perpetrators' willingness to act, and to a great extent is a product of the social construction of knowledge.⁴⁶ The types of actions that a person is willing to carry out—whether only those directly ordered, those that take initiative, those that are excessive, and those that are the product of zealotry—are derived from a person's motivation; but the person's actions do not *necessarily* correspond to his motivations, because his actions are influenced by the circumstances and opportunities for action. Obviously, without opportunity, a person's motivation to kill or to torture cannot be acted upon. But opportunity alone does not a killer or torturer make.

To say that every (socially significant) action must be motivated does not mean that all acts are merely the result of the actor's prior beliefs about the desirability and justice of the action. It simply means that a person must decide to undertake the action and that some mental calculation (even if he does not conceive of it in such terms) leads him to decide not to refrain from undertaking the action. The mental calculation can include a desire to advance one's career, not to be ridiculed by comrades, or not to be shot for insubordination. A person might kill another without believing in the justice of the death if, despite the understood injustice, he is sufficiently motivated to act by other considerations, such as his own well-being. Wanting to protect one's life is a motive. As such, structures, incentives, or sanctions, formal or informal, can themselves never be motives; they only provide inducements to act or not to act, which the actor might consider when deciding what he will do.⁴⁷ Now, of course, certain situations are such that the vast majority of people will act in the same manner, seemingly regardless of their prior beliefs and intentions. Instances of this sort have tempted many to conclude, erroneously, that "structures" cause action.⁴⁸ The structures, however, are always interpreted by the actors, who, if they share similar cognitions and values (preserving one's life is a value, as is wanting to live in a "racially pure" society, or wanting to succeed in one's career, or seeking monetary gain, or wanting to be like others at all costs), will respond to them in a like manner. Not every person will place his own well-being over principle; not every person will vi-

olate deeply held moral positions because his comrades do not share them. If people do, then the values—which are not universal values and certainly not universal social psychological dispositions—that lead them to do so must be seen as a crucial part of the explanation. Some people will risk their lives for others, renounce the advancement of their careers, dissent in word and deed from their comrades. Inanimate objects do not independently produce cognition and values; all new cognition and values depend upon a preexisting framework of cognition and value that lends meaning to the material circumstances of people's lives. And it is cognition and values, and only cognition and values, that in the last instant move someone willfully to pick up his hand and strike another.

Whatever the cognitive and value structures of individuals may be, changing the incentive structure in which they operate might, and in many cases will certainly, induce them to alter their actions, as they calculate the desired course of action in light of what they know and value, and the possibilities of realizing them in differing mixes. This, it must be emphasized, does not mean that the incentive structure itself is causing people to act, but only that it *in conjunction with the cognitive and value structures* are together producing the action.

Explaining the perpetrators' actions demands, therefore, that the perpetrators' phenomenological reality be taken seriously. We must attempt the difficult enterprise of imagining ourselves in their places, performing their deeds, acting as they did, viewing what they beheld.⁴⁹ To do so we must always bear in mind the essential nature of their actions as perpetrators: they were killing defenseless men, women, and children, people who were obviously of no martial threat to them, often emaciated and weak, in unmistakable physical and emotional agony, and sometimes begging for their lives or those of their children. Too many interpreters of this period, particularly when they are psychologizing, discuss the Germans' actions as if they were discussing the commission of mundane acts, as if they need explain little more than how a good man might occasionally shoplift.⁵⁰ They lose sight of the fundamentally different, extraordinary, and trying character of these acts. The taboo in many societies, including western ones, against killing defenseless people, against killing children, is great. The psychological mechanisms that permit "good" people to commit minor moral transgressions, or to turn a blind eye even to major ones committed by others, particularly if they are far away, cannot be applied to people's perpetration of genocidal killing, to their slaughter of hundreds of others before their own eyes—without careful consideration of such mechanisms' appropriateness for elucidating such actions.

Explaining this genocidal slaughter necessitates, therefore, that we keep two things always in mind. When writing or reading about killing operations,

it is too easy to become insensitive to the numbers on the page. Ten thousand dead in one place, four hundred in another, fifteen in a third. Each of us should pause and consider that ten thousand deaths meant that Germans killed ten thousand individuals—unarmed men, women, and children, the old, the young, and the sick—that Germans took a human life ten thousand times. Each of us should ponder what that might have meant for the Germans participating in the slaughter. When a person considers his or her own anguish, abhorrence, or revulsion, his or her own moral outrage at the murder of one person, or of a contemporary “mass murder” of, say, twenty people—whether by a serial killer, or by a semiautomatic-toting sociopath in a fast food outlet—that person gains some perspective on the reality that these Germans confronted. The Jewish victims were not the “statistics” that they appear to us on paper. To the killers whom they faced, the Jews were people who were breathing one moment and lying lifeless, often before them, the next. All of this took place independent of military operations.

The second item to bear in mind, always, is the horror of what the Germans were doing. Anyone in a killing detail who himself shot or who witnessed his comrades shoot Jews was immersed in scenes of unspeakable horror. To present mere clinical descriptions of the killing operations is to misrepresent the phenomenology of killing, to eviscerate the emotional components of the acts, and to skew any understanding of them. The proper description of the events under discussion, the re-creation of the phenomenological reality of the killers, is crucial for any explication. For this reason, I eschew the clinical approach and try to convey the horror, the gruesomeness, of the events *for the perpetrators* (which, of course, does not mean that they were always horrified). Blood, bone, and brains were flying about, often landing on the killers, smirching their faces and staining their clothes. Cries and wails of people awaiting their imminent slaughter or consumed in death throes reverberated in German ears. Such scenes—not the antiseptic descriptions that mere reportage of a killing operation presents—constituted the reality for many perpetrators. For us to comprehend the perpetrators' phenomenological world, we should describe for ourselves every gruesome image that they beheld, and every cry of anguish and pain that they heard.⁵¹ The discussion of any killing operation, of any single death, should be replete with such descriptions. This, of course, cannot be done, because it would make any study of the Holocaust unacceptably lengthy, and also because few readers would be able to persevere in reading through the gruesome accounts—such inability itself being a powerful commentary on the extraordinary phenomenology of the perpetrators' existence and the powerful motivations that must have impelled Germans to silence such emotions so that they could kill and torture Jews, including children, as they did.

SINCE UNDERSTANDING THE BELIEFS and values common to German culture, particularly the ones that shaped Germans' attitudes towards Jews, is the most essential task for explaining the perpetration of the Holocaust, it is the first substantive topic taken up here and forms Part I of the book. The first of its three chapters proposes a framework for analyzing antisemitism. It is followed by two chapters devoted to a discussion of German antisemitism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, respectively. These chapters demonstrate the development in Germany well before the Nazis came to power of a virulent and violent "eliminationist" variant of antisemitism, which called for the elimination of Jewish influence or of Jews themselves from German society. When the Nazis did assume power, they found themselves the masters of a society already imbued with notions about Jews that were ready to be mobilized for the most extreme form of "elimination" imaginable.

Part II presents an overview of the measures that produced Jewish suffering and death and of the institutions that implemented the decisions. The first of its two chapters puts forward a new interpretation of the evolution of the Germans' assault on the Jews, and demonstrates that whatever the twists and turns of the policy might have been, or seem to have been, the policy conformed to the precepts of German eliminationist antisemitism. Its second chapter provides a sketch of the institutions of killing, the range of perpetrators, and a treatment of the emblematic German institution of killing: the "camp." Together, these two chapters provide the broader context in which to investigate and understand the core subjects of this study, the institutions of killing and the perpetrators.

The chapters of Parts III through V present cases from each of three institutions of mass killing: police battalions, "work" camps, and death marches. The actions of the members of each are examined in detail, as are the institutional contexts of their actions. These investigations provide the intimate knowledge of the perpetrators' actions and of the immediate settings and incentive structures of the perpetrators' lives as genocidal killers, upon which any valid analysis and interpretation of the Holocaust must depend.

Part VI contains two chapters. The first one provides a systematic analysis of the perpetrators' actions, and it demonstrates the theoretical and empirical inadequacy of the conventional explanations for the findings of the empirical studies. It shows that the perpetrators' eliminationist antisemitism explains their actions, and that the explanation is also adequate to making sense of the perpetrators' actions in a variety of comparative perspectives. The second chapter of Part VI explores further the character of eliminationist antisemitism's capacity to move the Nazi leadership, the perpetrators of the

Holocaust, and the German people to assent and, in their respective ways, to contribute to the eliminationist program. The book ends with a brief Epilogue that draws upon the lessons derived from the study of the perpetrators. It proposes that the nature of German society during the Nazi period must be re-considered, and it suggests some features of such a revised understanding.

THIS BOOK FOCUSES on the perpetrators of the Holocaust. In explaining their actions, it integrates analyses of the micro, meso, and macro levels, of the individual, institutional, and societal. Previous studies, and almost all previous explanations of the perpetrators' actions, have been generated either in the laboratory, have been deduced purely from some philosophical or theoretical system, or have transferred conclusions (which themselves are often erroneous) from the societal or institutional levels of analysis to the individual. As such, they underdetermine the sources of the perpetrators' actions, and they fail to account for, or even to specify,⁵² the varieties and variations of those actions. This is particularly the case with all non-cognitive "structural" explanations. Few interpreters have concerned themselves with the micro-physics of the Holocaust's perpetration, which is where the investigation of the perpetrators' actions must begin.⁵³ This book, therefore, lays bare the perpetrators' actions and makes sense of them by examining them in their institutional and societal contexts, and in light of their social psychological and ideational settings.

People must be motivated to kill others, or else they would not do so. What conditions of cognition and value made genocidal motivations plausible in this period of German history? What was the structure of beliefs and values that made a genocidal onslaught against Jews intelligible and sensible to the ordinary Germans who became perpetrators? Since any explanation must account for the actions of tens of thousands of Germans of a wide variety of backgrounds working in different types of institutions, and must also account for a wide range of actions (and not merely the killing itself), a structure common to them must be found which is adequate to explaining the compass of their actions. This structure of cognition and value was located in and integral to German culture. Its nature and development form the subject of the next three chapters.

NOTES

Introduction

1. See letter of Jan. 30, 1943, StA Hamburg 147 Js 1957/62, pp. 523–524.
2. They departed from this admittedly vague standard, both in the ordinary language sense of being civilized and in Norbert Elias' social theoretical sense of imposing external and especially internal controls over emotional displays, including outbursts of destructive violence. See *The Civilizing Process*, 2 vols., (New York: Pantheon, 1978).
3. Definitional and substantive issues pertaining to the category of “perpetrators” are discussed in Chapter 5.
4. The literature's neglect of the perpetrators takes more subtle form than a mere failure to focus on them. Through conscious, half-conscious, and unconscious linguistic usage, the perpetrators often, and for some authors, typically, disappear from the page and from the deeds. The use of the passive voice removes the actors from the scene of carnage, from their own acts. It betrays the authors' understanding of the events and forms the public's comprehension of them, an understanding robbed of human agency. See Martin Broszat and Saul Friedländer, “A Controversy about the Historicization of National Socialism,” in Peter Baldwin, ed., *Reworking the Past: Hitler, the Holocaust, and the Historians' Debate* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990), pp. 102–134, for a discussion of this tendency in the work of Martin Broszat, one of the most influential interpreters of the Holocaust and of Germany during the Nazi period.
5. We do not hesitate to refer to the citizens of the United States who fought in Vietnam to achieve the aims of their government as “Americans,” and for good reason. The reason is just as good in the case of Germans and the Holocaust. The per-

perpetrators were Germans as much as the soldiers in Vietnam were Americans, even if not all people in either country supported their nation's efforts. Customary usage for analogous cases, as well as descriptive accuracy and rectitude, not only permit but also mandate the use of "Germans" as the term of choice. Moreover, the Jewish victims conceived of the German perpetrators and referred to them overwhelmingly not as Nazis but as Germans. This usage does not mean that all Germans are included when the term "Germans" is employed (just as the term "Americans" does not implicate every single American), because some Germans opposed and resisted the Nazis as well as the persecution of the Jews. That they did so does not alter the identity of those who were perpetrators, or what we should properly call them.

A real terminological problem exists when discussing "Germans," because "Germans," particularly when contrasted to "Jews," seems to imply that the Jews of Germany were not also Germans. I have, with some misgivings, decided to call Germans simply "Germans" and not to use some cumbersome locution like "non-Jewish Germans." Thus, whenever German Jews are referred to as "Jews," their Germanness is implicit.

6. Many non-Germans contributed to the genocidal slaying of Jews, particularly various formations of eastern European auxiliaries who worked in conjunction with Germans under German supervision. Perhaps the most notable of these were the so-called Trawnikis, the mainly Ukrainian auxiliaries who contributed greatly to the decimation of the Jews living in the *Generalgouvernement*, by being parties to deportations and mass shootings and working in the extermination centers of Treblinka, Bełżec, and Sobibór. The Germans found willing helpers in Lithuania, Latvia, in the various regions of the conquered Soviet Union, in other countries of eastern and central Europe, and in western Europe as well. Generally speaking, these perpetrators have been neglected in the literature on this period. Their comparative study should be undertaken (and is discussed briefly in Chapter 15), yet it is not an integral part of this book, for two reasons. The first, already mentioned, is that the Germans and not the non-Germans were the prime movers and executors of the Holocaust. The second is a practical consideration. This book is already ambitious in scope, so its purview had to be restricted so as to be manageable. The study of non-German perpetrators, which would include a large number of people of many nationalities, is the fitting subject for another project. For a discussion of the disposition of ethnic Germans during the war, see Valdis O. Lumans, *Himmler's Auxiliaries: The Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle and the German National Minorities of Europe, 1933–1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993); for the contributions of the "Trawnikis," the east European auxiliaries who manned the extermination camps of Bełżec, Treblinka, and Sobibór, and who killed and brutalized tens of thousands of Jews while deporting them from the ghettos of Poland or while shooting them themselves, see Judgment Against Karl Richard Streibel et al., Hamburg 147 Ks 1/72; for the Soviet Union, see Richard Breitman, "Himmler's Police Auxiliaries in the Occupied Soviet Territories," *Simon Wiesenthal Annual* 7 (1994): pp. 23–39.

7. See Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), pp. 3–30.

8. This is discussed in Chapter 3.

9. See Hans-Heinrich Wilhelm, “The Holocaust in National-Socialist Rhetoric and Writings: Some Evidence against the Thesis that before 1945 Nothing Was Known about the ‘Final Solution,’” *YVS* 16 (1984): pp. 95–127; and Wolfgang Benz, “The Persecution and Extermination of the Jews in the German Consciousness,” in John Milfull, ed., *Why Germany? National Socialist Anti-Semitism and the European Context* (Providence: Berg Publishers, 1993), pp. 91–104, esp. 97–98.

10. See, for example, Max Domarus, *Hitler: Speeches and Proclamations, 1932–1945* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1990), vol. 1, p. 41; and C. C. Aronsfeld, *The Text of the Holocaust: A Study of the Nazis’ Extermination Propaganda, from 1919–1945* (Marblehead, Mass.: Micah Publications, 1985), pp. 34–36.

11. This is the subject of the “intentionalist-functional” debate discussed below. On the motivation for the decision to exterminate European Jewry, see Erich Goldhagen, “Obsession and *Realpolitik* in the ‘Final Solution,’” *Patterns of Prejudice* 12, no. 1 (1978): pp. 1–16; and Eberhard Jäckel, *Hitler’s World View: A Blueprint for Power* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981).

12. This was a consequence of Germany’s military expansion.

13. This is a major focus of Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (New York: New Viewpoints, 1973).

14. Naturally, it is the biographers of Hitler who wrestle most with this question. See, for example, Allan Bullock, *Hitler: A Study in Tyranny* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974); Robert G. L. Waite, *The Psychopathic God: Adolf Hitler* (New York: Signet Books, 1977); Joachim C. Fest, *Hitler* (New York: Vintage, 1975); see also Hitler’s own account in Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971). For two treatments of the Nazis’ ascent to power, see Karl Dietrich Bracher, *Die Auflösung der Weimarer Republik* (Villingen: Schwarzwald Ring Verlag, 1964); and William Sheridan Allen, *The Nazi Seizure of Power: The Experience of a Single German Town, 1922–1945*, rev. ed. (New York: Franklin Watts, 1984).

15. These are discussed in Chapter 5.

16. The focus on the gassing, to the exclusion of other features of the Holocaust, with the exception of a fair amount of attention that has been devoted to the *Einsatzgruppen*, justified the title of Wolfgang Scheffler’s article “The Forgotten Part of the ‘Final Solution’: The Liquidation of the Ghettos,” *Simon Wiesenthal Center Annual* 2 (1985): pp. 31–51.

17. This is a common notion, whose most prominent exponent is Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*.

18. See Uwe Dietrich Adam’s recent discussion, “The Gas Chambers,” in François Furet, ed., *Unanswered Questions: Nazi Germany and the Genocide of the Jews* (New York: Schocken Books, 1989), pp. 134–154. He opens the essay appropriately: “Even today certain false ideas and abusive generalizations about the existence, placement, functioning, and ‘efficiency’ of the gas chambers continue to circulate even in reputable historical works, and these lead to confusion and errors” (p. 134).

19. This is demonstrated by the literature’s general, overwhelming failure to discuss the perpetrators in a manner which indicates clearly that many were not SS men; had this been understood, then it would have been emphasized as an important feature of the genocide.

20. It is astonishing how readily available material on this has been ignored; it is not even mentioned in virtually all of the standard works on the Holocaust, including the most recent treatments. This subject is taken up at length during the discussion of police battalions in Part III and in Chapter 15.

21. For the positions of the major protagonists, see Tim Mason, "Intention and Explanation: A Current Controversy about the Interpretation of National Socialism," in Gerhard Hirschfeld and Lothar Kettenacker, eds., *Der "Führerstaat": Mythos und Realität* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1981), pp. 23–40; Ian Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation*, 3d ed. (London: Edward Arnold, 1993), pp. 80–107; and Michael R. Marrus, *The Holocaust in History* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1987), pp. 31–51.

22. Hans Mommsen, "The Realization of the Unthinkable: The 'Final Solution of the Jewish Question' in the Third Reich," in Gerhard Hirschfeld, ed., *The Policies of Genocide: Jews and Soviet Prisoners of War in Nazi Germany* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1986), pp. 98–99.

23. *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, 4 vols., ed. Israel Gutman (New York: Macmillan, 1990), for example, which attempts to summarize and codify the state of knowledge about the Holocaust, and which provides statistics on an enormous array of matters, as far as I can tell, neither addresses the subject nor provides an estimate.

24. This is obviously a widely shared belief among the public that the perpetrators had the choice either to kill or to be killed. Few recent scholarly interpreters have made this assertion so baldly. For one, see Sarah Gordon, *Hitler, Germans and the "Jewish Question"* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), who says as much about the German army's cooperation in the genocide (p. 283).

25. See Saul Friedländer, *History and Psychoanalysis: An Inquiry into the Possibilities and Limits of Psychohistory* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1978).

26. See Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View* (New York: Harper Colophon, 1969). See also Herbert C. Kelman and V. Lee Hamilton, *Crimes of Obedience: Toward A Social Psychology of Authority and Responsibility* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

27. This propensity is sometimes conceived of as having been historically formed. See Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom* (New York: Avon Books, 1965); and G. P. Gooch et al., *The German Mind and Outlook* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1945).

28. See Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Meridian, 1971). Hans Mommsen, in "The Realization of the Unthinkable," pp. 98–99, 128–129, follows a related line of reasoning, as does Rainer C. Baum, *The Holocaust and the German Elite: Genocide and National Suicide in Germany, 1871–1945* (Totawa, N.J.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1981).

29. The most recent and most considered account of this sort is Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992). Essentially, this is also Hilberg's position in *The Destruction of the European Jews*. Robert Jay Lifton, who has studied the German doctors at Auschwitz in *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), provides a psychoanalytic explanation for how professional healers could become killers, how otherwise decent men could perpetrate such evil. It too depends on situational factors and psychological mechanisms, and, its psychoanalytical bearing notwithstanding, falls into this category.

30. Mommsen, “The Realization of the Unthinkable”; Götz Aly and Susanne Heim, *Vordenker der Vernichtung: Auschwitz und die deutschen Pläne für eine neue europäische Ordnung* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1991); also Gordon, *Hitler, Germans and the “Jewish Question,”* p. 312.

31. This explanation is so untenable in the face of what the actual killers were doing, such as shooting defenseless people at point-blank range, that it need be mentioned only because some have seen fit to put it forward. Marrus, an exponent of this view, writes with unwarranted certitude: “As students of the Holocaust have long understood, the extensive division of labor associated with the killing process helped perpetrators diffuse their own responsibility.” See *The Holocaust in History*, p. 47. To the (small) extent that this is true, it is a tiny part of the story and not, as Marrus appears to be contending, almost the whole of it.

32. A partial exception is the acknowledgment by Herbert Jäger, *Verbrechen unter totalitärer Herrschaft: Studien zur nationalsozialistischen Gewaltkriminalität* (Olton: Walter-Verlag, 1967), that some percentage of the perpetrators acted out of ideological conviction (pp. 62–64). Jäger, however, does not believe that it was ideological conviction that moved most of the perpetrators (see pp. 76–78). On the whole, as the book’s title, “Crimes under Totalitarian Domination,” suggests, Jäger accepts the 1950s totalitarian model of Germany during the Nazi period (see pp. 186–208), employing concepts such as “totalitarian mentality” (*totalitäre Geisteshaltung*) (p. 186). This model—wrong in the most fundamental of ways and which continues to obscure for many the substantial freedom and pluralism that actually existed within German society—consistently misdirects Jäger’s analysis, which in many ways is rich and insightful. For revisions and critiques of the totalitarian model’s applicability to Germany during the Nazi period and of the general issues and debates in classifying Nazism, see Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship*, pp. 17–39. Hans Safrian, in the introduction to his recent study of those who worked under Adolf Eichmann to deport European Jewry to their deaths, has also called into question the historical consensus that antisemitism did not motivate the perpetrators, though he fails to develop this notion much beyond asserting it. See *Die Eichmann-Männer* (Vienna: Europaverlag, 1993), pp. 17–22.

33. Others have of course recognized and emphasized the importance of political ideology and antisemitism for the Nazi leadership’s decision to undertake the total extermination of the Jews. For a wide-ranging discussion of this issue, see Eberhard Jäckel and Jürgen Rohwer, eds., *Der Mord an den Juden im Zweiten Weltkrieg: Entschlussbildung und Verwirklichung* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1985); Lucy Dawidowicz, *The War Against the Jews, 1933–1945* (New York: Bantam Books, 1975); Gerald Fleming, *Hitler and the Final Solution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), and Saul Friedländer’s introduction to the book; and Klaus Hildebrand, *The Third Reich* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1984). Those who do take this position, however, either have not looked at the perpetrators or have denied that the perpetrators as a group were themselves moved by similar cognitions. Marrus, citing approvingly Hans Mommsen, speaks for the historical consensus in his historiographic *The Holocaust in History*: “Antisemitic indoctrination is plainly an insufficient answer, for we know [*sic*] that many of the officials involved in the administration of mass murder did not come to their tasks displaying intense antisemitism. In some cases, indeed, they appear to have had no history of anti-Jewish

hatred and to have been coldly uninvolved with their victims” (p. 47). Erich Goldhagen is an exception to this general consensus, and although he has not published on the subject, he has emphasized in his course lectures and in our many conversations precisely the point being made here. Thus, while my claim might not sound so novel to some, it actually stands in contradiction to the existing literature.

34. For an overview of a number of cases from the recent and distant past, see Frank Chalk and Kurt Jonassohn, *The History and Sociology of Genocide: Analyses and Case Studies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

35. See Cecil Roth, *The Spanish Inquisition* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1964); and Malise Ruthven, *Torture: The Grand Conspiracy* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1978). The Spanish in the New World were genocidally murderous towards the indigenous inhabitants, usually in the name of Jesus; see Bartolome de las Casa, *The Devastation of the Indies: A Brief Account* (New York: Seabury Press, 1974).

36. See Clifford Geertz, “Common Sense as a Cultural System,” in *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

37. The crucial subject of how different starting assumptions bias conclusions by requiring different kinds of falsifying evidence is discussed in Chapter 1. Generally speaking, the fewer data that exist on a given subject, the more prejudicial the assumptions will be. And since interpretations of the issue at hand often depend on readings of the actors’ cognitions, for which the data is far from ideal, particular attention must be given to justifying the assumptions being used: incompatible assumptions about, say, the attitudes of Germans may *each* be “unfalsifiable”; data that allows for generalizing with confidence about large groups of Germans is often hard to come by, so most data can be deemed by someone holding a given assumption to be anecdotal and therefore not sufficient to *falsify* the initial assumption.

38. This is obviously hypothetical, yet thinking about it—particularly if the conclusion drawn is that boundaries did exist which the perpetrators would not have crossed—should lead to a consideration of the nature of the limits of their willingness to act.

39. Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved* (New York: Summit Books, 1986), is one who attempts, not entirely successfully, to understand the Germans’ cruelty (pp. 105–126).

40. Discussing and delimiting “cruelty” for the phenomena that collectively compose the Holocaust, or, more broadly, the Germans’ persecution of European Jewry, is always difficult. The Germans’ actions were so “out of this world” that they skew our frames of reference. Killing innocent people might be justly conceived of as being an act of cruelty, as would forcing people who are emaciated and debilitated to perform taxing manual labor. Still, these were ordinary—“normal” in the German context of the times—utilitarian parts of the Germans’ jobs, so it makes sense to distinguish them from acts (in this context) of gratuitous cruelty, such as beating, mocking, torturing Jews or forcing them to perform senseless, debilitating labor for the sole purpose of immiserating them further.

41. Jäger, *Verbrechen unter totalitärer Herrschaft*, is aware of these issues, the discussion of which he pioneered in the published literature. See pp. 76–160. For another discussion of this issue, see Hans Buchheim, “Command and Compliance,” in

Helmut Krausnick et al., *Anatomy of the SS State* (London: Collins, 1968), pp. 303–396.

42. German cruelty towards Jews occurred not only during the killing operations. This is another reason why cruelty (and the other actions) are best conceptualized as variables analytically distinct from the killing itself.

43. The horror is significant for still another reason. Since Hannah Arendt, a dominant strand of interpretation has assumed or explicitly held that the perpetrators were “affectively neutral,” devoid of emotion towards the Jews. All explanations which deny the importance of the identity of the victims at least potentially imply that the perpetrators’ views about the victims, whatever they were, were not causally important. As if the wholesale killing of people alone were not sufficient to force the perpetrators to examine their views of their actions, having to confront the horror of their deeds would have made it virtually impossible for them to have no view of the desirability of the slaughter. The notion that the perpetrators were totally neutral towards the Jews is, I am willing to assert, a psychological impossibility. And if not neutral, then what did they think of Jews, what emotions did they bring to the mass slaughters? Whatever these cogitations and emotions were, how did they influence the perpetrators’ actions? This line of thinking is meant merely to emphasize the need to investigate as thoroughly as possible the cognitions of the perpetrators, indeed their shared cognitions; for once it is admitted that they could not have been neutral towards their actions and the victims, then their thoughts and feelings must be taken seriously as sources of their actions.

44. See Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, eds. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), pp. 8–9.

45. Categorizing the killings and the killers is difficult. One question to ask in thinking about them is: What would an enabling order such as “Do what you can to kill Jews,” which carried no sanctions and promised no rewards, have spurred each German to have done and why? Would he have sat immobile? Would he have worked towards their deaths in a perfunctory manner? Killed with efficiency? Or zealously pursued, with body and soul, the extermination of as many Jews as possible?

46. Obviously, in order to answer the questions guiding this inquiry, it is not enough to explicate the motivations of those who set policy or of those who worked at the pinnacle of the genocidal institutions. The elite’s motivations and actions are, of course, important, so it is good that we know already a fair amount about many of them. For a few examples, see Waite, *The Psychopathic God*; Richard Breitman, *The Architect of Genocide: Himmler and the Final Solution* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991); Matthias Schmidt, *Albert Speer: The End of a Myth* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1984); and Ruth Bettina Birn, *Die Höheren SS- und Polizeiführer: Himmlers Vertreter im Reich und in den besetzten Gebieten* (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1986).

47. Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), writes: “Structural constraint is not expressed in terms of the implacable causal forms which structural sociologists have in mind when they emphasize so strongly the association of ‘structure’ with ‘constraint’. Structural constraints do not operate independently of the motives and reasons that agents have for what they do. They cannot be compared with the effect of, say, an earthquake which destroys a town and its inhabitants without their in any way being

able to do anything about it. The only moving objects in human social relations are individual agents, who employ resources to make things happen, intentionally or otherwise. The structural properties of social systems do not act, or ‘act on’, anyone like forces of nature to ‘compel’ him or her to behave in a particular way” (pp. 180–181).

48. For an example of this kind of reasoning, see Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

49. This recommendation follows in the tradition of Weber’s demand for achieving “*Verstehen*.” See Weber, *Economy and Society*, pp. 4–24.

50. See Marrus, *The Holocaust in History*, p. 51.

51. Part of the reason that many have failed to understand the killers and the moving forces behind the Holocaust is likely that they have systematically, if not self-consciously, avoided coming to grips with the phenomenological horror of the genocidal killings. Reading most of the “explanations” reveals few gruesome scenes; when presented, they are typically followed by little analysis, the horror remaining unexplored, mute, as the discussion turns to other (often logistical) matters. When ghetto roundups and deportations, mass slaughters, and gassings are mentioned, they are frequently merely recorded as having happened. The horror of specific killing operations is not adequately conveyed, which makes it difficult to comprehend the compass of the horror for the perpetrators, the frequency of their immersion in it, and its cumulative toll on them.

Those who do take into account the horrors are the survivors and the scholars who focus on them. These people, however, have as a rule not concerned themselves with explaining the perpetrators’ acts, except impressionistically and in passing. An interesting feature of scholarship on the Holocaust is how little overlap and intersection there has been between those who write about the perpetrators and those who write about the victims. My work is not much of an exception in this respect.

52. Jäger, *Verbrechen unter totalitärer Herrschaft*, is an obvious exception to this, as is, to a lesser extent, Browning, *Ordinary Men*; Hermann Langbein, *Menschen in Auschwitz* (Frankfurt/M: Ullstein, 1980), also takes cognizance of the varieties of the perpetrators’ actions.

53. Those who, like Browning in *Ordinary Men*, have failed to integrate their investigations adequately with the two higher levels of analysis.

Chapter 1

1. Gregor Athalwin Ziemer, *Education for Death: the Making of the Nazi* (London: Oxford University Press, 1941), pp. 193–194.

2. See Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (New York: Free Press, 1965); Jacques Soustelle, *Daily Life of the Aztecs* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1961), esp. pp. 96–97; and Joshua Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews: The Medieval Conception of the Jew and Its Relation to Modern Anti-Semitism* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1983).

3. See Orlando Patterson, *Freedom in the Making of Western Culture*, vol. 1 of *Freedom* (New York: Basic Books, 1991).

POLICE BATTALIONS:
AGENTS OF GENOCIDE

THE ORDER POLICE (*Ordnungspolizei*) was as integral to the commission of the Holocaust as the *Einsatzgruppen* and the SS were. It was composed of the Uniformed Police (*Schutzpolizei*), under which police battalions operated, and the *Gendarmerie* (Rural Police).¹ Police battalions were the branch of the Order Police most intimately involved in the genocide. Their mobility made them, unlike other parts of the Order Police, a flexible, general instrument for implementing genocidal policies. The character of these units and the deeds that they performed provide an unusually clear window onto some of the central issues of the Holocaust.

An analysis of the role and significance of police battalions' contribution to the slaughter of Jews does not depend upon a thorough comprehension of the institutional development of the Order Police or of police battalions during the Nazi period. It requires only that three features of police battalions be understood:

1. A large percentage of the Germans who were their members were an inauspicious lot, not selected for them because of military or ideological fitness. In fact, the men were often chosen for service in a haphazard manner and were frequently the least desirable of the manpower pool, even considered unfit for military service. Moreover, no ideological screening to speak of was performed on these men.
2. Once in police battalions, these unpromising men often received below par training in weapons, logistics, and procedures, and the ideological training

or indoctrination to which they were subjected was minimal, at times laughably perfunctory and ineffective.

3. Police battalions were not "Nazi" institutions. Their men were not particularly Nazified in any significant sense save that they were, loosely speaking, representative of the Nazified German society.

The Order Police grew from a total of 131,000 officers and men on the eve of the war² to 310,000 men and officers by the beginning of 1943, of whom 132,000 (42 percent) were reservists.³ It was a security organization of considerable dimension and importance. With increased size and the new demands of policing territories populated by "inferior races" came added duties, such as fighting partisans, transferring populations, and, though unmentioned in these organizational reports, killing civilians, especially and overwhelmingly Jews. These developments produced an institution that by 1942 was radically different from its prewar incarnation. Although its institutional structure remained essentially unchanged, it had quadrupled in size (since 1938) and had gone from being a relatively decentralized professional police force whose men were stationed primarily in their hometowns or native regions, to an organization staffed ever more by non-professionals, devoted to colonial domination, with its men strewn about the European landmass among hostile peoples of different languages, customs, and aspirations. By 1942, the Order Police had become, compared to its character in 1938, unrecognizable in size, composition, activities, and ethos.

Police battalions and reserve police battalions were the organizational home of a large number of Germans.⁴ They were units averaging more than five hundred men, performing a wide range of duties in the occupied areas and in Germany itself. Initially, they were composed of four companies and a battalion staff, led by a captain or a major. (They were subsequently reduced to three companies.) Each company was subdivided into three platoons, which were further subdivided into groups of ten to fifteen men. As they were conceived of in 1939, they policed, garrisoned, regulated traffic flow, guarded installations, and helped to transfer populations in occupied areas such as the Poland of 1940.⁵ Also, owing to an agreement with the German army, they were, in times of need, to fight in traditional military operations (and to combat partisans behind the lines). Police battalions did participate in the 1939 campaign against Poland, the 1940 campaign in the west, and the battles in the Soviet Union during the German onslaught. Except possibly for the fighting, these were the normal wartime duties of policemen in occupied areas. The low priority given to their manpower needs, their light armaments, and especially their often inadequate training reflected these modest expectations of police "normality." There is no indication from any record,

utterance, or act that in 1939 any preparation was being made for the men of the police battalions to take part in genocidal slaughter.

Police battalions were raised and trained in a haphazard manner, reflecting the low status of the Order Police within the array of German security and military forces⁶ as well as its continuous manpower problems throughout the war. The Order Police estimated in November 1941 that its manpower shortage was approaching 100,000 men (its strength at the time was less than 300,000) and that it urgently needed an infusion of 43,000.⁷ Its ability to recruit the most able men having been restricted, the Order Police had to rely to a great extent on the drafting of men less soldierly in profile in order to meet its increasing, and increasingly unmet, manpower needs,⁸ including many who were older than the normal military age and others who had failed to meet the standard of physical qualification for police duty. Such compromises were explained by "the current difficult personnel situation in the Order Police."⁹ The Order Police, in scraping together anyone it could, was depleting the last available reserves. Police Battalion 83, for example, had completely exhausted the manpower of the eastern German city of Gleiwitz, where it was raised, so it had to forgo filling one of its units completely.¹⁰

Not only was there little attempt on the part of the regime to stock the Order Police and its police battalions with especially able men or with men who had demonstrated fidelity to Nazism beyond that of any randomly selected group of Germans, but also the training given these men indicated the low expectations that the regime had of them.

The Order Police's draftees were not auspicious recruits; most had had no military training, many were marginal physical fodder, and their ages and already established family and professional lives made them less pliable than the youngsters whom military and police organizations typically seek. They desire young men for good reason; the experience of millennia teaches that young people are more malleable, more easily turned into integrated bearers of an institution's ethos and practices. So, even with its low operational expectations, the Order Police faced a formidable training task, which was made still more difficult by the paucity of training time, owing to the pressing need to get the men into the field.

The Order Police's training of its new inductees was nevertheless inattentive, and perfunctory to the point of being negligent. Even when the men of reserve police battalions received it in full (which many did not), the training lasted only about three months, an inadequate period for units of this kind, which before the war had been allotted a year of training.¹¹ The overall inadequacy of the actual training is borne out by an inspector's conclusion that almost six months after their creation, one-third of the reservists of Police Battalions 65 and 67 were not yet sufficiently trained.¹² The inattention

to training is corroborated by the men of police battalions themselves, many of whom mention its perfunctory nature.

During their training period, usually a paltry two hours a week were devoted to ideological training. The weeks covered different topics (with more than one topic being treated each week), which were laid out in the educational guidelines. Many of Nazism's staple ideological themes were included (Versailles, "the preservation of the blood," "the leadership of the Reich") but were allotted insufficient time to allow for in-depth treatment.¹³ This superficial ideological education, which actually did little more than familiarize the new inductees with the laws that codified ideological principles, was unlikely to have had much more of an effect upon them than did listening to a couple of Hitler's speeches, something that these men undoubtedly had already done. During the weeks of intensive and tiring training, the meager sessions devoted to ideological pronouncements were probably more effective as rest periods than as indoctrination sessions.¹⁴

There was to be continuing ideological training during the war, with planned daily, weekly, and monthly instruction of the men in police battalions. The "daily instruction" (to take place at least every other day) informed the men of political and military developments. The weekly instruction was intended to shape their ideological views and build their character. Once a month, the men were instructed in a designated theme supplied by Himmler's office, the purpose of which was to treat thoroughly a topic of contemporary ideological importance. Although at first glance all of this may seem to add up to considerable ideological inundation, it amounted to little time each week and—even when carried out to the full extent of the orders—likely had little effect on the men. The "daily instruction" was meant only to convey and interpret the news, and therefore probably focused on military fortunes. The weekly instruction was to present material so that "the educational goals of National Socialism are clearly presented." Three types of presentations were suggested as appropriate: (1) a brief lecture about experiences in the war, or about the exploits of men of the Order Police; (2) the reading of passages from an appropriate book, such as *Pflichten des deutschen Soldaten* ("Duties of the German Soldier"); or (3) discussing material from SS educational pamphlets. The impression of casualness that these instructions convey, and hence the sessions' ineffectiveness in indoctrinating the men, is further reinforced by the directive's declaration that no special preparation is necessary for conducting these sessions. Moreover, all educational meetings were to be conducted by the pedagogically innocent officers of the police battalions themselves and not by trained teachers. The once-a-week "weekly" instructional sessions, the central forum of the continuing ideological education efforts, was to last an ane-

mic thirty to forty-five minutes, and could be omitted if they "disturb[ed] or hamper[ed] concentration and spiritual receptivity."¹⁵

THE ORDER POLICE, as a whole, and particularly the police reserve, which stocked the police battalions, were not elite institutions. The age profile was highly unmilitary; the men were unusually old for military institutions. The training was insufficient. A large proportion of the men that it chose had managed to stave off more "military" military service (whether in the SS or in the army), indicating certainly no great disposition for military discipline and activities, including killing. They were likely to have a large number of fathers among them. They were as far away from eighteen-year-old youths, with no life experience, easily molded to the needs of an army, as an effective military institution is likely to be. They did not share the bravado of youth, and they were used to thinking for themselves. By age, family situation, and disposition, the Order Police, and especially the police reserve, were likely to be composed of men who were more personally independent than whatever the norm was in Germany during its Nazi incarnation.

The Order Police was also not a *Nazi* institution, in the sense of being molded by the regime in its own image. Its officers were not especially Nazified by German standards of the day, and the rank and file even less so. It made little effort to fill its ranks with people especially beholden to Nazism. Except for mild regard paid to an officer's ideology in promotion, ideological stance was almost an absent criterion for the daily workings of the Order Police.¹⁶ The institution did not screen its enlisted men for their ideological views, and the paltry ideological training it gave them was unlikely to have intensified anyone's existing Nazi views perceptibly, let alone to have converted the unconvinced. Compared to the daily ideological fare of German society itself, the institution's ideological instruction was meager gruel. The Order Police accepted into its ranks whomever it could get. Owing to the selection process and the available pool of applicants, it got men who were less than ideal as policemen and, if anything, were, as a group, less Nazified than average for German society. The Order Police was populated by neither martial spirits nor Nazi supermen.

The men in police battalions could not have been expected to be particularly Nazified, and their institution had not prepared them in any purposive way to become more Nazified, let alone genocidal killers. Yet the regime would soon send them to kill, and would discover, as expected, that the ordinary Germans who composed the Order Police, equipped with little more than the cultural notions current in Germany, would easily become genocidal executioners.

POLICE BATTALION 101:
THE MEN'S DEEDS

LIKE POLICE BATTALION 65 and the other units of Police Regiment 25, Police Battalion 101 engaged wholeheartedly in the German extermination of European Jewry.¹ The battalion had two lives. The early one lasted until May 1941, when the battalion was renmade as its initial personnel of professional policemen were replaced almost completely by raw draftees. Before its first life came to a close, Police Battalion 101 participated in lethal activities, but, in comparison to its later life, only sporadically. Its second life lasted from that May until its dissolution, and was marked by the overwhelming bulk of its killing activities. Because a personnel change demarcates the battalion's two instantiations, its first life had little relevance for the deeds that shaped the identity of the battalion's second life as a *Völkermordkohorte*, or genocidal cohort.

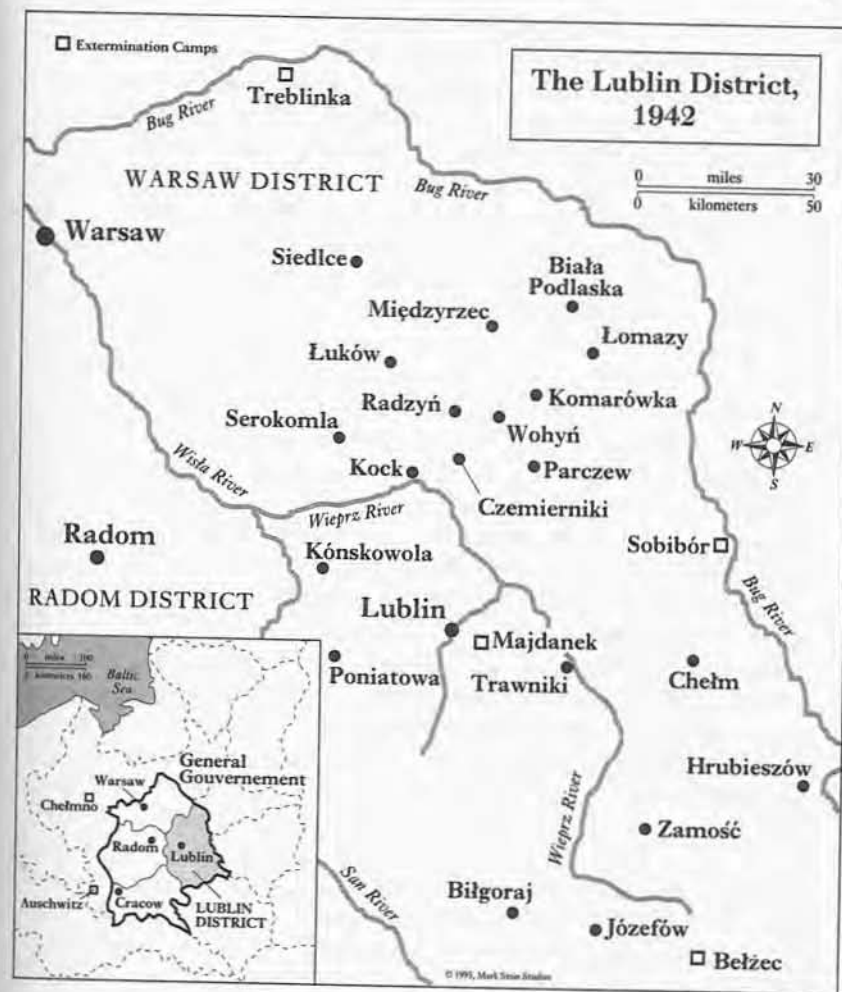
Police Battalion 101's pre-genocidal life course was essentially uneventful.² Police Battalion 101 was established in September 1939 and was then composed exclusively of active policemen (*Polizeibeamter*). Sent immediately to Poland, it operated there until December 1939, securing conquered areas and guarding POWs and military installations. Upon returning to Hamburg, it took part in general police duties. In May 1940, the battalion was sent again to Poland, for the second of its three turns at "pacifying" and restructuring the subjugated territory. Its most important activities were the forced evacuation of Poles from the region around Posen, so that ethnic Germans from the Baltics and the Soviet Union could be resettled there, and providing

guards for the Łódź ghetto. There the men of Police Battalion 101 participated in the immiseration, brutalizing, and even killing of Jews. During this stay in Poland, which lasted until April 1941, the battalion's men occasionally shot Polish "hostages."³

Upon returning to its home base of Hamburg, Police Battalion 101 was broken up when its men were distributed among three other recently established police battalions from Hamburg, numbered 102, 103, and 104. Its ranks were replenished with draftees, and like these three other police battalions, it received the designation of being a reserve battalion, so its official name became "Reserve Police Battalion 101." Remaining for the time being garrisoned in Hamburg, Police Battalion 101 engaged in activities that were the normal, unremarkable duties of policemen. The exceptions to this were the three separate deportations that its men conducted of Jews from Hamburg to conquered areas of the Soviet Union. The Jews were massacred there, at least one time by some of the men of the battalion. Obviously, deporting the Jews to their deaths was not opposed by many in the battalion, because, as some men report, the deportation duty was coveted. One man testifies that only a small circle of "favored comrades" got to go.⁴

In June 1942, the battalion's third tour of duty began in Poland, which lasted until the beginning of 1944. Stationed the entire time in the Lublin region, the battalion's headquarters moved from Bilgoraj in June 1942, to Radzyń the next month, to Łuków in October, back to Radzyń in April 1943, and then to Międzyrzec at the beginning of 1944. Its companies and their platoons were sometimes stationed in the city of the battalion headquarters, though they were generally assigned to surrounding cities and towns.⁵ In February 1943, the older members of the battalion (those born before 1900), like those of other police battalions, were transferred home, to be replaced by younger men. During this period, Police Battalion 101's officers and men were principally and fully engaged in *Aktion Reinhard*, undertaking numerous killing operations against Jews, sometimes shooting the Jews themselves, even by the thousands, and at other times deporting thousands more to the gas chambers.

Police Battalion 101 was divided into a battalion staff and three companies, with a total strength, if a gradually changing membership, of about five hundred men. The battalion was led by Major Wilhelm Trapp. Two of the companies were commanded by captains, the third by a lieutenant. In addition to the small company staffs, each company was composed of three platoons. Generally, two of the three platoons were led by lieutenants and the third by a non-commissioned officer. The platoons were further divided into groups of about ten men, with a non-commissioned officer in charge. The battalion was lightly armed, having only four machine guns per company to augment the rifles that its men carried. The battalion had its own transport, which included trucks and, for conducting patrols, bicycles.⁶



Who were the men of Police Battalion 101? The biographical data that exist on these men are scanty, so only a partial portrait of the battalion can be drawn.⁷ This turns out not to be a crucial problem, because enough of the relevant data do exist to suffice for the primary task of drawing this portrait. Since the men did not choose to join an institution known to be devoted to mass slaughter, the purpose here is not to seek the elements of their backgrounds that might explain their participation. Rather, assessing their backgrounds allows us to gauge how representative the men of Police Battalion 101 were of other Germans, and whether or not the conclusions drawn about them might also apply to their countrymen.

Police Battalion 101 was manned overwhelmingly by reservists, by men who were called to duty between 1939 and 1941, men who were not yet in any military or security institution, the men least likely to be martial in spirit and temperament. Of the 550 men who are known to have served in Police Battalion 101 during its genocidal stay in Poland, the birthdays of 519 are known.⁸ Their age profile was extremely old for a military or police institution. Their mean age, when their genocidal killing began, was 36.5 years old. Only 42 of them were younger than thirty, a measly 8.1 percent. One hundred fifty-three of them, a shade under 30 percent, were older than forty. Nine of them were over fifty. Fully 382 of them, or almost three-quarters (73.6 percent) came from the birth cohorts of 1900–1909, the cohorts of men who were generally deemed to be too old to be desirable for military service and from which most reservists who served in police battalions were raised. That they were older is significant. They were not the impressionable, malleable eighteen-year-olds that armies love to mold according to the institution's specified needs. These were mature men who had life experience, who had families and children. The overwhelming majority of them had reached adulthood before the Nazis ascended to power. They had known other political dispensations, had lived in other ideological climates. They were not wide-eyed youngsters ready to believe whatever they were told.

Social class, according to occupation, can be determined for 291 (52.9 percent) of the members of Police Battalion 101.⁹ They were distributed widely among all of the occupational groups in Germany, except for those forming the elite. Following a variant of the standard occupational classification system for Germany of this era, German society is divided according to a tripartite scheme of lower class, lower middle class, and elite. The elite formed a tiny upper crust in the society of less than 3 percent, with the overwhelming bulk of the people being divided between the lower and lower middle classes. Each class is further subdivided into occupational subgroups. The table below gives the occupational breakdown for Germany as a whole and for Police Battalion 101.¹⁰

CLASS

Occupational Subgroup	Percent of Total		
	Germany %	Police Battalion 101	
		(n)	%
LOWER			
1. Unskilled workers	37.3	(64)	22.0
2. Skilled workers	17.3	(38)	13.1
Subtotal	54.6	(102)	35.1

LOWER MIDDLE

3. Master craftsmen (independent)	9.6	(22)	7.6
4. Nonacademic professionals	1.8	(9)	3.1
5. Lower and intermediate employees	12.4	(66)	22.7
6. Lower and intermediate civil servants	5.2	(59)	20.3
7. Merchants (self-employed)	6.0	(22)	7.6
8. Farmers (self-employed)	7.7	(2)	0.7
Subtotal	42.6	(180)	61.9

ELITE

9. Managers	0.5	(1)	0.3
10. Higher civil servants	0.5	(1)	0.3
11. Academic professionals	1.0	(1)	0.3
12. Students (university and upper school)	0.5	(0)	0
13. Entrepreneurs	0.3	(6)	2.1
Subtotal	2.8	(9)	3.1
Total	100.0	(291)	100.0

Part of this graph is based on information from Michael H. Kater's *The Nazi Party*.

Compared to the German population as a whole, the men of Police Battalion 101 came more from the lower middle class and less from the lower class. This imbalance was due mainly to the unit's shortage, on the one hand, of unskilled workers compared to the general population, and its overabundance, on the other, of lower and intermediate employees from business and the government. Within the lower middle strata, the battalion was particularly lacking in farmers, which is not surprising, since the battalion was raised primarily from an urban environment. Its representatives of the elite, all nine of them, were in virtually identical proportion (3.1 percent) to that existing in the general population. All in all, the differences between the occupational profiles of Police Battalion 101 and Germany as a whole were not of great significance.¹¹ A smaller percentage of blue-collar workers and farmers, and a greater percentage of lower-level white-collar workers populated the battalion than German society as a whole, but significant numbers of each nonetheless were to be found in its ranks.

The most important characteristic of the battalion's men for assessing their actions and the degree to which they were, as a group, representative of German society—that is, ordinary Germans—is their degree of Nazification. This can be appraised by looking at their institutional affiliation, which, if imprecise, is the best indicator of Nazification beyond the degree to which most Germans were generally Nazified (particularly on the independent dimension of antisemitism). In short, how many men in Police Battalion 101 were members of the Nazi Party and of the SS? Of the 550 men, 179 were Party members, composing 32.5 percent of the battalion, which was not much greater than the national average. Seventeen of the Party members

were also in the SS. An additional 4 were SS men who were not Party members. So, in sum, only 21, but 3.8 percent of the men, mainly reservists, were in the SS—a tiny percentage—which, though higher than the national average, is of no great significance for understanding this battalion's actions.

The major issue here, anyway, is not the percentage of these men who were Nazified according to institutional affiliation in comparison to the national average, and therefore how *representative* a sample these men form in this respect. It is those who had no Nazi or SS affiliation who are analytically the most significant people, because they (and the thousands like them in other police battalions) provide insight into the likely conduct of other ordinary Germans, had they too been asked to become genocidal killers. In this battalion, 379 men had no affiliation whatsoever with the major Nazi institutions. And it cannot even be concluded that Nazi Party membership meant for each person a higher degree of ideological Nazification than that which existed in the general populace, because many non-ideological reasons induced people to join the Party. Obviously, whether or not people were members of the Nazi Party did differentiate Germans from each other. Still, the Party members who were Nazified beyond the standard existing in Germany was a subset of all Party members. Moreover, at the time of Police Battalion 101's major killings, about seven million Germans could boast of membership in the Party, over 20 percent of the adult male German population. Being a member of the Party was a rather ordinary distinction in Germany. Being a Nazi was "ordinary" in Germany. Thus, the most remarkable and significant fact is that 96 percent of these men were not in the SS, the association of the true believers. As a group, the men of Police Battalion 101 were not an unusually Nazified lot for German society. Overwhelmingly, they consisted of ordinary Germans—of both kinds—those who were in the Party and, especially, those who were not.

A comparison of the age and occupational profiles between Party and non-Party members reveals that they were remarkably alike. Party members were on average about one year older than non-Party members (37.1 to 36.2 years). The occupational breakdowns of the two groups are remarkably parallel.

CLASS

Occupational Subgroup	Percent of Total	
	Party	Non-Party
LOWER		
1. Unskilled workers	23.3	20.6
2. Skilled workers	10.2	16.3
Subtotal	33.5	36.9

LOWER MIDDLE

3. Master craftsmen (independent)	5.8	9.2
4. Nonacademic professionals	4.7	1.4
5. Lower and intermediate employees	19.3	26.2
6. Lower and intermediate civil servants	22.7	17.7
7. Merchants (self-employed)	8.7	6.4
8. Farmers (self-employed)	0.7	0.7
Subtotal	61.8	61.7

ELITE

9. Managers	0.7	0
10. Higher civil servants	0.7	0
11. Academic professionals	0.7	0
12. Students (university and upper school)	0.0	0
13. Entrepreneurs	2.7	1.4
Subtotal	4.7	1.4
Total	(150) 100.0	(141) 100.0

Part of this graph is based on information from Michael H. Kater's *The Nazi Party*.

The men of Police Battalion 101 came predominantly from Hamburg and the surrounding region. A small contingent of around a dozen men from Luxembourg was also in the battalion.¹² Since the Hamburg region of Germany was overwhelmingly Evangelical Protestant, so too most of them must have been. The smattering of data on their religious affiliation indicates that some percentage of them had renounced the Church and declared themselves "gottgläubig," the Nazi-approved term for having a proper religious attitude without being a member of one of the traditional churches. Their geographic origins and religious affiliations almost certainly had nothing to do with their participation in genocidal slaughter, as police battalions and other killing units were raised from all regions of Germany and drew on Protestants, Catholics, and the *gottgläubig* alike.

The relatively advanced age of these men is of significance. Many of them headed families and had children. Unfortunately, the data on their family status are partial and difficult to interpret. There are data on the marital status of only ninety-six of them. All but one, 99 percent, of them had wives. Almost three-quarters of them, seventy-two of the ninety-eight for whom data exist, had children at the time of the killings. It is safe to surmise that these percentages are higher than was true for the entire battalion. In their irregular biographical self-reporting, those who were married and, particularly, those who had children were probably more likely to offer these tidbits about themselves. How much the existing sample overrepresents the contingent of husbands and fathers among the battalion is impossible to say. It is safe, however, to assume that many of the battalion's men were married and had children, similar to a large majority of Germans of their ages. Nothing about their histories suggests that they would have been anomalous in these matters.

The political views and previous political affiliations of these men cannot be determined. Only the most paltry of evidence exists about them in the available sources. Because they were mainly from Hamburg, a city that supported the Nazis somewhat less enthusiastically than the nation as a whole and that was a traditional bastion of support for the left, it might be presumed that among these men were more former Social Democrats and Communists than in Germany as a whole. Also, that the men had not signed up for other military institutions might suggest a certain coolness to Nazism, though they might have kept themselves free because of family responsibilities. In any case, as was discussed earlier, by the time of the battalion's genocidal activity, the enterprise of national aggrandizement was greatly popular among the German people generally, whatever their previous politics had been. That a smaller percentage of lower-class men made up their ranks, from whom the left drew its traditional strength, might have worked to counterbalance this presumed relative coolness to Nazism that its Hamburg origins might have bequeathed to the battalion. All of this, however, is educated guesswork. What is safe to assume is that within the battalion were men who had been and were political supporters of the regime (as were most Germans), and some who were not. Much more on this subject cannot be said.

In forming this battalion, the Order Police drew on an ordinary population, distinguished chiefly by its advanced age and its status of not being enrolled in military service. Some of the men had been previously declared unfit for duty because of age or physical infirmities.¹³ In so doing, the regime was employing men who were among the least fit able-bodied men that it could find (both physically and by disposition) for staffing its roving police battalion. The men's advanced age brought with it longer histories of personal independence as adults, knowledge of other political orders, and the experience derived from having and heading families. Their Nazi Party and SS membership was somewhat higher than the national average, though the large majority among them were free of Nazi institutional affiliation. These men form anything but the portrait of hand-selected *Weltanschauungskrieger*, of men that would have been selected had a search been conducted to find the "right" men to carry out an apocalyptic deed like the wholesale mass slaughter of civilians.

The Order Police filled out Police Battalion 101 with an inauspicious group. It nevertheless made little effort to hone these men, through physical or ideological training, into men bearing a more soldierly and Nazi attitude. In chorus, the men testify to the perfunctory nature of their training. Some men were drafted but weeks or days ahead of the beginning of the battalion's killing life, and were thrown directly into the genocidal fray. One such man was a dairy farmer until April 1942. He was called up, given brief training

prior to being sent to Police Battalion 101, and, before he knew it, found himself engaged in genocidal slaughter.¹⁴ Nothing whatsoever indicates that any attempt was made to examine the "fitness" of these men for their future genocidal activities by investigating their views on crucial ideological subjects, particularly the Jews. Although no reason exists to believe that the Order Police was aware of it, some of the men in this police battalion had previously shown hostility to the regime. One had been declared untrustworthy by the Gestapo, and others had been active opponents of Nazi rule in the SPD or trade unions.¹⁵ This simply did not matter. The manpower shortage dictated that the Order Police would take anyone it could find—and it had to pick from the leftovers.

ON JUNE 20, 1942 Police Battalion 101 received the order to embark on its third tour of duty in Poland. Setting out for Poland were 11 officers, 5 administrators, and 486 men.¹⁶ They traveled by truck over five hundred miles, arriving a few days later in Bilgoraj, a city to the south of Lublin. At this time, its men had not received word that they would soon be committing genocidal slaughter. Yet perhaps some, especially the officers, suspected what might have lain before them. After all, the battalion had already escorted Jews from Hamburg to their deaths; its officers, during the battalion's second tour in Poland, had been in the thick of executing the anti-Jewish policy of the time; and many, if not most, undoubtedly knew of their brethren's mass killing of the Jews in the Soviet Union and Poland.

The first order to kill Jews was communicated to the battalion's commander, Major Trapp, some short time before the operation's designated day. The day before the foray, he gathered his officers for a briefing and divulged to them their orders.¹⁷ Presumably, the company commanders were not supposed to inform their men of the anticipated event. Some evidence suggests that not all of them kept quiet. Captain Julius Wohlauf, the commander of First Company, who was to become an enthusiastic killer of Jews, apparently could not keep his anticipation to himself. One of his men remembers Wohlauf having characterized their upcoming mission in Józefów as an "extremely interesting task" (*hochinteressante Aufgabe*).¹⁸ Without stating explicitly whether he then learned of the upcoming massacre, another man recounts having learned of an aspect of the preparations that presaged the character of their entire stay. "I can still remember clearly that on the evening before the killing [*Aktion*] in Józefów whips were handed out. I personally did not witness it because I was in town making purchases. I learned it, however, from my comrades after my return to our quarters. In the meantime, we got wind of what kind of operation lay ahead of us the next day. The whips were to be used in driving the Jews

out of their homes. The whips were made of genuine ox hide."¹⁹ The men thus outfitted for the upcoming massacre were those assigned to drive the Jews out from their homes and to the assembly point. Exactly which companies they were from, he says he cannot remember.

The battalion's companies rode in trucks to Józefów, which was less than twenty miles away. They departed after midnight and rode for about two hours. Those among them who had learned of the nature of their operation, had time, as the trucks jolted them up and down over the bumpy roads, to contemplate their tasks' meaning and appeal. The others were to discover only moments before the Dantesque production would commence that they had been chosen to help bring about their *Führer's* dream, frequently articulated by him and those close to him—the dream of exterminating the Jews.

Major Trapp assembled his battalion. The men formed three sides of a square around Trapp in order to hear his address.

He announced that in the locality before us we were to carry out a mass killing by shooting and he brought out clearly that those whom we were supposed to shoot were Jews. During his address he bid us to think of our women and children in our homeland who had to endure aerial bombardments. In particular, we were supposed to bear in mind that many women and children lose their lives in these attacks. Thinking of these facts would make it easier for us to carry out the order during the upcoming [killing] action. Major Trapp remarked that the action was entirely not in his spirit, but that he had received this order from higher authority.²⁰

The unequivocal communication to these ordinary Germans that they were expected to take part in genocidal slaughter was made to them that morning, as they stood near a sleeping small Polish city about to be awakened to scenes that were nightmarish beyond its inhabitants' imagination. Some of the men testify that Trapp justified the killing with the transparently weak argument that the Jews were supporting the partisans.²¹ Why the partisans' fortunes, which at this point were actually meager to non-existent, bore any relationship to their task of killing infants, small children, the elderly, and the incapacitated was not explained. The appeal to the Jews' alleged partisan activity was intended to place a gloss, however thin, of military normality on the large massacre, for the slaughtering of an entire community as its members slept in their beds might have been expected to give pause to the Germans the first time around. Similarly, Trapp's appeal to superior orders likely had two sources. It needed to be made clear to the men that an order of such gravity came from the highest of authorities and was therefore consecrated by the state and Hitler. Trapp also seemed to be expressing his genuine emotions.

He was shaken by the order. Trapp was later heard to have exclaimed, upon seeing the battalion's doctor: "My God, why must I do this."²²

Yet Trapp's reservations appear not to have been born of a view of Jews that diverged from the dominant antisemitic model. His explanation to the men that the killing of the Jews, including the Jewish women and children, was a response to the bombing of German cities betrays his Nazified conception of the Jews. How could such a statement make sense to him and to all those who heard and understood it?²³ It is not clear what the exact logic of the comparison was, yet it suggested that the slaughter of the Jews was either just retribution for the bombing of German cities or perhaps a retaliatory act that would have some salutary effect on the bombing, or both. To the Germans who were on the verge of utterly effacing this remote and prostrate Jewish community, the connection between the Jews in this sleepy city in Poland and the Allies' bombing of Germany appears to have been real. In fact, the men in the police battalion do not comment on the ludicrousness of Trapp's central justification, spoken to them at their baptismal moment as genocidal executioners. The perversity of the Nazified German mind was such that thinking of their own children was not intended to, calculated to, and evidently did not—except in the case of a few—arouse sympathy for other children who happened to be Jewish. Instead, thinking of their children spurred the Germans to kill Jewish children.²⁴

Trapp's address to his men included general instructions for the conduct of the operation. The assembled Germans—whether they had learned on that morning or the night before about the phase in their lives that they were then initiating—understood that they were embarking on a momentous undertaking, not some routine police operation. They received explicit orders to shoot the most helpless Jews—the old, the young, and the sick, women and children—but not men capable of doing work, who would be spared.²⁵ Did these ordinary Germans want to do it? Did any of them mutter to themselves, as men, including those in uniform, often do when they receive onerous, disagreeable, or unpalatable orders, that they wished they were elsewhere? If they had, then the continuation of Trapp's address was for them a godsend. Their beloved commander, their "Papa" Trapp, gave them a way out, at least initially to the older battalion men. He made a remarkable offer: "As the conclusion of his address, the major put the question to the older battalion members of whether there were among them those who did not feel up to the task. At first no one had the courage to come forward. I was then the first to step forward and stated that I was one of those who was not fit for the task. Only then did others come forward. We were then about ten to twelve men, who were kept at the major's disposal."²⁶

Those who were a party to the scene must have felt some uncertainty. The Germans were at the staging ground for the wholesale slaughter of a

community. They were entering a new moral world. Who among them had ever imagined, say, three years before, that he would be standing in eastern Poland with such a charge, to kill all the women and children he would find? Yet the *Führer* had ordered the killing, the killing of these Jews. And now their commander was giving at least some of them the option not to kill. He was a genuine man who was, by all accounts, solicitous of them.²⁷ Some of the men stepped forward. If they were hesitant, however, their uncertainty must have been further intensified by Captain Hoffmann's reaction. The man who first took advantage of Trapp's offer continues: "In this connection, I remember that the chief of my company, Hoffmann, became very agitated at my having stepped forward. I remember that he said something to the effect: 'This fellow ought to be shot!' But Major Trapp cut him off. . . ."²⁸ Hoffmann, who was to prove himself a zealous, if fainthearted killer, was publicly silenced and put in his place by Trapp. Trapp's way was to be the battalion's way. That was unequivocal. The men who had stepped forward were all excused from the killing operation. Yet it must be noted, as it was undoubtedly noted by the assembled men, that Hoffmann's willingness to object so openly and vociferously to the acceptance of Trapp's offer was publicly to call into question a superior order. It was hardly the picture of obedience.

Another man, Alois Weber, agrees that Trapp made the offer to excuse those who did not want to kill, yet he maintains that the offer was made not just to the older men but to the entire battalion: "Trapp's request was not intended as a trap. It did not require much courage to step forward. One man of my company stepped forward. An angry exchange of words between Hoffmann and Papen developed. . . . It is possible that twelve stepped forward. I did not hear that only older men could step forward. Younger ones also stepped forward. Everyone must have heard that one may step forward, because I heard it too."²⁹ It is difficult to know which account is correct. To my mind, the assertion of a more inclusive offer of reassignment is the more plausible of the two. In addition to it simply sounding more credible, three further items support this conclusion. During the unfolding of the killing operation that day, men of all ages, and not just the older men, were easily able to excuse themselves from the killing. Second, Weber testifies that younger men also stepped forward when Trapp made his offer, which is unlikely to have occurred had Trapp not addressed them as well. Finally, Weber indicts himself by admitting that he did not choose to avoid becoming a genocidal killer of Jews even though he knew that he had that option and saw others who chose not to contribute in this way to genocide.³⁰ In some sense, it does not matter very much which account is correct; even if Trapp's initial offer had been directed only to the older men, it soon became clear to the others that it was not only the older men who had the option to avoid killing. Once

the killing began, moreover, when the full horror of the enterprise engulfed them, the emotional incentive to opt out of the killing grew enormously, but had little discernible effect on the men's choices.

The battalion assembly was followed by a series of smaller meetings. Trapp gave assignments to the company commanders, who then informed their men of their tasks (a sergeant did the briefing for First Company), which included the shooting of those who could not so easily be brought to the assembly point—the old, the young, and the sick—on the spot, namely in their homes, even in their beds.³¹ Initially, First Company was detailed first to help out in clearing the Jews out of the ghetto and then to man the execution squads. Second Company received the main responsibility of clearing the ghetto, of going door to door and compelling the Jews to assemble at the specified gathering place, Józefów's market square. The majority of Third Company was supposed to secure the city by cordoning it off. One of its platoons was assigned to help Second Company.³² As the operation unfolded, the logistical arrangements were modified, so members of the various companies took part in the duties originally assigned to other companies.

When dawn arrived, the Germans began rounding up the Jews from the ghetto of Józefów. They combed through the ghetto in small groups, generally of two or three, driving Jews from their homes. The men of Third Company had received, directly from their company commander, the same instructions as the others, "that during the evacuation, the old and the sick as well as infants and small children and Jews, who put up resistance, are to be shot on the spot."³³ The Germans were incredibly brutal, carrying out with abandon their orders not to bother transporting the non-ambulatory to the roundup point and instead to kill them on the spot. "I saw about six Jewish corpses, who had, according to orders, been shot by my comrades where they found them. Among others I saw an old woman, who lay dead in her bed."³⁴ When the Germans' work was completed, Jewish corpses lay strewn throughout the ghetto, as one of the Germans put it, in the "front yards, doorways, and streets all the way to the market square."³⁵ A member of Third Company describes the handiwork: ". . . I also know that this order was carried out, because as I walked through the Jewish district during the evacuation, I saw dead old people and infants. I also know that during the evacuation all patients of a Jewish hospital were shot by the troops combing the district."³⁶

It is easy to read these two sentences, shudder for a moment, and continue on. But consider how intense the psychological pressure not to slaughter such people would have been had these men indeed been opposed to the slaughter, had they indeed not seen the Jews as deserving this fate. They had just heard from their commander that he was willing to excuse those who wanted to demur. Instead of accepting his offer, they chose to walk into a hospital, a

house of healing, and to shoot the sick, who must have been cowering, begging, and screaming for mercy. They killed babies.³⁷ None of the Germans has seen fit to recount details of such killings. In all probability, a killer either shot a baby in its mother's arms, and perhaps the mother for good measure, or, as was sometimes the habit during these years, held it at arm's length by the leg, shooting it with a pistol. Perhaps the mother looked on in horror. The tiny corpse was then dropped like so much trash and left to rot. A life extinguished. The horror of killing just one baby, or of taking part in the massacre of the Jewish hospital patients, let alone all of the other killing that was then or later that day to occur, ought to have induced those who saw Jews as part of the human family to investigate whether Trapp's offer might yet be taken up by them as well. As far as it is known, none did.

After the initial roundup was finished, the Germans combed through the ghetto to ensure that no Jews would escape their appointed fate. By mid-1942, Jews all over Poland, having learned through individual and the collective Jewish experience what the Germans intended for them, had constructed hiding places, often ingenious, in the hope that they might escape detection. The Germans, aware of the Jews' attempts to cheat the hangmen's nooses, assiduously applied themselves to uncovering the concealed places. Aided by eager local Poles, these Germans left no wall untapped and no stone unturned: "The residential district was searched again. In many cases, with the aid of Poles, numerous Jews were found hiding in blockaded rooms and alcoves. I remember that a Pole drew my attention to a so-called dead space between two walls of adjoining rooms. In another case, a Pole drew attention to a subterranean hideout. The Jews found in two hideouts were not killed in accordance with the order but upon my instructions were brought to the marketplace."³⁸ This man, if he is to be believed, preferred to let others do the dirty work. He chose to disobey his orders to kill all resisters, and to bring about the same end in a more palatable manner (by letting others do the killing). Had he been opposed to the killing of Jews, rather than merely finding it distasteful to do it himself, it would have been easy not to find Jews who had done their utmost to remain hidden; yet in his extensive testimony, he gives no indication that he or others made an effort to turn a blind eye to concealed Jews.³⁹

The Germans assembled the Jews at the market square. The driving of the Jews from their homes had taken a long time. It was Police Battalion 101's first killing operation, and they had not yet streamlined their routine. Some of the officers were dissatisfied with the progress of the operation. They went around spurring their men onward: "We're not making headway! It's not going fast enough!"⁴⁰ Finally, around 10 a.m., the Germans sorted out the so-called able-bodied (*Arbeitsfähigen*), about four hundred men, and sent them

to a "work" camp near Lublin.⁴¹ The men of Police Battalion 101 were now ready to enter into the climactic stage of their first genocidal enterprise. New assignments were given to the men, and so they were set to begin the systematic slaughter. They had already been instructed in the recommended shooting technique during the initial assemblage around Trapp. "About Dr. Schoenfelder I recall with certainty. . . . We stood, as I said, in a semicircle round Dr. Schoenfelder and the other officers. Dr. Schoenfelder sketched on the ground—so that we could all see—the outline of the upper part of a human body and marked on the neck the spot at which we should fire. This picture stands clearly before my eyes. Of one thing I am not sure, whether in drawing on the ground, he used a stick or something else."⁴² The battalion's doctor, their healer, who tutored the men on the best way to kill, obviously did not deem his Hippocratic oath to apply to Jews.⁴³ Further discussions on refining the killing technique took place. "It was discussed how the shooting should be carried out. The question was whether [to shoot] with or without a bayonet mounted on the rifle. . . . The mounted bayonet would avoid misfirings and the man need not come too close to the victims."⁴⁴

From the market square the Germans trucked the Jews, one group at a time, to woods on the outskirts of Józefów, whereupon "the Jews were ordered by the policemen in escort to jump down from the trucks, and were naturally, as circumstances warranted, given a 'helping hand' [*nachgeholfen wurde*] to speed things up."⁴⁵ Even though this was their first killing operation, it was already, according to this killer, "natural" for the men of Police Battalion 101 to strike Jews (the obvious meaning of the euphemistic "helping hand," which appears in his testimony in quotation marks). So "natural" was it that the killer mentions it in an offhand, passing manner, not deeming it worthy of any further attention or elaboration.

The men of First Company, who were initially assigned to shoot the Jews, were joined around noon by members of Second Company because Major Trapp anticipated that they would not otherwise finish the slaughter before nightfall.⁴⁶ The actual killing duties ended up being shared by more of the battalion than Trapp had originally planned. The exact manner of transport and procedure of execution differed a bit from unit to unit and also evolved during the course of the day. The platoons of First Company, to focus on it, had broken down into killing squads of about eight. The initial procedure was some variation on the following. A squad would approach the group of Jews who had just arrived, from which each member would choose his victim—a man, a woman, or a child.⁴⁷ The Jews and Germans would then walk in parallel single file so that each killer moved in step with his victim, until they reached a clearing for the killing where they would position themselves and await the firing order from their squad leader.⁴⁸

The walk into the woods afforded each perpetrator an opportunity for reflection. Walking side by side with his victim, he was able to imbue the human form beside him with the projections of his mind. Some of the Germans, of course, had children walking beside them. It is highly likely that, back in Germany, these men had previously walked through woods with their own children by their sides, marching gaily and inquisitively along. With what thoughts and emotions did each of these men march, gazing sidelong at the form of, say, an eight- or twelve-year-old girl, who to the unideologized mind would have looked like any other girl? In these moments, each killer had a personalized, face-to-face relationship to his victim, to his little girl. Did he see a little girl, and ask himself why he was about to kill this little, delicate human being who, if seen as a little girl by him, would normally have received his compassion, protection, and nurturance? Or did he see a Jew, a young one, but a Jew nonetheless? Did he wonder incredulously what could possibly justify his blowing a vulnerable little girl's brains out? Or did he understand the reasonableness of the order, the necessity of nipping the believed-in Jewish blight in the bud? The "Jew-child," after all, was mother to the Jew.

The killing itself was a gruesome affair. After the walk through the woods, each of the Germans had to raise his gun to the back of the head, now face down on the ground, that had bobbed along beside him, pull the trigger, and watch the person, sometimes a little girl, twitch and then move no more. The Germans had to remain hardened to the crying of the victims, to the crying of women, to the whimpering of children.⁴⁹ At such close range, the Germans often became spattered with human gore. In the words of one man, "the supplementary shot struck the skull with such force that the entire back of the skull was torn off and blood, bone splinters, and brain matter soiled the marksmen."⁵⁰ Sergeant Anton Bentheim indicates that this was not an isolated episode, but rather the general condition: "The executioners were gruesomely soiled with blood, brain matter, and bone splinters. It stuck to their clothes."⁵¹ Although this is obviously viscerally unsettling, capable of disturbing even the most hardened of executioners, these German initiates returned to fetch new victims, new little girls, and to begin the journey back into the woods. They sought unstained locations in the woods for each new batch of Jews.⁵²

In this personalized, individual manner, each of the men who took part in the shooting generally killed between five and ten Jews, most of whom were elderly, women, and children. The approximately thirty men of Lieutenant Kurt Drucker's platoon of Second Company, for example, shot between two hundred and three hundred Jews in three to four hours.⁵³ They took breaks during the killing, for rest, for relief, and for smoking cigarettes.⁵⁴ Uncharacteristically for German killing operations, the men of Police Battalion 101

neither forced the Jews to undress nor collected valuables from them. They had one single-minded mission that day. In total, between the wild slaughter in the ghetto itself and the methodical executions in the woods, the Germans killed that day somewhere over 1,200 Jews, perhaps a few hundred more. The Germans abandoned the bodies where they lay, whether in the streets of Józefów or in the surrounding woods, having left the burial for Józefów's Polish Mayor to arrange.⁵⁵

Among the victims was a considerable number of German Jews from the northern part of Germany, who spoke German in an accent similar to that of the men in Police Battalion 101. The linguistic strangeness of Polish Jews (who were the majority of the victims) and their alien Polish Jewish customs served to buttress the monumental cognitive and psychological barrier that effectively prevented the Germans from recognizing the Jews' humanity. However much the Germans could dissociate the Polish Jews from themselves, the Jews from their own region of Germany, who addressed the killers in the cadences of their mother tongue, might nevertheless have shocked the Germans into considering the humanity of these Jews. Two members of Second Company remember a Jew from Bremen, who was a veteran of the First World War, having begged for his life to be spared. It did the Jew no good,⁵⁶ just as the rest of the German Jews' Germanness yielded them nothing but the Germans' egalitarian bullets, which—in the Germans' eyes and in reality—leveled all Jews, German or Polish, male or female, young or old.

What was the effect of the killing on the killers? Their assiduousness in killing is not to be doubted. They applied themselves diligently to their task with telling effect. The gruesomeness of it revolted some, but not all, of them. One killer describes a vivid memory from that day:

These Jews were brought into the woods on the instruction of [Sergeant Steinmetz]. We went with the Jews. After about 220 yards Steinmetz directed that the Jews had to lay themselves next to each other in a row on the ground. I would like to mention now that only women and children were there. They were largely women and children around twelve years old. . . . I had to shoot an old woman, who was over sixty years old. I can still remember, that the old woman said to me, will you make it short or about the same. . . . Next to me was the Policeman Koch. . . . He had to shoot a small boy of perhaps twelve years. We had been expressly told that we should hold the gun's barrel eight inches from the head. Koch had apparently not done this, because while leaving the execution site, the other comrades laughed at me, because pieces of the child's brains had spattered onto my sidearm and had stuck there. I first asked, why are you laughing, whereupon Koch, pointing to the brains on my sidearm, said: That's from mine, he has stopped twitching. He said this in an obviously boastful tone. . . .⁵⁷

This kind of jocularity, this kind of boyish, open joy being taken in the mass slaughter, was not a singular occurrence, never to be repeated. After describing the mocker's tone as boastful, the killer remarks: "I have experienced more obscenities [*Schweinereien*] of this kind. . . ."

The ghastliness of the killing scene did disturb some of the killers. Of this, there can be no doubt. Some were shaken badly. Entering an ordinary animal slaughterhouse is unpleasant for many, even for some avid meat eaters. Not surprisingly, a few of the killers felt the need to excuse themselves from the killing or to take a breather during its course. One squad leader, Sergeant Ernst Hergert, reports that within his platoon two to five men asked to be exempted from the killing after these men had already begun, because they found it too burdensome to shoot women and children. The men were excused by him or by their lieutenant and given either guard or transport duties for the duration of the killing.⁵⁸ Two other sergeants, Bentheim and Arthur Kammer, also excused a few men under their commands.⁵⁹ A third sergeant, Heinrich Steinmetz, explicitly told his men before the killings that they did not have to kill. "I would like also to mention that before the beginning of the execution, Sergeant Steinmetz said to the members of the platoon that those who did not feel up to the upcoming task could come forward. No one, to be sure, exempted himself."⁶⁰ Significantly, these men had already participated in the brutal ghetto clearing, so by the time of his offer they had had the opportunity to confront the gruesome reality of the genocidal enterprise. Yet not even one of them took up the ready offer to avoid further killing at the time. According to one of his men, Steinmetz repeated the offer after the killing had gotten under way. This man admitted to having killed six or eight Jews before asking the sergeant to excuse him. His request was granted.⁶¹ Sergeant Steinmetz was not a superior who was unfeeling towards his men.

A particularly noteworthy refusal to kill was that of one of the battalion's officers, Lieutenant Heinz Buchmann. Beginning with the killing in Józefów and in subsequent killings, he avoided participating directly in the executions, having managed to get himself assigned other duties. At Józefów, he led the escort of the so-called able-bodied Jews to a "work camp" near Lublin. Everyone in the battalion knew that this lieutenant avoided killing duty. His wish not to participate in the killings was so accepted in the hierarchy of command that his company commander circumvented him when killing operations were at hand, and gave orders directly to the lieutenant's subordinates.⁶²

Obviously, at least some of the men felt no hesitation to ask out. The fact was that they easily got themselves excused from the killing and that others saw that extricating themselves from the gruesome task was possible. Trapp's offer had been made before the entire battalion. At least one sergeant in

charge of a contingent of executioners explicitly made the same offer to his men, and the lieutenant and sergeant running another squad easily acceded to requests by men that they be excused. Offers and opportunities for removal from direct killing were accepted, both in front of the assembled battalion and in the intimacy of the platoons and squads. Even one reluctant officer served as an example to the battalion's rank and file that extricating oneself from the gruesome killing was possible—and not dishonorable. Up and down Police Battalion 101's hierarchy, there was what appears to have been a partly formal and partly informal understanding that men who did not want to kill should not be forced to do so.⁶³ That mere sergeants, and not only the battalion commander, were exercising discretion to excuse men from killing demonstrates how accepted the men's opting out was. It also makes unequivocal that those who slaughtered Jews, including Jewish children, did so voluntarily.⁶⁴

After the day's work, the men had the chance to digest what they had done, to talk it over among themselves. The company clerk, for example, who had remained behind in Bilgoraj, was informed by the others of their deeds upon their return.⁶⁵ Clearly, they talked. And it is unimaginable that these ordinary Germans spoke in value-neutral terms when discussing their anything-but-value-neutral deeds. Many of the men were shaken, even momentarily depressed, by the killings: "No comrades participated in these things with joy. Afterwards, they were all very depressed."⁶⁶ They lost their appetites that day: "I still remember that upon their return none of my comrades could enjoy the meal. They did, however, enjoy the alcohol which was available as a special supplementary ration."⁶⁷ Clearly, many did not have a neutral reaction to their deeds. In their postwar testimonies, some of the men speak with great passion of their and their comrades' distressed feelings after their first massacre. That some were initially unhappy, disturbed, perhaps even incensed to have been thrust into such gruesome duty is clear.⁶⁸ Yet the men's postwar self-reporting of their own afflictions should be viewed with some circumspection; the temptation to read more into them than they warrant should be resisted.⁶⁹ The men were sickened by the exploded skulls, the flying blood and bone, the sight of so many freshly killed corpses of their own making,⁷⁰ and they were given pause, even shaken by having plunged into mass slaughter and committing deeds that would change and forever define them socially and morally. Their reaction was similar to that of many soldiers after sampling for the first time the grisly offerings of real battle. They too often feel sickened, throw up, and lose their appetites. That it happened to these Germans upon their initiation into killing in such a gruesome manner is understandable. But it is hard to believe that the reaction was born from anything but the shock and gruesomeness of the moment, as their soon-thereafter-renewed, assiduous efforts in

mass slaughter indicate. Despite their disgust and shock, as the battalion medical corpsman testifies, no one suffered any significant emotional difficulties after the Józefów communal slaying. The corpsman knows of no man who "because of the experience got sick or by any stretch of the imagination had a nervous breakdown."⁷¹

The portrait of this battalion is one of verbal give-and-take, of men discussing their views and emotions, of disagreements, even to some extent between people at different levels of the battalion hierarchy. In the midst of the afternoon's executions, a heated argument broke out between Lieutenant Hartwig Gnade, the commander of First Company, and one of his junior lieutenants over where they should have been shooting a batch of Jews. Gnade was heard to have screamed at the recalcitrant subordinate that he could not work with him if he would not obey orders.⁷² This insubordination—an officer arguing with his commander (in front of the men, no less) over such an insignificant operational matter, and the evident unwillingness or inability on the part of the superior to assert his prerogative of absolute authority—reveals a great deal about the undraconian, lax character of this police battalion. It was not characterized by the submissive holding of one's tongue in the face of a superior's order, let alone by unthinking obedience to any order.

Despite the evident difficulty displayed by some of these Germans in this, their initial mass slaughter, despite their having found the byproducts of their shots to the backs of Jewish heads revolting, and despite their having had the opportunity to extricate themselves from the killing, from the grisly, disgusting duty, almost all of them chose to carry out their lethal tasks. Had anyone disapproved of the killing of the Jews, of the killing of Jewish children and infants, especially when even the toughest stomach would have been sorely tested by the blood, bone, and brains that spattered them, then it is difficult to understand not only why he killed, but also how he could have managed to bring himself to kill and to continue to kill. He had a way out. Even some who in principle did not disapprove of the killing of Jews, but who were unnerved by the gruesomeness, got themselves temporarily excused.⁷³

THE RESPITE FROM their contribution to the "solving" of the "Jewish Problem" lasted only a few days for the men of Police Battalion 101, as they embarked immediately on a number of small operations in the area around Biłgoraj and Zamość, in which they removed Jews from small villages and locales to larger concentrations. Although the operations appear to have been frequent, few details are known of them, because the perpetrators have said little about them.⁷⁴

There were always adventurers and volunteers who together with Sergeant Steinmetz took these buildings [*sic*] first and shot the Jews.¹⁰³

The Germans' killing of Jews found living in small communities or estates resembled in procedure the large ones, except in scale. Yet if the large killing operations made the deepest impression on the killers, suggesting the historic importance of their activities, the frequent small ones made the killing of Jews a normal constituent feature of their days and lives. That this man and others understood the extermination of the Jews to have been their primary activity is due, to a large extent, to the great frequency of their engagement in it. Contributing to the sense that the perpetrators had of themselves as being above all else genocidal agents were the regular patrols they went on, in order to search out Jews hiding in the countryside and kill them. These "search-and-destroy" missions (this is my appellation) differed in character from the large killings that have been described. They differed in scale, not just in the number of victims, which could be as few as one or two people, but also in the number of Germans who manned them. The search-and-destroy missions also demanded a degree of individual initiative that during the destruction of ghettos was required generally only of those (though this was often a large number) who searched through the Jews' homes for the hidden. "Today I still remember exactly that we were already right before the bunker when a five-year-old boy came out crawling. He was immediately grabbed by a policeman and led aside. This policeman then set the pistol to his neck and shot him. He was an active policeman [*Beamter*] who when with us was employed as a medical orderly. He was the only medical orderly of the platoon."¹⁰⁴

Police Battalion 101, like other German forces, had received the *Schiessbefehl*,¹⁰⁵ mandating that they shoot all Jews found outside the ghettos and approved areas in Poland. Essentially, it bestowed upon the most junior men of Police Battalion 101 executive power over capital decisions regarding Jews. Each was deemed to be a fit judge and executioner. The men of Police Battalion 101 proved the trust in them to have been well placed.

Whenever the men of Police Battalion 101 learned (often from Polish informers) or suspected that Jews were living or hiding in a certain area, they formed a detachment of a size sufficient for the expected task, sought out the Jews, and, if found, killed them.¹⁰⁶ Sometimes the Germans' information regarding the Jews' whereabouts was very specific, sometimes vague. The forces assembled for search-and-destroy missions varied in size from company strength to a few men. These variations, however, were but tertiary factors in the ongoing, coordinated German sweeping of the countryside, which was necessary if Poland were indeed to become *judenrein*, free of Jews.

The search-and-destroy missions, which began in the fall of 1942 and continued throughout 1943, together with the slaughter of Jews living in small groups in towns and on estates, became the main operational activity of the men of Police Battalion 101. Many of them have testified to the great frequency of these missions. In fact, so many of the men went on so many search-and-destroy missions that after the war they had difficulty recollecting the details of them. The missions blur together.¹⁰⁷ A member of Second Company recalls: "From the diverse locations of our platoon, every week several operations were started. They were aimed at the so-called pacification of the area entrusted to us. It goes without saying that in the course of the general patrolling we were alert to the presence of Jews and if we met any we shot them on the spot."¹⁰⁸ A member of Third Company relates that "it is entirely true that after the completion of a [killing] action, operations against Jews were frequently undertaken. . . . It may be true of me as well that I participated in ten to twelve such operations. The number of victims ranged from two to twenty. The number of times Herr Nehring and I participated applies also to the other members of the platoon."¹⁰⁹ These missions were so frequent and so successful, according to another man of Third Company, that from the beginning of August 1942 until the end of August 1943, "almost daily stray Jews who had been chanced upon by any squad in the field were shot on the spot."¹¹⁰

The men of Police Battalion 101 undertook both mop-up operations after large killings and search-and-destroy missions in the surrounding region. This was true of the group under Sergeant Bekemeier which remained in Łomazy after the August 19 extermination of the city's Jews. A few days after the massacre, the rest of Second Company having already returned to the garrison locations, Bekemeier's men combed through the ghetto that had a few days earlier been teeming with life, and found about twenty Jews—men, women, and children. They took them to the woods, forced them to lay themselves on the ground without undressing, and shot them in the back of their heads (*Genickschuss*) with pistols.¹¹¹ The small detachment of around twenty men who were under Bekemeier's command were acting independent of the supervision of superiors. Whether they found a few more or a few fewer Jews made no difference vis-à-vis the battalion command. The command had no way of knowing how many Jews were really on the loose. Even if it had, the locally stationed men could have conjured up any numbers that they wanted, since no evidence of killings was requested or provided. Such killings were so routine and so expected that the Germans treated them as part of the normal fabric of life and therefore did not see them as noteworthy. When Bekemeier's men did find Jews, they not only killed them but, in one instance that has been described, they, or at least Bekemeier, also had fun with them beforehand:

One episode has been preserved in my memory to this day. Under the command of Sergeant Bekemeier we had to convey a transport of Jews to some place. He had the Jews crawl through a water hole and sing as they did it. When an old man could not walk anymore, which was when the crawling episode was finished, he shot him at close range in the mouth. . . .¹¹²

After Bekemeier had shot the Jew, the latter raised his hand as if to appeal to God and then collapsed. The corpse of the Jew was simply left lying. We did not concern ourselves with it.¹¹³

One photograph that was available for the photo albums of these executioners shows Bekemeier and his men holding their bicycles and posing with evident pride as they prepare to embark on the sort of patrol that led so frequently to their slaughter of Jews. The following photograph shows Lieutenant Gnade with his men on a search-and-destroy mission.



Lieutenant Gnade and his men hunting through the countryside for hidden Jews

These photographic mementos, so innocent-looking to the uninitiated, were replete with significance for the Germans of Police Battalion 101.

A search-and-destroy mission that harvested among the greatest number of Jewish corpses occurred near Kónskowola. Members of Third Company had been ordered by Hoffmann to an area where reports indicated Jews to be hiding. They came across a series of underground bunkers, whereupon they yelled for the Jews to come out. Silence greeted them. The Germans threw in tear-gas grenades, which revealed to them something of their victims:

“. . . from the bunkers rang out the cries and whimpers of women and children.” The Germans again ordered them to come out, to no effect. “And when no one emerged, hand grenades were thrown into the bunker. I remember that hand grenades were thrown again and again until it had become completely lifeless inside the bunker in question. . . . I cannot state the exact number of victims because we did not excavate the bunker after finishing the operation. Nor did we verify the deaths of the occupants.”¹¹⁴

In the organized ghetto liquidations, the Germans operated in large formation, in a situation structured according to their commander's design, which did constrain their actions, even if they were always able to find opportunities for personal expression in the form of gratuitous brutality. On search-and-destroy missions, in contrast, small groups of comrades, with minimal supervision, leisurely riding or walking through the countryside, were free to search zealously or lethargically, with keenness or inattentively. When finding Jews, they had a free hand to treat them as they wanted to, whether their innermost wishes were to kill them or not. They could degrade and torture the Jews before killing them, or just kill them. They could try to kill them while inflicting as little additional suffering as possible, be unconcerned about such matters, or perpetrate gratuitous degradations and brutalities on the victims. The killers' own testimony about the search-and-destroy missions reveals men who acted with zeal, and at the very least with disregard for the suffering of their Jewish victims, who were frequently women and children. These Germans do not claim that they purposely failed to find Jews or that they tried their best to inflict as little suffering on them. Indeed, in a matter-of-fact manner, they report on their routine success in uncovering and killing Jews, and on the cavalier fashion in which they did so. It is not surprising that these Germans failed to spare Jews; they undertook the avowedly genocidal patrols—which were so frequent that one man describes them and therefore the killing of Jews as having been “more or less our daily bread”¹¹⁵—with unmistakable alacrity. The killers admit that it was the norm for men to volunteer for missions to find, ferret out, and annihilate more Jews. The killers also tell us that, typically, more men volunteered than was required to fill out a given mission.¹¹⁶ It is safe to say that these ordinary Germans wanted to kill the Jews.

The only rationale for the search-and-destroy missions was genocide, and it was understood as such. The Germans in this police battalion did not encounter one single case of armed resistance from the Jews on all the search-and-destroy missions that they undertook.¹¹⁷ Many of the men went on many such missions. For them it was a hunt, pure and simple, the purpose of which was to denude the countryside of the offending beasts. The Germans themselves conceived of these missions in this manner. Among themselves, they tellingly called a search-and-destroy mission a “Jew-hunt” (*Judenjagd*).¹¹⁸

The Germans' use of the term "Jew-hunt" was not casual. It expressed the killers' conception of the nature of their activity and the attendant emotion. Theirs was the exterminatory pursuit of the remnants of a particularly pernicious species that needed to be destroyed in its entirety. Moreover, the word "*Jagd*" has a positive *Gefühlswert*, a positive emotive valence. Hunting is a pleasurable pursuit, rich in adventure, involving no danger to the hunter, and its reward is a record of animals slain—in the case of the men of this police battalion and other German "Jew-hunters," a record of Jews ferreted out and killed.

BASED ON THEIR activities and on the revelations contained in their own testimony, the men of Police Battalion 101 can be aptly described as members of a "genocidal cohort" (*Völkermordkohorte*), and it cannot be doubted that they conceived of themselves as such: "Our main task continued to consist, however, in the annihilation of the Jews."¹¹⁹ Their devotion to annihilating the Jews was such that they would even postpone operations against real partisans, against the people who posed a real military threat to them, in order to undertake search-and-destroy missions against the Jews.¹²⁰ The descriptions and analyses of their actions here suggest that these Germans viewed the genocidal killing, their primary activity in Poland, and themselves favorably. They repeatedly showed initiative in killing and did not shirk their assigned tasks, though they could have without punishment. They gave priority to the killing of Jews and even acted with cruel abandon. Their dedication to the genocidal slaughter was such that they persisted in it despite the gruesomeness which, though conveyed here at times graphically and in some detail, is difficult, perhaps impossible, to imagine and comprehend for anyone who has not been a party to similar scenes. Much of the killing was also personalized, in that the men often faced their victims one on one. Frequently, they were facing children.