

Wehrmacht Propaganda Troops and the Jews¹

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The representation of the Jews in Nazi propaganda has long been a popular topic of inquiry in regard to the Holocaust and antisemitism. In particular, there has been substantial work on antisemitic films, the newspaper *Der Stürmer*, and its editor, Julius Streicher.² Nonetheless, to date there has been no serious attempt to determine precisely who disseminated what within the framework of the antisemitic campaign in Nazi Germany. It has been generally assumed that the driving force was the Reich Ministry for Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda (Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda, RMVP) headed by Josef Goebbels, or the initiatives of various Nazi party organizations. There has been no research on the specific role of the Wehrmacht propaganda machine in this connection, especially during the war, even though it was the source for the bulk of propaganda material disseminated to the Germans and other peoples.

In 1995, a traveling exhibition on Wehrmacht war crimes opened in Germany, focusing on the complicity of the Wehrmacht in the persecution and destruction of the Jews. The exhibition sparked a fresh wave of interest in the topic.

In general, propaganda troops have not been the focus of renewed inquiry, except for isolated references that have not been incorporated into a more encompassing framework. How did propaganda troops deal with the question of the Jews? Such an examination can deepen our knowledge of the Wehrmacht's active complicity in Jewish persecution and its general character and shed light on a little known aspect of Nazi propaganda.

¹ This article is derived from the author's doctoral research on Wehrmacht propaganda and German public opinion.

² See, for example, David Welch, *The Third Reich: Politics and Propaganda* (London: Routledge, 1993); Josef Wulf, *Presse und Funk im Dritten Reich. Eine Dokumentation* (Frankfurt am Main: Zeitgeschichte Verlag, 1983); Jay W. Baird, *The Mythical World of Nazi War Propaganda 1939-45* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1974); Ernest K. Bramstedt, *Goebbels und die nationalsozialistische Propaganda* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1971).

History and Organization of the Propaganda Troops

The Wehrmacht Propaganda Department (Wehrmachtpropaganda-Abteilung, WPr.) was one of the lesser-known branches of the German army. There was no previous, comparable organization in military history. Before its establishment no military department had existed whose activities embraced all areas of modern propaganda and functioned as an independent branch within the armed forces.

The first initiatives to set up a military propaganda organization were in 1935-1936, principally by the Ministry of Propaganda. There was also a general consensus within the Wehrmacht command on the need for such an organization. The background to that perception was the broad agreement that the failure of German propaganda in World War I had had a decisive impact on the collapse of the German rear and had led to the German defeat. The main point of contention between the civilian Propaganda Ministry and the military involved the organizing and overseeing of the propaganda units. The Propaganda Ministry wanted to attach civilian units from the ministry to military formations deployed in the field. In contrast, the War Ministry and, later, the Wehrmacht Supreme Command (Oberkommando der Wehrmacht; OKW) demanded that army units should be under the total control of the army command. The dispute was resolved after several experiments conducted in 1936-1937. A compromise was worked out: the units were organized within the framework of the army, but their professional directives were to come straight from the Ministry of Propaganda.³ Prior to the German invasion of the Sudetenland, eleven propaganda companies (Propaganda-Kompanien, PKs) were set up: five in the army; four within the Luftwaffe; and two in the navy.⁴

³ Ortwin Buchbender, *Das tönende Erz: Deutsche Propaganda gegen die Rote Armee im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Stuttgart: Seewald, 1978), pp. 16-19.

⁴ This survey is based largely on the books by Buchbender and von Wedel: Hasso von Wedel, *Die Propagandatruppen der deutschen Wehrmacht* (Neckargemünd: Scharnhorst Buchkameradschaft, 1962).

As for the sphere of command and control, an earlier key step had been the creation of the OKW Propaganda Department. This staff body was headed by a professional officer, General Hasso von Wedel, who was directly subordinate to the head of OKW Operations Staff (Wehrmachtführungsstab, WFSt.), General Alfred Jodl. The Wehrmachtpropaganda-Abteilung was created to coordinate command and control over the growing number of new propaganda units and served to mediate between them and the Reich Propaganda Ministry.

In that period the tasks of the propaganda troops were defined by the following priorities: collection of news material from the areas of military operations, dissemination of propaganda within the enemy army and population (the technical term for this was “active propaganda”), and the organization of educational and recreational activities for the German troops.

During the course of the war, the size of the propaganda troops increased significantly, peaking in mid-1942, at division strength (some 15,000 troops). They were then reorganized, and a process of gradual reduction set in that continued to the war’s end. The priorities also changed, and, from the middle of the war on, the top priority was active propaganda. Another wheel in the machinery of the military propaganda was the propaganda unit of the Waffen-SS, which was partially subordinate to the OKW Propaganda Department. The Waffen-SS unit was established in 1940, as a propaganda company, but, under the energetic command of *SS-Standartenführer* Günther d’Alquen,⁵ it expanded to a regiment, the *SS-Standarte* “Kurt Eggers.” Competing within the sphere of active propaganda, the regiment increased in importance, and, toward the end of the war, d’Alquen succeeded General Von Wedel as commander of the propaganda troops.

The propaganda troops were organized as a department within the OKW, which commanded a large number of propaganda units in the front areas, occupied territories, and Military Districts (*Wehrkreise*) in the Reich. In the occupied territories, the size of the active units varied in accordance with the size of the territory and the prevailing conditions. Within the Reich,

⁵ D’Alquen is better known as editor-in-chief of the SS periodical *Schwarze Korps*.

Wehrmacht propaganda activity was delegated to special staffs assigned to the Military District commands and headed by an intelligence officer. The Propaganda Companies comprised the core of the combat units, operating within the framework of the three branches of the armed services. The PKs of the army were attached to the respective army commands. They included platoons and squads of newspaper and radio journalists, photographers, cameramen and propagandists, as well as printing presses and batteries of propaganda rocket launchers.

It appears that the Wehrmacht was unable to supply large numbers of sufficiently qualified personnel, so recruitment for the propaganda units was largely handled by the Propaganda Ministry and its organizations. The Propaganda Ministry was also in charge of news reporting, and directives on this were channeled regularly via the Propaganda Department to all propaganda units. The propaganda units in the field sent on the material they collected as quickly as possible to the OKW Propaganda Department in Berlin. There the incoming material was sifted and censored and then passed on to the Propaganda Ministry for dissemination in the press, radio, weekly cinema newsreels, films, books, etc. Film footage was forwarded directly to the ministry so that it could be incorporated into the weekly newsreels shown in movie theaters. The Germans were well aware of the topical importance of the news and did their utmost to dispatch the materials as quickly as possible. The Propaganda Department even had two cargo planes at its disposal; on constant alert, they stood ready to fly to the front, pick up material, and speed it back directly to Berlin.

In principle and throughout the duration of the war, the Wehrmacht and civilian propaganda organizations cooperated successfully and effectively, even though numerous apologetic postwar publications described the relations between them as problematic.⁶

⁶ See, for example, von Wedel, *Die Propagandatruppen*, pp. 25-26, and the general tendency in Hans Leo Martin, *Unser Mann bei Goebbels. Verbindungsoffizier des OKW beim Reichspropagandaminister 1940-44* (Neckargemünd: Scharnhorst Buchkameradschaft, 1973). Martin was liaison officer of the WPr. in the Ministry of Propaganda and worked in close association with Goebbels. In spite of the negative remarks his book

Propaganda Troops and the “Jewish Question”

In the framework of their activities and as a result of their direct involvement with basic questions of Nazi ideology, the propaganda troops also dealt with the “Jewish question.” It is important to note, however, that dealing with the Jewish question was never one of their central tasks. Moreover, the Propaganda Department did not set up a separate Jewish affairs section like that in the Reich Propaganda Ministry under the direction of Dr. Eberhard Taubert. In any event, since the propaganda troops largely furthered Nazi ideology, the Jewish question came up repeatedly in the context of their activities. This was inescapable, and it appears that they, too, were not disinclined to address this topic. In general, dealing with Jews was not a matter imposed on the propaganda troops from above. Most voiced their readiness to deal with this theme. The underlying reasons will be discussed below.

Troops in the Reporting of News

It is well known that news in the Third Reich was conceived as a form of propaganda. From the beginning of the war, a central component in the activities of the propaganda troops was the preparation of combat reports. The PKs were the only news-reporting units able to move unhindered into areas of military operation and gather news. Starting with the occupation of the Sudetenland, civilian reporters were prohibited from entering zones of military activity.⁷

This exclusive right placed the PKs in a position to provide concrete topical reports on the Jews in the occupied territories, principally in the East. From

contains, other testimony indicates that they were on excellent terms and that, in general, they had good working relations.

⁷“Stellungnahme der Pressegruppe zur Berichterstattung der Reichsdeutschen Presse über den Einsatz der Wehrmacht zur Befreiung des Sudetenlandes,” February 1939, Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv, Freiburg (BA-MA), RW4/333, OKW/I Pr. D2.

the early stages of the military campaign in Poland, PK reporters were on the scene and able to dispatch their first impressions on the Jewish communities they encountered. One representative example is the four reports dispatched in September 1939, by PK 621, most of whose men were Austrian. The unit was operating together with the XVIIIth Mountain Corps in southern Poland. At that time there were as yet no detailed instructions for reporting on Jews, but, in the framework of their commentary on other matters, the Jews were depicted in a highly stereotypical way.⁸

In the main, these reports were meant for publication in the local press of the XVIIIth military district, headquartered in Salzburg. Copies were sent to the propaganda staff of that command post and deposited along with other materials in a special archive. Also preserved in the archive were photographs of Jews taken by PK 621 photographers. In addition, the propaganda staff tried to obtain copies of amateur photos taken by regular troops in order to utilize them for propaganda purposes. Included among them were photographs of Jews in localities occupied by the German army.⁹ Surprisingly, a photo from this collection, showing an old Jewish beggar, was published after the war in a volume on the unit's wartime history initiated by veterans of the 1st Mountain Division. The photo's caption reads "A type familiar to all."¹⁰

Shortly after the beginning of the invasion of Poland, the Propaganda Ministry was asked by the German press to provide photos of Jews; it passed on the request to the military's Propaganda Department. Since the PKs were in a position to supply such material, the request was channeled to them.¹¹ But, as mentioned, it was not always necessary to issue specific instructions in order to obtain such types of material. The closer the campaign in Poland neared its end, the greater the demand for visuals on the Jews. Immediately after the fall of Warsaw, the Propaganda Ministry started to request material on Jews. On October 2, 1939, the PKs stationed in Poland received the following order from the Propaganda Ministry in Berlin:

⁸ BA-MA, RH53-18/92, reports VII-B22-106, 107, 110, 125.

⁹ See eighteen photos preserved in the original file in BA-MA, RH53-18/92.

¹⁰ "Ein Typ den jeder kennt." Hubert Lenz, *Gebirgsjäger. Die 1. Gebirgsdivision 1935-45* (Bad-Nauheim: Podzun, 1954), p. 62.

¹¹ "Weisungen für die Propagandakompanien des Heeres," September 8, 1939, BA-MA, RW4/185, RMVP/Hauptreferat Bildpresse.

Of high priority is film footage showing all sorts of Jewish types. We need more than before, from Warsaw and all the occupied territories. What we want are portraits and images of Jews at work. This material is to be used to reinforce our antisemitic propaganda at home and abroad.¹²

Footage shot by the PK photographers in accordance with directives was incorporated into the weekly Ufa newsreels sent to the theaters on October 4 and 18, 1939.¹³ The films presented stereotypical images of Jews and pictures of Jews at forced labor; they were ordered by the Wehrmacht to remove rubble. Such scenes were also shot earlier, as evident from a Ufa newsreel of September 14, 1939, showing the arrest of Jews in Bromberg (Bydgoszcz).¹⁴

In this same period, Wehrmacht PKs began to assist film teams from the Propaganda Ministry dispatched to take the first films in several Jewish communities in Poland. Those films were ultimately used to help compose the malicious antisemitic film *Der Ewige Jude*, released to movie theaters a year later. On October 7, 1939, the Eighth Army command received a cable from the Propaganda Department stating:

The Propaganda Ministry has sent Dr. Eberhard Taubert and Dr. Fritz Hippler on special assignment to Warsaw; to Lodz [Łódź]: the photographers Soll, Endreat, Zunft, Tallmann; to Kraków: [the photographers] Hartmann, Kungel, Winterfeld, and Eschenbach. Please assist them in carrying out their mission and detail them to a PK.¹⁵

What actually took place at this time is not completely clear. PK 649 was then the operating propaganda unit of the Eighth Army. Dr. Hippler claimed he never went to Warsaw to film, but was dispatched to Lodz. There he

¹² "Propagandaweisung des Reichspropagandaministers für den 2.10.1939, 01.10.1939," BA-MA, RW4/241/1, WPr.Id to PK501, 649, 637, 621, LwPK1, 4 & LwProp. Zug.

¹³ *Ufa Tonwoche*, Nrs. 474/41/1939, 476/43/1939.

¹⁴ *Ufa Tonwoche*, Nr. 471/38/1939.

¹⁵ Hippler was Reich Supervisor of Films. WPr. to AOK8/lc, October 7, 1939, BA-MA, RW4/241.1.

established contact with the local army command and received assistance from the local PK (most probably PK 501). He and his team stayed there for three days. In the course of that time, they filmed the well-known scenes of ritual slaughter – supposedly for archival purposes, as Hippler had been informed. After that he went to Warsaw to meet an old friend and then returned to Berlin.¹⁶ Yet on October 17, 1939, Goebbels wrote in his diary that Hippler had returned from Poland that same day with material for the “ghetto film.”¹⁷ That footage later was included in the film *Der Ewige Jude*, based on a script by Taubert and directed by Hippler.

What is significant here is the fact that at least one PK provided technical and logistical assistance in the early stages of the production of that infamous antisemitic film. A comparison between footage shot by the PKs for weekly newsreels and scenes in *Der Ewige Jude* indicates that several scenes from PK films were incorporated into the film. This particular instance can serve to illustrate the complexity involved in the production of antisemitic propaganda and demonstrate that various organizations and persons – not just the Propaganda Ministry and Nazi party – had a direct hand in its crafting.

The PKs continued to dispatch news material of this sort even later--again without specific instructions from the Propaganda Ministry or the OKW Propaganda Department. Reporting on Jews was renewed and intensified in the first half of 1941, apparently mainly because of the lull in combat the propaganda units in the East had encountered. At a time when propaganda units in the West were busy reporting on a great deal of military activity, the units in the East were marking time, with little military action to recount. During the winter of 1941, the Propaganda Department instructed the PKs there to do their utmost and effectively gave them a free hand.¹⁸ Since the general instructions to the PKs were to report on anything of interest in their area, they quite naturally turned to the Jewish ghettos in Poland as a topic. Reports on the activity of PKs for February 1941, noted the following:

¹⁶ Personal interview by the author with Dr. Fritz Hippler, Berchtesgaden, April 16, 1998.

¹⁷ Joseph Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, 15 vols., Elke Fröhlich, ed., (Munich: Saur, 1996), October 17, 1939.

¹⁸ “Tätigkeitsbericht der Gruppe Ic/AO des AOK17 für den Monat Januar 1941 (A.H.Qu. Zakopane),” BA-MA, RH20-17/274.

* February 4, 1941 - PK 666 cameraman filmed footage in the Lublin ghetto;¹⁹ radio reporter from PK 689 prepared a report from the Lodz ghetto.

* February 12, 1941 - photographer from PK 689 was in the Lodz ghetto and shot seven photos there.

* February 12-13, 1941 - two cameramen from PK 689 shot film in the Lodz ghetto.

* February 17-19, 1941 - reporter from PK 689 was in the Lodz ghetto and prepared a story on it.

* February 17-28, 1941 - another cameraman from PK 689 returned to the ghetto and shot two films.²⁰

Additional general reports indicate that, in April and May 1941, PK journalists visited the ghettos in Warsaw, Lodz, and Łowicz.²¹ The interesting fact is that army correspondents stayed a comparatively long time in the ghettos in order to gather material and prepare a large number of diverse reports. At first glance it is somewhat astonishing that it was specifically the Wehrmacht reporters who were intensively involved in writing the stories on the ghettos. There is only one instance, in September 1940, when SS reporters, on Himmler's orders, were dispatched to the Lodz ghetto to prepare reports.²²

In the days prior to the attack on the Soviet Union, the reporters returned to the ghettos.²³ On this occasion several correspondents from the Luftwaffe

¹⁹ This was stated in the report, but the ghetto in Lublin was not established until March 24, 1941.

²⁰ "Lageberichte (PK)" Nr.41, February 1-28, 1941, BA-MA, RW4/338, WPr.Id; this is the only detailed report in the files.

²¹ Ibid. Nr. 43 (April 1-30, 1941), Nr. 44 (May 1-31, 1941).

²² "Meine Dienstreise nach Litzmannstadt im September 1940," February 25, 1941, BA-Berlin, R55/409, Pro/4 ORR Imhoff an Personalabteilung/Min.Rat Flügel. It should be noted that the journalists mentioned were reckoned together with the propaganda troops, but other SS photo and film teams active in the framework of Himmler's personal staff were not connected in any way whatsoever with the Wehrmacht.

²³ "Lagebericht (PK)" Nr.45 (June 1-30, 1941), BA-MA, RW4/338, WPr.Id; the best example of the use to which the materials were put is the article "Juden unter sich," *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, No. 30, July 24, 1941. The subtitle reads: "This is how the people lives from whose midst the murderers came – from Bromberg Lemberg, Dubno and Bialystok. Report from the Warsaw

Kriegsberichterkompanie (KBK) 6 were among them. They prepared a number of reports on the ghetto. The unit was stationed near Warsaw within the framework of secret troop movements that preceded Operation Barbarossa. Since it was forbidden to report on such troop movements, it was decided to do some feature stories on the ghetto. The stories bore titles such as “Behind the Ghetto Barrier,” “Warsaw Between Today and Tomorrow” and didactic titles such as “Why a Ghetto?” One report, entitled “Ahasver over England,” was written in English as propaganda for the English-speaking world. At least twenty photos accompanied these reports.²⁴

The accounts did not just contain a description of the ghetto but also sought to justify the bitter fate of its residents. A short time later KBK6 journalists accompanied the German battalions that invaded the Soviet Union and continued reporting on Jewish topics. It was understood at the time that it was important to emphasize the close link between the Jews and the Soviet regime.²⁵ In their reports, some of the correspondents even proposed solutions for combating “Jewish terror”:

As elsewhere, the Jews here [in Minsk] constitute a real danger. They are our enemies at all times. And want to be. It’s still possible to find former commissars in the ghetto. This is the origin of their constant desire to disturb the population. But using all means possible, we will crush the resistance of the Jews. It is common knowledge that before their withdrawal, the Soviets

Ghetto.” It is interesting to see how the photos made even before the invasion of the Soviet Union were exploited in propaganda prepared after the discovery of the crimes of the “Jewish-Bolshevik” regime; *ibid.*

²⁴ Reports by the reporters Hans R. Ertz, Hans-Werner Groth, Friedrich Luegmayer, Karl Gleiss, BA-MA, RL15/67.

²⁵ See, in particular, the report: Kriegsberichter Gefreiter Karl Gleiss (Lw.KBK6): “In zerstörten Städten kehrt wieder Ordnung ein. Die deutsche Verwaltung beginnt zu arbeiten,” September 16, 1941, BA-MA, RL15/71. From entries in the war diary of PK 612 dated July 4, 1941, it is possible to conclude that there was a specific order from the WPr. to report in that tone. It is stated there that the most recent instructions from Berlin demanded material on the reaction of the local population to its “Jewish oppressors”; BA-MA, RH45/6, KTB PK612, July 4, 1941.

spared the ghetto when setting fire to the town. A clear solution to the Jewish Question in this region is the precondition for future peace and calm here.²⁶ KBK 6 was not the only propaganda company that dispatched material on the “crimes” of the Jews in the Soviet Union; even the navy PKs added their contribution.²⁷ However, PKs in that period generally had their hands full with plenty of military material to report on. For that reason--and because the Jews were gradually disappearing from the Eastern territories--references to Jews in correspondents’ reports declined markedly, almost to nothing. A problematic aspect of reporting the news were accounts of executions of Jews. Such reports were meant solely for purposes of documentation.²⁸ Especially well known is the documentation of the execution of Jews and Gypsies in Pančevo, Serbia, on October 9-11, 1941. The film crew of the PK assigned to the Army Command Southeast (the Propaganda-Abteilung Südost) filmed members of the Wehrmacht signal corps unit taking the victims to be executed.²⁹ In addition to the film, a large number of photos were also taken by a PK photographer on the spot, the prominent photo correspondent Gerhard Grünefeld.³⁰ It is likely that at least some of the known photographs of the killing of Jews were also taken by military photographers.

²⁶ Ibid., Kriegsberichter A. Feickert (Lw.KBK6): “Reichskommissariat Ostland,” September 2, 1941.

²⁷ See, for example, “Marine Prop.Abt. Nord: Zusammenstellung der seit Beginn der Ostfeldzuges gemachten Filmaufnahmen bis einschl. October 15, 1941,” MA-BA, RW4/213. The report contains footage titled *Synagogenbrand in Riga und russische Plünderer in Verhör* (cameraman Ibler, length 345 m) and five photos taken by the photographer Bangemann on September 3, 1941 with the caption “Auf den Rückzugstrassen der Sowjetarmeen. Juden lernen Handarbeit.”

²⁸ See the detailed instructions on this matter in “Der Bevollm.Komm.Gen. in Serbien: Photographieren der Vollstreckung von Urteilen,” January 3, 1942, BA-MA, RH26-104/52; *ibid.*, “Fotographieren der Vollstrecken von Todsurteilen,” January 22, 1942.

²⁹ Oblt. Liepe: “Bericht über die Erschiessung von Juden,” October 13, 1941, BA-MA, RH24-18/213.

³⁰ Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, ed., *Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941-44. Ausstellungskatalog* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1996), pp. 28-31. In photo no. 2 one can clearly discern the cameraman and his assistant filming the incident. The originals of Grünefeld’s photographs are deposited in the German Historical Museum (DHM) in Berlin. See Winfried Ranke, *Deutsche Geschichte kurz belichtet. Photoreportagen von Gerhard Grünefeld 1937-65* (Berlin: DHM, 1991).

One deportation in the West – the deportation of the Jews of Marseilles on January 24, 1943, by the German and French police assisted by local Wehrmacht units – was caught on film by PK photographers. Apparently this was for documentation purposes, since none of the photos was published.³¹ The photos of the eviction are part of a series of photographs taken during the “clearing” of the old port neighborhood on January 22-24, 1943. During the operation there was a strict ban on taking photos, and only the PK photographers were permitted to photograph the Jews being removed to the train station and herded aboard trains for deportation.³² The more the German situation at the front deteriorated, the more the news-reporting concentrated on military or military-economic matters. This trend notwithstanding, antisemitic references appear in later reports as well. Thus, for example, a Jewish officer in the Red Army who was taken prisoner in January 1944, is depicted in the most stereotypical manner.³³ In another incident, the anti-Jewish feelings of the inhabitants of Budapest after a heavy bombardment of the city are described. The German military correspondent wrote:

The bombardment destroyed not just the houses of the working population, but also ravaged the last remnants of sympathy created by British propaganda and agitation of the Jewish rumor-mongers. Again and again, one can hear sharp expressions of disgust over the Americans and British and curses hurled against the Jews. The broader public has for some time been aware of the fact that they were responsible for igniting the conflagration of this war.³⁴

It would appear that the military correspondent here was not just recounting the animosity the Hungarian population harbored toward the Jews, but also (and perhaps in the main) giving voice to his own personal feelings.

The Jews in Active Propaganda

³¹ Ahlrich Meyer, *Der Blick des Besatzers: Propagandaphotographie der Wehrmacht aus Marseille 1942-1944* (Bremen: Ed. Temmen, 1999), pp. 19-27.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 22-23, 106-142.

³³ “Gefangene schildern Sowjetverlust in der Schlacht ostwärts Witebsk. Bolschewistisches Allerle – Samuel wurde in 6 Wochen Leutnant,” January 13, 1944, BA-MA, RW4/803, Pz.PK697/KB Heinz Henke.

³⁴ “Die Feuerprobe - Bewährung der ungarischen Heimatfront,” April 4, 1944, BA-MA, RW4/801, Prop. Zug b.58.Pz.Korps/ KB Werner Haverbeck.

The importance of active propaganda centering on the Jews became ever greater as the war progressed. Even though there were already campaigns of active propaganda at the time of the invasion of Poland, it was only after the invasion of the Soviet Union that these initiatives peaked. Active propaganda was directed principally against the enemy army, yet propaganda units stationed in the occupied territories focused their activities within the local civilian population. A central topic in that propaganda was the role of the Jews in the two hostile camps: the capitalist Plutocracy and Bolshevism.³⁵

A good example of active propaganda with antisemitic features was material disseminated by the propaganda unit in the Balkans, active mainly in Yugoslavia. From its inception, the Propaganda-*Abteilung* Südost bombarded the local population with extreme antisemitic imagery. It did this by publishing antisemitic articles in the local press, which was controlled by the propaganda units in the occupied territories, and by means of an anti-Jewish exhibition organized in Belgrade. The direct motive for that exhibition was the assumption that the Jews constituted the backbone of communism in Serbia.³⁶

In the aftermath of this propaganda, more concrete steps were taken against the Jews there, and, at the end of July 1941, the Propaganda Unit Southeast reported: “The military command is acting energetically against the bandits, the terrorists and their accomplices. The local population has not forgotten the shooting of some 50 communists and Jews.”³⁷

Only four days after this report was written, Lt. Dr. Schrade from the Propaganda Unit Southeast participated in a staff meeting with the commander-in-chief in Serbia, General Dunckelmann. At that conference it was decided to execute 122 communists and a number of Jews and to arrest

³⁵ Messerschmidt, *Die Wehrmacht im NS-Staat*, p. 326.

³⁶ “Propaganda-Abteilung Südost: Lage- und Tätigkeitsbericht der Propagandaabteilung,” May 26 – June 25, 1941, BA-MA, RW4/231. On the historical context of anti-Jewish propaganda in Serbia, see Walter Manoschek, “Serbien ist Judenfrei!”. *Militärische Besatzungspolitik und Judenvernichtung in Serbien 1941/42* (Munich: MGFA, 1993).

³⁷ “Propaganda-Abteilung Südost: Lage- und Tätigkeitsbericht,” June 26 – July 25, 1941, BA-MA, RW4/231.

anyone in Belgrade suspected of being a communist and send them to concentration camps.³⁸

One of the subordinate units (Propagandastaffel Kroatien), active principally in Bosnia, was centrally involved in anti-partisan activity and efforts to recruit Moslems to the German cause. In 1943-1944, in the framework of those activities, the unit published a broad array of antisemitic leaflets, postcards, and brochures.³⁹

The Propaganda-Abteilung Frankreich (PAF) of the Wehrmacht High Command in France carried out similar activities--but on a larger scale. In May 1941, the first extensive anti-Jewish campaign was initiated in France; at the same time, the German authorities introduced the first severe measures against the Jews there. This unit was responsible for orchestrating the propaganda campaign. Among other things, it emphasized the importance of the role of motion-picture films in antisemitic propaganda. As a first step, the unit brought in a French version of the antisemitic film *Jud Süss* in the areas under Vichy control.⁴⁰

Here, too, propaganda forged an identity between the Jews and Germany's enemies. The Jews were cast as the main group responsible for spreading anti-German propaganda in France.⁴¹ A year later, in May 1942, the PAF came to the conclusion that the Jews were the major culprits in spreading enemy propaganda and thus represented a substantial obstacle to the unit's work. Reports on the propaganda situation in the country noted that if steps were not taken against the Jews, the problem of communist resistance

³⁸ Lt. Dr. Schrade: "Kurze Niederschrift über Dienstbesprechung am 29.07.41," BA-MA, RW4/252.

³⁹ See the collection of materials in the following files: BA-MA, RH45/45-48, 66, 69, 75-76.

⁴⁰ PA Frankreich/Referat Rundfunk/Abteilung Zeitgeschehen: "Tätigkeitsbericht über 10 Monate Zeitgeschehen," May 23, 1941, BA-MA, RW35/217.

⁴¹ See comments by the intelligence officer of the military government in France: "Der Militärbefehlshaber in Frankreich/lc: Die deutschfeindliche Propaganda im besetzten Frankreich und ihre Bekämpfung," May 25, 1941, BA-MA, RW35/238.

would never be solved.⁴² It was recommended that, in propaganda targeting the French population, the Jews should be presented as :

enemies of mankind, who are able only to destroy, not to create. Communism is an Asian phenomenon influenced by the Jews, and aspires to plunge culture and civilization, created with such huge effort, back into the depths of the most primitive form of human existence.⁴³

Within the thrust of this tendency, the PAF unit in northern France was ordered to produce propaganda around the show trial of Herschel Grynszpan, who had assassinated the German diplomat vom Rath in Paris in November 1938. That trial was scheduled to be held in May 1942. The head of the anti-Jewish department in the Propaganda Ministry, Dr. Taubert, instructed the propaganda unit “to bring the guilt of international Jewry before the highest German tribunal.”⁴⁴ In the end, the show trial was not held, and so the propaganda campaign that was planned to accompany it was never launched.

Anti-Jewish propaganda in France was intensified as part of preparations for a severe clamp-down on the Jews. Thus, the French version of the antisemitic feature film *Der Ewige Jude* was released for screening in occupied France at the beginning of July 1942; this was a short time after the order was issued for Jews to wear the yellow star and the first deportations to the death camps.

The release of *Der Ewige Jude* in France was a well-prepared propaganda move. The French version of the movie had been readied for screening already in December 1941, but the commander of the PAF ordered the film to be kept in storage until the appropriate moment for its viewing.⁴⁵

After the yellow star order was issued, the PAF unit reported:

⁴² Propaganda-Abteilung Frankreich: “Die Wirksamkeit der Feindpropaganda, Zielsetzung der deutschen Propaganda und Möglichkeiten in Frankreich,” May 3, 1942, BA-MA, RW4/256; the report also stressed the fact that, in Paris alone, there was a Jewish population of over 120,000.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ “Dr. Taubert/RMVP an die Propagandaabteilung beim Militärbefehlshaber in Belgien und Nordfrankreich (über Abt. RV und WPr.),” April 27, 1942, BA-MA RW4/256.

⁴⁵ Propaganda-Abteilung Frankreich/Referat Film: “Tätigkeitsbericht für die Zeit vom 12.-19.12.41,” BA-MA, RW35/224, RW35/226; Ibid., 13-20/6/42.

It is evident that special marking of the Jews will be able to achieve its full effect only if associated with certain humiliating measures.

As a consequence, the propaganda unit turned once more to the SD and recommended that Jews should be prohibited from entering public baths, coffee houses and restaurants. They should be deprived of their ration cards for cigarettes. These should be given to French POWs. Jews should not be allowed to walk on the main streets and boulevards on Sundays and holidays. According to recently received information from the SD, an order is being prepared that will take these proposals into due account.⁴⁶

It is intriguing to note that in France, as in Serbia, the Wehrmacht propaganda unit did not deal only with obvious propaganda issues but was also involved in shaping occupation policy. The PAF pressured the SD to take more severe anti-Jewish measures in order to carry out its own mission, which was basically anti-Jewish. The aim was to strengthen the anti-Jewish animus within the French population, but, in so doing, the unit also tried to influence the fate of the Jews directly. After several weeks, it reported:

The initial propaganda work on the Jewish Question has continued in the period described utilizing radio broadcasts, lectures, press articles and the dissemination of brochures. After the end of arrests [of Jews without French citizenship papers], anti-Jewish propaganda has continued on a broader scale by stressing the benefits that will accrue to the French population in connection with the removal of Jews who do not hold French citizenship.⁴⁷

Active propaganda with antisemitic features was even implemented in the Middle East. A major effort was made to incite the Arabs against the British by dropping large numbers of leaflets from planes over Egypt, Iraq, Syria, and Palestine. These leaflets presented the Jews as proxies of the British in the Middle East. They exploited the continuing dispute between the Jews and the Arabs by injecting virulent antisemitic messages.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Propaganda-Abteilung Frankreich/Gruppe Aktiv-Propaganda: "Allgemeines Stimmungsbild (vom 10.6-8.7.42)," July 8, 1942, BA-MA, RW4/237.

⁴⁷ Propaganda-Abteilung Frankreich/Gruppe Aktiv-Propaganda: "Allgemeines Stimmungsbild (vom 8.7-11.8.42)," August 11, 1942, BA-MA, RW4/237.

⁴⁸ A collection of leaflets apparently disseminated in 1942, is contained in BA-MA, RW4/257. RW4/258 contains texts with antisemitic content meant for the Arab population of North Africa and the French colonial troops stationed there.

The most extensive propaganda campaign in the East was directed against the Soviet Union. Its antisemitic content was, of course, extremely poisonous. From the first days of the campaign, identifying the Jews with the Kremlin regime was at the very heart of the active German propaganda efforts.⁴⁹

Antisemitic content was already evident in propaganda leaflets published in September 1937, at the time of the Wehrmacht autumn maneuvers. In these maneuvers troops practiced repelling a mock Soviet offensive against eastern Germany, while the propaganda unit experimented with disseminating propaganda material beyond enemy lines. A central theme in these leaflets was equating the Jews with the oppressive Soviet regime.⁵⁰

Some four years later, PK units born in that same 1937 experiment forged a similar linkage to incite mass desertion from the Red Army. The improved content geared to this aim was equating the Jews with the notorious Red Army commissars. The Wehrmacht tried hard to induce simple soldiers to turn their backs on their commissars, who were always presented as Jews or persons closely associated with them.⁵¹

Since these propaganda efforts proved ineffective, the Wehrmacht launched a new campaign in early 1942: this time it was designed to persuade the commissars themselves to defect. The infamous *Kommissarbefehl* was revoked, and references identifying the commissars with the Jews were

⁴⁹ See, for example, "Richtlinien für die Aktivpropaganda in die Sowjetarmee," September 1, 1942, BA-MA RW4/257, WPr.(AP): Para. A of the "Main Tendencies in Active German Propaganda," states that "the German army and its allies are not fighting against the peoples of the Soviet Union. Their struggle is solely against the Jewish-Bolshevik system of exploitation and terror." For a detailed picture of the system of active propaganda in the East, see Buchbender, *Das tönende Erz*, efforts on the Western front were much more limited, their influence quite marginal. A rare example of antisemitic material prepared for troops in the West is BA-MA RW4/258, "Flugblatt für die amerikanischen und englischen Truppen."

⁵⁰ See the texts of leaflets in BA-MA, RW4/812.

⁵¹ Buchbender, *Das tönende Erz*, pp. 98-102. Leaflets deriding the commissars had slogans such as "Schlagt die Kommissare nieder, schlagt die Juden nieder!," "Nieder mit den Juden und Kommissaren!," "Haut den Judenkommissar, seine Fresse schreit nach einem Ziegelstein!" ("Strike down the Jews and commissars," "Down with the Jews and commissars!" "Strike down the Jewish commissar. His dog's face is shouting for a brick.") The last leaflet called on Soviet soldiers to take a real stand against the commissars.

dropped.⁵² Nonetheless, the general line of propaganda did not change, and the construct of a linkage between the Jews and the hard-core communists was retained. As a result, antisemitic material continued to reach Red Army troops, spread via aerial drops, artillery shells, special missiles, loudspeakers, and other means.⁵³

The Germans were very curious about the specific influence their propaganda messages, including those with antisemitic content, were actually having. They began to assess that by questioning Soviet POWs. In the course of this “research,” the question of antisemitism in the Red Army arose, and, based on the information that was gathered, the active propaganda messages were revised and improved. For example, a report in July 1942, stated:

Leaflets with slogans such as “Down with the Jews!” were unappealing because they did not explain why the Jews should be gotten rid of. If they offer such an explanation, then the Russian can pause to think, comparing this with his own personal experience before the war. Only then does he find his earlier observations confirmed.⁵⁴

Ortwin Buchbender investigated the contents of the bulk of leaflets disseminated by propaganda units on the eastern front. He found they were marked by ten dominant themes. One of these was antisemitism, and, in August 1942, it constituted 9 percent of the total material, ranking fifth in relative importance. This amounts to a total of some 3,978,540 antisemitic leaflets distributed in one way or another behind enemy lines. The amount increases significantly if we take into account the antisemitic content in anti-

⁵² Ibid. pp. 160-166.

⁵³ Some of the leaflets bore slogans such as: “In den Kampf gehen nicht die Juden sondern Ihr”, “Zitat des Dichters Dostojewski über die Juden,” “Stalin treibt Euch im Interesse der Juden ins Verderben,” “Wer sind die Herren in der U.d.S.S.R. Die Juden” etc. (“You’re going to battle, not the Jews,” “From the words of Dostoyevsky on the Jews,” “Stalin is sending you to your ruin for the sake of the Jews,” “Who are the masters in the Soviet Union? The Jews”); AOK6/lc Prop.: “Flugblattübersicht für Monat August 1942,” September 20, 1942, BA-MA RW4/257.

⁵⁴ Dienststelle Major Baun: “Unsere Propaganda u. deutsche Kriegsgefangene,” July 18, 1942, BA-MA, RW4/257.

Bolshevik propaganda, a theme that ranked second, accounting for 17 percent of the total.⁵⁵

The active propaganda that targeted the civilian population in the East also had a strong antisemitic content. Between 1941 and 1944, some 9 percent of the propaganda pamphlets and brochures distributed by military propaganda units operating in the East to the civilian population were antisemitic in character.⁵⁶

It should be noted in this context that, in 1942, an agreement of cooperation was signed between the OKW Propaganda Department and the RSHA (Reichssicherheitshauptamt; Reich Main Security Office) regarding the posting of SS propagandists to Einsatzgruppen. The Wehrmacht PKs operating in the East were ordered to cooperate with the Einsatzgruppen. As in the case of the PKs, the propaganda specialists in the Einsatzgruppen were also to receive professional directives for their work directly from the OKW Propaganda Department.⁵⁷

Cooperation was not restricted to propaganda. The PKs had various technical means at their disposal that could assist the Einsatzgruppen in carrying out their mission of mass murder. This was part of the Wehrmacht's logistical assistance for implementing the mass slaughter in the East.

One such example was on August 7, 1941, when the residents of Zhitomir were informed by loudspeakers atop a PK 637 vehicle that they should proceed to the central square in order to witness the execution of 400 Jews. These Jews were assembled opposite the mass gathering and were accused of various crimes. Then two of them were dragged to a makeshift gallows and hanged as loudspeakers proclaimed the crimes with which they had been

⁵⁵ Buchbender, *Das tönende Erz*, p. 182.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 278.

⁵⁷ Der Chef der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD an WPr.: "Propagandisten bei den Einsatzgruppen der Sipo und des SD in den besetzten sowjetischen Gebieten," July 1, 1942, BA-MA, RW4/192; WPr.la to PK621, Prop.Abt.W, Prop.Abt.U, PK695: "Propagandisten bei den Einsatzgruppen der Sipo und des SD in den besetzten sowjetischen Gebieten," July 8, 1942.

charged.. The remainder of the Jews were taken outside the town and murdered by men of Einsatzgruppe C.⁵⁸

PK 637 was operating at that time under the command of the famous Sixth Army (later encircled and destroyed at Stalingrad). At the end of September 1941, it provided auxiliary service to the killing units in connection with a notorious incident. The mobile printing press of the unit printed some 2,000 large wall posters calling on the Jews of Kiev to gather in a specific place on the morning of September 29.⁵⁹ More than 33,000 Jews were assembled that day and then taken to the ravine of Babi Yar, where almost all met their death.

Education and Recreation Activities for German Troops

The OKW Propaganda Department, in cooperation with various Nazi party organizations, such as Kraft durch Freude (KdF), organized educational and recreational activities for the German troops. The main aim was to lift the soldiers' morale by providing them with reading material, musical instruments, diverse means of entertainment and relaxation, movies, shows and performances, etc. However, in the army, which was so deeply integrated into the National-Socialist system, it was not possible to leave the ideology out of these seemingly innocent activities. Thus, for example, various units throughout Europe attended screenings of the famous antisemitic films *Der Ewige Jude*, *Jud Süß*, and *Die Rothschilds Aktien von Waterloo*.⁶⁰ The Propaganda Department had a special section that distributed films from its own storage facilities or obtained them from the film centers of the NSDAP and KdF. In addition, propaganda troops disseminated antisemitic reading

⁵⁸ Bernd Ball and Hans Safrian, "Auf dem Weg nach Stalingrad. Die 6. Armee 1941/42," in Hannes Heer and Klaus Naumann, eds., *Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941-44* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1995), pp. 272-273.

⁵⁹ "Tätigkeitsbericht vom 27.9.41," September 29, 1941, BA-MA, RH20-6/492, PK637 an AOK6/lc. This activity was recorded in the report of the unit as part of active propaganda. See also Helmut Krausnick and Hans-Heinrich Wilhelm, *Die Truppe des Weltanschauungskrieges. Die Einsatzgruppen der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD 1938-42* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags Anstalt, 1981), p. 235.

⁶⁰ WPr. film delivery lists in: BA-MA, RW4/293.

materials to every company commander in the Wehrmacht in order to help him properly “educate” the soldiers under his command.⁶¹ For the same educational purpose, a PK correspondent named Karl Dürfler sent his comrades in PK 612, after their release from the army in January 1942, fifty copies of his antisemitic book *Hofjuden*.⁶²

Radio was also an instrument for elevating the soldiers’ spirits and entertaining them. Great efforts were made to enable soldiers to listen to radio broadcasts from back home or to German-language stations set up by the Propaganda Department in the occupied territories. A special branch, the Propaganda Section W.Pr.IIc, headed by Dr. Erich Murawski, was responsible for all matters relating to radio broadcasting. One of the main areas of the department’s activities in 1939-1940, was procuring radio receivers and record players for Wehrmacht units. A major source for these appliances was expropriated Jewish property in Germany and Poland. In order to obtain these items, the department maintained contact with the party propaganda administration, the Gestapo, and Eichmann’s office in the RSHA.⁶³ These were the same authorities that had expropriated the items in the first place and arranged to store and repair them before passing them on to the army.⁶⁴ The sources indicate that radio sets and record players continued to be collected until November 1944, when the task was taken over by the Troop Entertainment Department set up in the Propaganda Ministry. In that same time frame, in 1942, the RSHA had issued an order for the regular transfer of

⁶¹ WPr.Id to WPr.VId and Ie, March 13, 1940, BA-MA, RW4/259; among the books distributed to company commanders were the following: Dr. P. Aldag, *Juden beherrschen England* and H. Bollensiefen, *Juden in Frankreich*.

⁶² Hpt. Kattermann to Pg. Uffz. Karl Dürfler, February 10, 1940, BA-MA, RH45/16a.

⁶³ “Die Arbeit der Partei-Propaganda im Kriege,” in *Unser Wille und Weg* 11 (1941), p. 8. It is stated there that “cooperating with the police, our men also collected radio sets that had previously belonged to Jews. After they were tested and repaired, about half were passed on to the army for the use of the troops.” Adolf Eichmann headed section IV B4 of the RSHA.

⁶⁴ OKH/O QuIV to WPr. and I, December 7, 1939; WPr.IIc to OKH/O QuIV, December 11, 1939; WPr.IIc to RSHA, December 11, 1939; WPr.IIc to RSHA, December 30, 1939, BA-MA RW4/420.

radios formerly owned by Jews to army units.⁶⁵ Among other things, the civilian organizations that cooperated in this effort also took care of filtering the musical material sent on to the soldiers from pilfered Jewish possessions. Records with Hebrew music or by Jewish composers were removed from the collections transferred to the Wehrmacht.⁶⁶

In the course of organizing entertainment shows for German troops in the conquered areas, the propaganda units were careful to exclude Jewish artists or anyone “suspected” of being Jewish. Thus, for example, the Propaganda-*Abteilung* Südost discovered that a famous Jewish conductor from the Viennese opera was working as a conductor in the National Greek Theater in Athens. Subsequent to a demand by the department, it was decided that, in performances before Wehrmacht troops, he would be replaced by a younger Greek conductor. The same report detailing the affair also expressed opposition to continuing the contract of a Jew named Cohen as the director of a private theater in Athens.⁶⁷

The Propaganda Department was also responsible to some extent for the strict ideological indoctrination of the Wehrmacht troops. This task was accomplished largely through the series *Mitteilungen für die Truppe* (*MfdT*). This bulletin consisted of four printed pages and was distributed on an average twice a month to all Wehrmacht units up to the company level. These *MfdT* also contained venomous antisemitic material, especially after the invasion of the Soviet Union. In that period it was more important than ever to explain to the soldiers the “fact” that the Bolshevik system was exploited, managed, and controlled by Jews.⁶⁸ To that end, the *MfdT* published numerous short essays designed to explain to the troops in clear and simple

⁶⁵ Der Oberfinanzpräsident Magdeburg an RMVP/Ministeramt: “Eingezogenes und verfallenes Vermögen; hier Schallplatten und Abspielgeräte für Schallplatten,” July 4, 1942, BA-Berlin R55/679.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Propaganda-Abteilung “SO”: “Lage- und Tätigkeitsbericht für den Monat August 1942,” September 4, 1942, BA-MA, RW4/237.

⁶⁸ Messerschmidt, *Die Wehrmacht im NS-Staat*, p. 326.

language the nature of the nexus between the Jews and the main enemies of the German Reich.⁶⁹

The Influence of Wehrmacht Propaganda

The natural question regarding all propaganda is its effectiveness: to what extent is it successful in changing the views of its target public and galvanizing it to act? In the case of the Third Reich, it is possible to provide partial answers thanks to the confidential reports on the mood of the people and public opinion prepared by the SD (*Mitteilungen aus dem Reich - MadR*). While these reports do not deal directly with the effectiveness of Wehrmacht propaganda per se, since that propaganda was the basis of more general Nazi war propaganda it is possible to find reports on the responses of the German public to antisemitic materials provided by the Wehrmacht. The *MadR* did regular, detailed surveys of the weekly newsreels and thus contain material on audience responses to the antisemitic scenes they were shown. For example, No. 205 (July 24, 1941) contained an account on the public response to a story from Riga:

The images of the arrest of Jews who had a hand in the killing operation enjoyed broad acceptance. People said they were treated fairly. The pictures of Jews forced to clear away rubble were generally viewed with considerable pleasure ... The lynch trial that the inhabitants of Riga conducted against their oppressors, the Jews, was accompanied by shouts of encouragement.⁷⁰

About a month later, Jews were featured once again in the *Wochenschau*, this time in Balti. The SD report stated: "Throughout the Reich, the pictures of lines of Jews, with close-ups of specific types, were generally

⁶⁹ The following numbers of the bulletin contain direct or indirect antisemitic content: *MfdT* No.29, 87, 115, 116, 119, 120, 125, 126, 130, 146, 147, 153, 157, 195, 197, 198, 206, 209, 222, 253, 264, 317, 319, 324, September 1944 (357), 368, 382, BA-MA, RW4/357.

⁷⁰ *MadR* Nr.205, July 24, 1941, BA-Berlin, R58/162. The newsreel focused on in the report is *Wochenschau* No.567/30/1941, July 16, 1941; the "killing operation" referred to is an invention of German propaganda in order to characterize the "Jewish-Bolshevik terror in the Soviet Union." The "lynch trial" refers to the scene of the burning of the Riga synagogue, filmed by cameramen of the *Marine-Propaganda-Abteilung* Nord. On the general response of the German population to the anti-Jewish measures, see David Bankier, *The Germans and the Final Solution: Public Opinion under Nazism* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

received with comments that repeatedly asked: in future, what can be done with such riffraff?"⁷¹

Past research has argued that antisemitic propaganda helped to promote indifference to the fate of Jews among large segments of the German population. It also persuaded the public that it was quite able to return to a secure and apolitical private life, leaving the "solving" of "problems" of this type to others.⁷² If there is some truth in this contention, then the Wehrmacht propaganda, in providing regular propagandistic news reports on the Jews, had a significant impact on this process. Nonetheless, it is important to add that the available sources were not based on precise cross-sections of public opinion and in many cases were tendentious.

Regarding the influence of Wehrmacht propaganda on enemy armies and populations, the answers are even more ambiguous. Several contradictory reports were received from the eastern front on the effectiveness of German antisemitic propaganda among Red Army troops and the civilian population. Those reports were based in large part, as noted, on questioning POWs and civilians. The 17th Army, for example, indicated that such propaganda had some potential and recommended that it be intensified. By contrast, the 9th Army reported that antisemitic propaganda was not particularly effective.⁷³

Reports on civilian public opinion in various localities were likewise somewhat ambiguous. In certain instances it appeared that German propaganda was kicking at an open door, so to speak, while in many other

⁷¹ *MadR* Nr.211, August 14, 1941, BA-Berlin, R58/163. The newsreel in question is No. 570/33/1941, August 6, 1941, which shows the expulsion of the Jews of Balti.

⁷² Welch, *The Third Reich*, p. 82.

⁷³ "Auszüge aus sich widersprechenden Truppenberichten, Vorschläge für die deutsche Propaganda in den Feind- und Gefangenaussagen," August 16, 1942, BA-MA, RW4/257, WPr.(AP). The command of the 17th Army noted: "The requirements for German propaganda: intensified struggle against the Jews ... provision of as much information as possible on the Jews." The Intelligence Section of the 9th Army contended that "the Jewish Question comes up only rarely, and then not in an especially pronounced way."

instances it failed to prevent broad segments of the non-Jewish population from being shocked by the slaughter of the Jews in the East.⁷⁴

Subsequent to the first wave of active German propaganda in the East, the Heeresgruppe Mitte (Army Group Center) reported in August 1941:

After examining the reasons behind the relatively small impact of German propaganda to date, it appears that German propaganda basically deals with matters of no real interest to the average Russian. This is particularly true of antisemitic propaganda. Attempts to spark pogroms against the Jews have come to naught. The reason is that in the eyes of the average Russian, Jews live a proletarian life and thus do not represent a target for attack.⁷⁵

The principal “problem” in the East was evidently the fact that in most of the areas where Wehrmacht propaganda units were operating, the number of Jews declined markedly within the course of about a year as a result of murder, deportation, or concentration in ghettos. As the Propaganda Department Ukraine reported in August 1942, “There has been virtually no discussion of the Jewish Question. Since the disappearance or removal of the Jews, that question now has a historical significance for the Ukrainian population, which almost universally has nothing but contempt for the Jews.”⁷⁶

In propaganda reports from Western Europe, it was argued that whoever had had antisemitic prejudices before being exposed to German propaganda continued to adhere to them, and whoever was not was almost uninfluenced by propaganda.⁷⁷ The film section of the Propaganda Department France noted:

The German film *Jud Süss* was a big hit in Marseilles. It received a storm of applause and there were no disturbances...The audience watched its main

⁷⁴ Propaganda-Abteilung W: “Zur Lage und Stimmung der Bevölkerung in Stadt und Gebiet Smolensk,” n.d. (late 1941), BA-MA, RW4/236; Buchbender, *Das tönende Erz*, p. 270.

⁷⁵ Heeresgruppe Mitte: “Propaganda-Einsatz gegen die Rote Armee und die russische Zivilbevölkerung,” August 11, 1941, BA-MA, RW4/252.

⁷⁶ Propaganda-Abteilung U: “Anlage 2 zum Übergabebericht der Propoganda-Abteilung U,” August 27, 1942, BA-MA, RW4/237.

⁷⁷ For example, Propaganda-Abteilung Belgien: “Stimmungsbericht vom 10.6-9.7.42,” July 9, 1942, BA-MA, RW4/237.

scenes with great enthusiasm (*inter alia*, expressed in remarks such as “The Jews should disappear from Marseilles too”).⁷⁸

Nonetheless, there is other evidence from southern France suggesting that there was substantial opposition to the film from various sectors of the local population.⁷⁹

In June 1942, the Jews of France were ordered to wear the yellow star. According to a report from the Propaganda Department France, thanks to preparatory propaganda measures, including articles in the press and the dissemination of explanatory leaflets, the French population accepted the order without any overt opposition.⁸⁰ But the French public was not totally indifferent, as indicated by this report:

In many cases the French expressed sympathy for the Jews who had been arrested. Rumors of the barbaric treatment they were receiving were accepted as true and passed on.... By contrast, antisemitic circles voiced their pleasure with these measures and once again demanded that all Jews be ousted, regardless of their nationality.⁸¹

From these reports and subsequent research on public opinion in France, it seems it is difficult to reach a definite conclusion regarding the success of German antisemitic propaganda there. Still the sharp rise in popular antisemitism among the French population in 1941-1942, cannot be disregarded.⁸² Yet since there were so many factors acting simultaneously to influence French public opinion at the time, the role, if any, played by the Wehrmacht propaganda in this upsurge cannot be determined.

⁷⁸ Propaganda-Abteilung Frankreich/Referat Film: “Tätigkeitsbericht für die Zeit vom 25-30.4.41,” BA-MA, RW4/237.

⁷⁹ Michael R. Marrus and Robert O. Paxton, *Vichy France and the Jews* (New-York: Basic Books, 1981), p. 212.

⁸⁰ Propaganda-Abteilung Frankreich/Gruppe Aktiv-Propaganda: “Allgemeines Stimmungsbild (vom 10.6-8.7.42),” July 8, 1942, BA-MA, RW4/237. Attached to this report is a thick appendix containing German translations of letters from French citizens in which they voiced their opinions on anti-Jewish measures and the Jews more generally.

⁸¹ Propaganda-Abteilung Frankreich/Gruppe Aktiv-Propaganda: “Allgemeines Stimmungsbild (vom 8.7.-11.8.42),” August 11, 1942, BA-MA, RW4/237.

⁸² Marrus and Paxton, *Vichy France and the Jews*, pp. 181-182; see also the entire chapter on public opinion, pp. 179 - 214.

It is also difficult to come to a definite assessment regarding the influence of propaganda aimed at the German troops. It is well known that many soldiers had antisemitic prejudices before joining the military and that the German military was itself tainted by antisemitism even before the Nazis rose to power. This matter is strikingly evident in soldiers' letters and in numerous photographs that show German soldiers humiliating Jews.⁸³ Nonetheless, an officer of the Propaganda Department wrote, upon returning from a visit to the East, that combat troops reject the ideological material of the *MdFT* and are unwilling to read it. They prefer to read about the general war situation, the benefits they will receive as combat veterans, etc.⁸⁴

The main conclusion to be drawn here, as with Nazi propaganda in general, is that there is no way to determine the effectiveness of the Wehrmacht antisemitic propaganda based on the available sources. At the same time, it can be argued that, under certain circumstances and with certain specific target communities, the antisemitic messages did have some impact.

Manpower, Propaganda Troops, and Antisemitic Propaganda

Although the impact of Wehrmacht antisemitic propaganda was not very decisive, there is another aspect worth looking into. The very fact that the "unsullied" Wehrmacht produced propaganda that had certain antisemitic features necessitates an explanation and examination. The explanation lies hidden in two facts. First, the propaganda troops worked in close cooperation with the Propaganda Ministry, and in certain spheres, such as news reporting, they were, in practice, the ministry's military extension. The working procedures of the propaganda troops in news reportage were discussed

⁸³ Examples of letters from soldiers are contained in Walter Manoschek, ed., *Es gibt nur eines für das Judentum: Vernichtung*. *Judenbild in in deutschen Soldatenbriefen* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1995); Ortwin Buchbender and Reinhold Stertz, *Das andere Gesicht des Krieges* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1982). See, also, the book published during the war: Wolfgang Diewerge, ed., *Deutsche Soldaten sehen die Sowjet-Union* (Berlin: W. Limpert, 1941). Photos of this kind were contained in the exhibition on Wehrmacht war crimes put on in Germany and Austria, 1995-1999; see the exhibition catalog, *Vernichtungskrieg, Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941-1944*.

Ausstellungskatalog.

⁸⁴ Hpt. Boness, Chef WPr.: "Beobachtungen beim Einsatz Osten Juni-Sept. 1942 (Woronesh, Sewastopol, Don Gebiet, Rostow, Kuban, Krasnodar, Kaukasus)," September 11, 1942, BA-MA, RW4/192.

above, and, as noted, everything began and ended in the Propaganda Ministry. The examples of directives and guidelines given the propaganda units by the ministry also demonstrate this.

Second, and perhaps more significant, was the presence of a relatively large number of Nazi party members and functionaries in the ranks of the propaganda troops. Manfred Messerschmidt noted in the late 1960s, that, by means of its assistance in manning the propaganda troop units, the Propaganda Ministry managed to enlist in its ranks more NSDAP members than in any other arm of the Wehrmacht.⁸⁵

In this last connection, it should be noted that, from the personnel files of the OKW Propaganda Department and the registers of the Berlin Document Center, a more precise picture of the type of personnel serving with the propaganda troops can be sketched. The overwhelming majority of staff officers in the Propaganda Department were professional army officers without formal ties to the Nazi party. Nevertheless, the bulk of the enlisted men and officers who served in the propaganda units were located for the military by the local branches (Reichspropagandaämter) of the Propaganda Ministry. Most were known to staff in the ministry's branches or were even employed there. Lists of personnel were sent to the Propaganda Ministry in Berlin to be certified with regard to professional credentials and political reliability. Appointments of PK commanders had to be approved by Goebbels personally.⁸⁶

Colonel Heinz Schmidtke, commander of the Propaganda Department France, whose signature is on the documents cited earlier, is a good example of the type of personnel that was so highly desired. He was a senior civilian official in the Propaganda Ministry and a close personal associate of Goebbels. With the start of the war, he was drafted into the military and assigned to the OKW Propaganda Department. His first posting was as liaison officer between the Propaganda Department and the section for the domestic

⁸⁵ Messerschmidt, *Die Wehrmacht im NS-Staat*, pp. 240-241.
⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 241.

press in the Propaganda Ministry.⁸⁷ In light of this, it is not surprising that he was well briefed on anti-Jewish policy.

One of the strangest chapters in the history of the Wehrmacht propaganda troops is connected with the fact that several Jews and *Mischlinge* were able to pass through the strict personnel filters and serve in their ranks. The best-known and most extreme case is that of Captain Edgar Jacoby, a movie-industry man who was appointed commander of PK 696 in 1941. A short time later it became known that he was a “full” Jew, and even before the investigation into his origin was completed, he was transferred from the Propaganda Department to the regional Officers’ Reserve Corps. Jacoby was subsequently court-martialed for having given false information and was sentenced to six months in a military prison. He was apparently released before serving the full sentence, discharged from the army, and not subjected to any further persecution until the end of the war.⁸⁸

Another unique case was that of the German military correspondent Werner-Jörg Lüddecke, who served in the Navy Propaganda Department West. Lüddecke was considered a superb journalist and was the head of the press section in his unit. He even spent nine months on a round-the-world trip on the deck of a ship attempting to break the naval blockade on Germany and sail to Japan. In August 1942, a short time after he returned from this adventure, it became known that he was a so-called second-degree *Mischling* (a “quarter-Jew” according to the Nazi race laws). Since he had the reputation of being an outstanding soldier, it was decided to bring the matter to Hitler’s attention for final adjudication – standard procedure in exceptional cases. It is not known what happened after that, but Lüddecke survived the war without any further persecution.⁸⁹ The cases of at least two cameramen

⁸⁷ Wedel, *Die Propagandatruppen*, p. 73.

⁸⁸ His story is partially documented in files BA-MA RW4/162, 186. I am indebted to Brian Rigg, who made it possible for me to examine Jacoby’s personal documents in his possession. He also provided me with information on the whole question of Jews and *Mischlinge* who served in the Wehrmacht.

⁸⁹ “Inspektion des Bildungswesens der Marine/ROA Abt. an Kommando Marinestation der Ostsee: MA Mt.d.R. Werner Lüddecke,” September 29, 1942, BA-MA, RW4/209. After the war Lüddecke returned to his former profession as a writer; see, for example, his novel *Der Hund vom anderen Stern* (Munich: Ehrenwirt, 1962).

who were released from service due to a similar background are also known.⁹⁰

Another case of a *Mischling* posted to the OKW Propaganda Department in Berlin illustrates the personal view of the department's head with regard to the problem. In a document dealing with the fate of the *Mischling* Dr. Kurt Zentner, it is stated that General von Wedel had "no interest" in having a *Mischling* serving in the OKW and that he should be sent back immediately to his original unit.⁹¹ Apparently, that decision was meant to spell the end of Zentner's Wehrmacht career, but it turned out that another senior officer who knew him was ready to employ Zentner in the Wehrmacht Education Department. That is, Zentner's dismissal from the Wehrmacht was not the only option, but von Wedel was not prepared to authorize his further service in the Propaganda Department. Von Wedel's opinion in this case can serve to a certain extent to point up the fact that even army officers of the old school conformed in the main to the Nazi system. This was a process that accompanied the Nazification of the Wehrmacht and reinforced the extent of its compliance with the content of Nazi ideology.⁹²

The attitude of those professional officers toward the Jews is also exemplified in statements by Major Hans Leo Martin, liaison officer of the Propaganda Department in the Ministry of Propaganda. In the ministry's daily briefing on May 19, 1940, Martin was asked by Goebbels to investigate reports according to which German paratroopers who had been taken prisoner were executed in Brussels before the arrival of the German army. Martin replied that this was highly unlikely, since, in that same period, 30,000 Jews and other wealthy individuals had already fled the city. In addition to this

⁹⁰ Personal interview by the author with Dr. Fritz Hippler, Berchtesgaden, April 16, 1998.

⁹¹ WPr.BO to Gruppe IV, November 7, 1941, BA-MA, RW4/204. Zentner also survived the war and later published several "soft" apologetic books on the Wehrmacht containing a great deal of PK material. See Kurt Zentner, *Nur einmal konnte Stalin siegen. Lehren und Bilder aus dem Russlandfeldzug 1941-45* (Hamburg: Gruner, 1952).

⁹² Brian Rigg relates that numerous senior officers tried to assist officers serving with them when it became known that they were of "mixed" racial background. Their ranks included Field Marshals Walther von Reichenau and Erich von Manstein, who could hardly be suspected of being "sympathetically disposed" toward Jews.

innuendo regarding Jews and their connection to war crimes, Martin went on to add that, since those persons were no longer around, the local population that remained was fundamentally loyal to the Germans.⁹³

In this connection it should be noted that the educational leaflets and pamphlets containing vicious antisemitic material were written, edited, and distributed by section WPr.II in the OKW Propaganda Department. Unlike the large numbers of party members serving with the field units, the officers serving there were a representative cross-section of the old officer generation. Officers from section WPr.IV in the Propaganda Department (including Major Martin), who disseminated all the active propaganda on the eastern front, were all professional military men.

Wehrmacht Propaganda and the Jews After 1945

After the war many veterans from the ranks of the propaganda troops attempted to clear the name of the Wehrmacht and to distance it from the crimes of the Nazi regime. In these efforts they occasionally referred to the Jews and the attitude of the propaganda troops to them during the war. General von Wedel wrote that the OKW Propaganda Department (WPr.) and he personally rejected National-Socialist antisemitism and that they had successfully prevented it from being incorporated into Wehrmacht propaganda.⁹⁴

Günther Heysing, who founded and directed the Association of Propaganda Troop Veterans and even edited its periodical (*Die Wildente*), also chose to deny and distort the past. In response to a veteran's letter to the editor criticizing the extremely anti-communist content of his articles, Heysing wrote: "I myself had many Jewish friends before the war, and I have never published anything antisemitic in the pages of *Die Wildente*. There is no need whatsoever to recall that the PKs had nothing at all to do with the Jewish problem."⁹⁵

⁹³ Willi A. Boelke, ed., *Kriegspropaganda 1939-41. Geheime Ministerkonferenzen im Reichspropagandaministerium* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlag, 1966), p. 357.

⁹⁴ BA-MA, RW4/157; Hasso von Wedel, *Die Propagandatruppe*, p. 76.

⁹⁵ Günther Heysing, ed., *Dokumentation einer Verleumdung. Die "Wildente" bei UPI, im Bundestag, im "Spiegel"* (Hamburg: *Die Wildente*, Beiheft 2, n.d.), p. 5.

Heysing was partially right: he indeed never published any antisemitic material in *Die Wildente*, although a number of other apologetic articles appeared in its pages. A veteran of the Propaganda Staff Estonia wrote that his unit tried to soften the harsh measures of the Germans in Estonia and that they cautioned against persecution of Jews at the hands of the extremely antisemitic local population.⁹⁶

In actual fact, when that unit began to operate in Estonia, in September 1941, most of the local Jews were no longer there, and men from the unit occupied themselves, among other things, with gathering art objects that Jews had left behind in their vacated houses and apartments. Another of the unit's activities was to "purge" the public libraries of Jewish books.⁹⁷

In another article by Heysing, one can even find hints of Holocaust denial. He points out that to spread reports on the murder of Jews was an "old propaganda trick" of the Germans themselves, one which they had made use of against the Russians in World War I. For that reason he wished to stress the need to avoid creating a diabolical collective image of the Germans and noted that today's Israelis are a far cry from the old collective image of the Jew.⁹⁸

As noted, all these claims do not jibe with what the sources show. Heysing himself is an excellent example of the ideologically -minded PK soldier. He was an *alter Kämpfer* (veteran NSDAP activist), joining the SA in 1929, the party in 1931, and the SS in early 1939.⁹⁹ In the course of his service, posted as a senior PK correspondent on the eastern front, Heysing wrote in one of his widely circulated reports: "Not far from him [a dead senior Soviet officer] there lay the dead body of the Corps' Jewish Commissar, Pavel Borisovitch Murat, who served on the staff of the Soviet 21st Army." This is how he described his meeting with a Jewish POW:

⁹⁶ Edgar Stahf, "Wie man Herzen erobern kann. Aus der Geschichte der Prop. Staffel Estland," in *Die Wildente* (17), February 1958, p. 17.

⁹⁷ Propaganda-Abteilung Ostland: "Lagebericht No. 4," September 29, 1941, BA-MA, RW4/233.

⁹⁸ Günther Heysing, "Bitte, keine Kollektivurteile," in *Die Wildente*, 22 (April 1960), pp. 10-11.

⁹⁹ BA-Berlin, SS-HO Heysing, Günther: SS *Führerstammkarte* Günther Heysing.

Another example is that of a commander, a POW with the rank of captain. Of course, a Jew! He emerged from the mass of prisoners and immediately turned to a German officer nearby standing to one side: “Just a moment, sir! I’ve got something very important to tell you!” Only with effort was it possible to keep that slimy rat at arm’s length. Among the Bolsheviks, it was the Jews upon whom the Soviet system rested.¹⁰⁰

This article is but one example from a broad array of antisemitic propaganda materials created by the Wehrmacht propaganda troops, and its author was a typical representative of the soldiers who served in its ranks.

Translated from the Hebrew by William Templer

Source: *Yad Vashem Studies*, Vol. 29, 2001, pp. 27- 65

¹⁰⁰ Günther Heysing, “Im Tal des Todes,” October 18, 1941, BA-Berlin, R55/1077. This file contains a number of articles regarded by the Propaganda Ministry as especially outstanding and which consequently were widely distributed.