



The Holocaust of Soviet Jewry in the Occupied Territories of the Soviet Union

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Soviet Jewry before the Holocaust

In the period from the October Revolution to the onset of World War II, Jewish life in the Soviet Union was profoundly transformed. The Jews enjoyed equal civil status as individuals, but as a national group they faced a serious predicament which, at least in part, derived from the fact that they lacked some of the attributes defining a nation as set forth in the communist ideology developed by Lenin, and especially by Stalin.

Stalin defined a nation as a historical partnership of people sharing the same culture, language, territory and economy. Lacking such a common basis, Jews were deemed by the canons of the communist ideology to become assimilated into the nations amidst whom they lived. From time to time, tactical considerations led the shapers of Soviet policy to revise this official line and allow the development of Jewish culture during certain periods. However, the long-term policy of Stalin projected nothing less than the total assimilation of Soviet Jewry.

In line with this approach, all independent organizations and bodies of Soviet Jews, such as religious communities, Zionist and other political parties, and secular and religious educational institutions, were suppressed in the early 1920s. Furthermore, in the process of demolishing the old economic system, the Soviet regime deprived broad sectors of the Jewish population of their livelihood, and destroyed their economic basis. Economic, political and ideological difficulties notwithstanding, Jewish culture in Yiddish

thrived in the 1920s and the first half of the 1930s; its content, however, reflected the official line of communist ideology, and not Jewish national concerns.

During these years the regime felt that communist ideas could best be disseminated among Soviet Jews in the language they understood, i.e., Yiddish. At that time mass migration, stimulated by industrial development and the employment opportunities it provided, was taking place from the traditional Jewish shtetl in the former "Pale of Settlement" to the big cities. There was also a steady influx of Soviet Jews into various state bodies and educational institutions. Their growing participation in the life of Soviet society intensified assimilation trends and increased the number of mixed marriages.¹

Anti-Semitism — a widespread phenomenon prior to the Bolshevik Revolution — did not disappear in the new Soviet society. Its roots in popular consciousness had grown too strong for that. Expansion of Jewish settlement patterns throughout the country, coupled with the increasing Jewish presence in the political apparatus, gave rise to renewed outbursts of anti-Semitism.

The Soviet authorities fought against anti-Semitism which they decreed illegal. Steps taken in this direction did result in a reduction of its outward manifestations, but failed to do away with its broad popular base. Stalin's anti-Semitism was well known.² Among the victims of huge purges in 1937–1938 were Jews holding high posts in the ruling apparatus, including heads of the Jewish Section (Yevsektziya) within the Communist Party. With the closure of

¹ Benjamin Pinkus, *Russian and Soviet Jews. Annals of a National Minority* (Hebrew), Jerusalem, 1986, pp. 151–155, 161–163, 212–225, 239–243.

² In his memoirs Khrushchev mentions Stalin's daughter, Svetlana, marrying a Jew by the name of Morozov, an economist by profession. Stalin opposed the marriage on the grounds of his prospective son-in-law's Jewishness, and several years later he forced Svetlana to get a divorce. *Khrushchev Remembers*, New York, 1971, pp. 279, 312–313. Pinkus, *Russian and Soviet Jews*, pp. 251–252, refers to Stalin's anti-Semitism, especially during a meeting with the prime minister of the Polish Government-in-Exile, General Sikorski, which took place in Moscow in December 1941, as well as in his meetings with Roosevelt at the Yalta Conference in February 1945.

Jewish schools, newspapers and many other institutions, Jewish culture in the Soviet Union suffered great losses. These measures made perfect sense from the viewpoint of communist ideology, which prescribed the assimilation of Jews in the U.S.S.R. Ultimately, as a result of these destructive practices, on the eve of World War II Soviet Jews found themselves without a leadership and organizational infrastructure, whereas Jewish culture in the country was on the brink of annihilation.³

The Soviet annexation of the Baltic countries, western Belorussia, western Ukraine, Bessarabia and northern Bukovina in 1939–1940 caused demographic and cultural changes among the Jewish population of the U.S.S.R. due to the presence in these territories of Jewries boasting a flourishing culture and strong national consciousness. However, the brief period of less than two years from the annexation to the German invasion was too short for these trends to make a significant impact on Soviet Jews, who for the past two decades had lived in virtual isolation from world Jewry.⁴ The German attack on the Soviet Union was to change radically the situation of its Jews.

This article deals mainly with the process of extermination of the Jews who remained in the German-occupied parts of the Soviet Union. It does not depict other atrocities perpetrated by the German occupation forces, such as the confiscation of Jewish property or slave labor. Some important aspects of the Jewish struggle for existence, such as cultural and religious life in the ghettos on the eve of destruction, starvation, diseases, etc. are not dealt with in the framework of this paper.

“Preparatory Measures”

The date of the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union, June 22, 1941, may be considered as marking the start of the last phase of the Nazi

³ Pinkus, *Russian and Soviet Jews*, pp. 190–195, 256–257; Shmuel Ettinger, *Modern Anti-Semitism* (Hebrew), Tel Aviv, 1978, pp. 178–183.

⁴ Dov Levin, *The Jews in the Soviet-Annexed Territories* (in Hebrew), Tel Aviv, 1989, pp. 235–256.

policy of the Final Solution of the Jewish Question, namely the physical annihilation of the Jews. Soviet Jews were its first victims; the extermination of Jews in other European countries was soon to follow.

The expanding war, its global scale and its escalation did away with all moral and political restraints. The fact that the decision on the mass extermination of Jews was taken on the eve of the attack on the Soviet Union testifies to the radicalization of anti-Jewish policies of the Nazis and their feeling that such policies could be implemented with impunity. Hitler regarded the Soviet Jews as a separate elite class which exercised effective control over the Soviet Union. He was convinced that the communist ideology, with the U.S.S.R. as the object of its realization, was but a weapon in the hands of the Jews, who planned to seize control of the entire world.

On January 20, 1939, some seven months before the outbreak of the war, Hitler delivered a speech in which he stated, *inter alia*: "If international Jewish capital succeeds in drawing the nations into a world war, the result will not be Bolshevization of the world, which would mean the triumph of Jewry, but the complete destruction of the Jewish race in Europe."⁵ This passage encapsulates the core of Hitler's views: Bolshevism and Jewry were one and the same, and the future war would lead to the destruction of the Jews. He believed that by liquidating Soviet Jewry he would achieve two purposes: undermine the foundations of the Soviet state, on the one hand, and eliminate the sworn enemy, i.e., the Jews, on the other.⁶

The occupation of the Soviet Union was to pave the way for the German colonization of Eastern Europe. The policy of *Drang nach Osten* was the cornerstone of Hitler's military and political plans. Vast colonies in the East were to lay the basis for the *Führer's* dream — the Thousand-year Reich.

⁵ Max Domarus, *Reden und Proklamationen 1932–1945*, Neustadt a.d. Aisch, 1962–1963, vol. II, pp. 1056–1058.

⁶ Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, Boston, Sentry Edition (n.d.), pp. 654–655, 662; Hermann Rauschnigg, *Hitler Speaks*, London, 1939, pp. 136–139. See also Hitler's declaration broadcast over the radio on June 22, 1941, the day of the attack on the Soviet Union (doc. no. 148, in the Institute of the History of the Soviet Union).

Operative plans for the liquidation of Soviet Jewry formed an integral part of military preparations in advance of the attack on the U.S.S.R. In the directives for the Barbarossa Plan (code-name for the invasion of the Soviet Union), drafted on March 13, 1941 by the High Command of the Wehrmacht, we find the following: "Within the area of Army operations the *Reichsführer SS* will be entrusted, on behalf of the *Führer*, with *special tasks* for the preparation of the political administration — tasks which derive from the decisive struggle that will have to be waged between the two opposing political systems."⁷ By defining the war against the Soviet Union as decisive and final, the German Command meant a total war with the lifting of all possible restraints, in which international conventions regarding prisoners of war, treatment of civilians, etc. are rendered null and void. The "special tasks" referred to in the directives designated, *inter alia*, the extermination of the Jews.

At the end of May 1941, an agreement was reached between Reinhard Heydrich, on behalf of the SS, and the *Generalquartiermeister* of the Wehrmacht, Eduard Wagner, about the activity of the SS units entrusted with the "special tasks" in the occupied territories of the Soviet Union. The agreement stated that "within the framework of their instructions and their own responsibility they [the SS units] are entitled to carry out executive measures against the civilian population." The Army was to supply them with quarters, petrol, food and, if necessary, radio communications.⁸ The March 13 directive and the Heydrich-Wagner agreement allowed the SS full freedom of action in the territories under the military administration of the Wehrmacht, up to the front line. In May-June 1941 the Wehrmacht supplemented this directive with three orders which provided the "legal" basis sanctioning the Nazi terror in the Soviet territories to be occupied: one introducing military jurisdiction in the areas of operation of the Barbarossa Plan, issued on May 13, 1941; the

⁷ Nuremberg Documents, NOKW-2302.

⁸ Affidavit by Schellenberg, Nuremberg Documents, PS-3710; NO-2890; "*Gott mit Uns.*" *Der deutsche vernichtungskrieg im Osten 1939-1945*, eds. E. Klee and W. Dressen, Frankfurt, 1989, p. 241.

second issued on May 19, 1941; and the third, known as the "commissars' order," on June 6, 1941. Jews are mentioned explicitly in the May 19 OKW order, which included a section headed "The Behavior of the Troops in the Soviet Union," stating:

Bolshevism is the deadly enemy of the people of National-Socialist Germany.... This struggle demands ruthless and radical measures against Bolsheviks, agitators, guerillas, saboteurs, Jews, and the total elimination of every instance of active and passive resistance.⁹

Including the Jews in the category of enemies along with the guerillas, saboteurs and others, against whom radical measures were to be taken, was, in effect, a death sentence issued by the Wehrmacht High Command.

These directives did, in actual fact, provide a "legal" basis for the mass extermination of Jews in the occupied territories.

Orders issued later on by the Wehrmacht further deepened the Army's involvement in war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The Army refrained from issuing direct orders on the liquidation of Jews. At the same time, however, Heydrich, head of the Reich Security Main Office and second only to Himmler in the SS hierarchy, spoke on this issue openly. Thus, his orders issued on July 2, 1941, and passed on to senior SS leaders, state in no uncertain terms that in the occupied areas of the Soviet Union, party activists, commissars and Jews must be executed by shooting.¹⁰

For the implementation of this task the Nazis set up four so-called operation groups, or *Einsatzgruppen*, of the SS, which acted under the direct command of Heydrich. Each such group numbered 500–900 soldiers, so that their total strength reached 3,000. The *Einsatzgruppen* were further subdivided into smaller, company-size operational units, the so-called *Einsatzkommandos*. For reasons of secrecy, the *Einsatzgruppen* received their orders concerning the liquidation of "enemies of the Reich" orally. In early June 1941 the

⁹ Norbert Müller, *Deutsche Besatzungspolitik in der UdSSR*, Köln, 1980, p. 53; The October Revolution Central State Archives (henceforth: ORCSA) in Moscow, division 7445, file 166, pp. 65–70 — document on military court system; Nuremberg Documents, NOKW-484.

¹⁰ Yad Vashem Archives (henceforth: YVA), 04/53–1.

four *Einsatzgruppen* were assembled at Pretsch in Saxony. Heydrich addressed their commanders and told them that Hitler had ordered the liquidation of the Jews and the leadership of the Communist Party in the occupied Soviet territories, and that they were charged with this task.¹¹

The Number of Jews in the Areas of German Occupation

There are no official Soviet figures on the number of civilians in general, and the number of Jews among them, who remained in the areas occupied by the German forces, or those who succeeded in fleeing or being evacuated to the Soviet interior prior to the occupation. The special situation of the Jews was not recognized by the Soviet authorities and thus they were not given any priority in evacuation. In view of the chaotic conditions of retreat which prevailed in the first months of the war in the western areas of the U.S.S.R., the exact number of the evacuees could not be ascertained. There are no figures whatsoever relating to refugees and evacuees who died en route from German aerial bombardments, were murdered by the local anti-Semites and anti-Soviet gangs, or were killed by the advancing columns of the Wehrmacht which caught up with them. For this reason the following statistics must be regarded as approximations.

According to the 1939 census, there were 3,020,000 Jews living within the prewar borders of the Soviet Union proper. In the Ukraine there were 1,533,000; in Belorussia — 375,000; in the occupied areas of the Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic (RSFSR), including Crimea and northern Caucasus — about 200,000.¹² This means that at least 2,100,000 Soviet Jews resided in the areas later occupied by the Germans. In the past these territories lay within the so-called Pale of Settlement, in which over two-thirds

¹¹ YVA, 04/20-19-11, p. 30, testimony of Dr. Filbert, commander of *Einsatzkommando 9*, given at his trial; Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, Chicago, 1967, pp. 189-190.

¹² Y. Leshchinski, *Jews in Soviet Russia*, Tel Aviv, 1943, p. 57; Pinkus, *Russian and Soviet Jews*, p. 196.

of all Soviet Jews lived. There are no precise figures on the number of Jews who either fled or were evacuated eastward prior to the German occupation. Results of some studies indicate that 1,000,000–1,100,000 Jews succeeded in escaping from the eastern areas (within the pre-September 17, 1939 borders) captured by the Germans.¹³ In the regions further to the east, where the pace of the German advance was slower, the Jews had more time at their disposal to make preparations for their flight eastward. Similarly, the Soviet authorities were in a better position to evacuate more civilians, including Jews. Nonetheless, at least one million Jews inhabiting these areas found themselves under German occupation.

A sizable Jewish population lived in the territories annexed by the Soviet Union in 1939–1941. In Lithuania (not counting the Vilnius area) there were 150,000 Jews; in Latvia — 95,000; in Estonia — 5,000; in western Ukraine and western Belorussia — 1,127,000; in Bessarabia and northern Bukovina — 325,000.¹⁴ Thus the total Jewish population in these areas numbered 1,850,000. To this figure we should add some 200,000 Jewish refugees who arrived from Nazi-occupied Poland.¹⁵ Altogether, 2.15 million Jews were resident at the time in these annexed territories. Due to the rapid pace of the German occupation of the areas under discussion, only a small number of Jews succeeded in fleeing or being evacuated. It is estimated that no more than 10–12% of the total Jewish population living in the said territories managed to slip away from the advancing enemy. However, not all of them made it to the

¹³ S. Spektor, "Fate of the Ukrainian Jews during the Nazi Invasion — Figures and Estimates" (Hebrew), *Shevut* 12 (1987), pp. 55–66; M. Altschuler, "Evacuation and Flight of Jews from Eastern Belorussia — June–August 1941" (Hebrew), *Yahadut Zemanenu, A Research Annual of Contemporary Jewry* 3 (1986).

¹⁴ Levin, *Jews in Soviet-Annexed Territories*, pp. 14, 22, 24, 343 note 4; S. Cholvavski, *The Jews in Belorussia During World War II* (Hebrew), Tel Aviv, 1982, p. 15. Cholvavski estimates that about 485,000 Jews lived in western Belorussia alone. According to *Pinkas Hakehillot — Encyclopaedia of the Jewish Communities, Romania* (Hebrew), vol. II, Jerusalem, 1980, p. 300, there were 206,938 Jews living in Bessarabia, and 120,000 in Bukovina at the time the Soviet Army entered these regions.

¹⁵ Ben-Zion Pinchuk, *Soviet Jews in the Face of the Holocaust* (Hebrew), Tel Aviv, 1979, p. 14. Pinchuk estimates the number of refugees from the German-occupied areas of Poland at about 300,000.

unoccupied territories of the Soviet Union; some of the areas they succeeded in reaching were soon overrun by German troops. In any event, to the above figure we should add between 2% and 3% of the Jews resident in the areas annexed by the Soviet Union before the war, who had either been deported or forcibly transferred to the interior of the country prior to the Nazi invasion. Among them were Jewish refugees who either did not seek or did not succeed in obtaining Soviet citizenship, as well as Jews falling in the category of anti-Soviet elements, including, as has already been determined, activists of the Zionist movement, the Bund and other political parties.¹⁶ On the basis of these figures, we may conclude that 1,750,000–1,800,000 Jews in the areas annexed previously by the Soviet Union found themselves under German rule. The total number of Jews living within the Soviet borders as of June 22, 1941, who resided in the occupied areas and did not succeed in fleeing or being evacuated, reached 2.75–2.9 million persons.

German Military and Civilian Administration in the Occupied Territories

The German Army which invaded the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, advanced rapidly eastward. Just before the winter of that year, German troops reached the outskirts of Leningrad in the north, the environs of Moscow on the central front, and the line east of the Kharkov–Rostov-on-Don sector in the south. In the course of the winter of 1941–1942, German forces were repulsed on several fronts, especially in the Moscow area and Rostov-on-Don. The Wehrmacht resumed its advance in the spring and summer of 1942, mainly on the southern front where German units reached the outskirts of Stalingrad, and invaded northern Caucasus. This move

¹⁶ S. Spektor, *The Holocaust of Volhynian Jews, 1941–1944* (Hebrew), Jerusalem, 1986, pp. 316–317, who appears to have drawn on data in the possession of the Polish mission in the Soviet Union, quotes the figure of 345,000 Polish Jews in the Soviet Union. This figure appears exaggerated, as it probably includes all the Jews of Polish nationality who either fled the German occupation or were expelled. Levin, *Jews in Soviet-Annexed Territories*, pp. 316–317, maintains that the proportion of Jews from the annexed territories who were deported to the Soviet interior reached 5%.

marked the high point of the German advance, and thereafter the Wehrmacht began suffering setbacks and retreats. Nearly all the occupied parts of the Soviet Union had been liberated before the end of summer 1944.

In the occupied areas of the Soviet Union a military administration was established in the form of "city-headquarters" (*Ortskommandantur*) and "field-headquarters" (*Feldkommandantur*). In August–September 1941 responsibility for the rear areas was transferred from the military administration to a German civilian administration — the Ministry of the Occupied Territories in the East (*Ostministerium*). The civilian administration was headed by Alfred Rosenberg. The territories which came under the civilian administration were divided into two *Reichskommissariats*: *Reichskommissariat* Ukraine headed by Erich Koch, which covered the Volhynia and Polesie regions and whose jurisdiction extended gradually into east Ukraine up to the Dnieper River; and *Reichskommissariat* Ostland headed by Heinrich Lohse, which included Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, parts of western Belorussia, and the cities of Minsk and Slutsk in east Belorussia. Each *Reichskommissariat* was subdivided into several *Generalkommissariats*. Eastern Galicia, including the city of Lvov, was incorporated into the General Government of Poland headed by Hans Frank.

A separate administrative unit known as *Generalbezirk* Bialystok was formed in the Bialystok-Grodno district; it was placed under the authority of the *Gauleiter* of East Prussia, Erich Koch, who also held the post of *Reichskommissar* of the Ukraine.

Bessarabia and northern Bukovina, annexed by the Soviet Union in June 1940, were returned to Romania. A wide strip of Ukrainian territory called Transnistria, between the Dniester and Bug Rivers, including the city of Odessa, also reverted to the Romanian administration in accordance with the German-Romanian agreement of August 30, 1941.

The remaining occupied territories lying closer to the front lines remained under military administration until the end of occupation. These areas included all of Belorussia east of Minsk and Slutsk, all of the Ukraine east of the Dnieper River (excluding the

Melitopol region), as well as all parts of the RSFSR captured by the Germans.¹⁷

The German civilian and military administrations appointed village and city chiefs, as well as regional chiefs, from among the local population. In every district and city special police forces (*Ordnungsdienst*) were formed, composed of local residents who volunteered to serve under Germans. Police station commanders in districts and cities were also local residents. This police force was placed under the direct command of German SS officers.

Extermination Actions. The First Phase: June 22, 1941–Winter 1941–1942

The annihilation of Jews in the occupied areas began with the invasion of the Soviet Union and continued until the Germans were driven out completely from the country. This process can be divided into three phases:

1) From June 22, 1941 until the winter of 1941–1942. During this period most of the Jews living in Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Moldavia (Bessarabia and northern Bukovina) were killed. Nearly all the Jews in eastern Belorussia, eastern Ukraine and the occupied parts of the RSFSR were murdered.

2) From the spring of 1942 up to the end of 1942. During this time most Jews living in the western areas of the Ukraine and Belorussia, as well as in the southern areas of the RSFSR captured by the Germans in the summer of 1942, were annihilated.

3) The third phase lasted from the beginning of 1943 until the complete withdrawal of German forces from all the occupied Soviet territories. During that time all the Jews who had survived till then were murdered. The last killing actions coincided with the beginning of the German retreat.

The *Einsatzgruppen* of the SS followed close on the heels of advance units of the German army moving into the Soviet interior. *Einsatzgruppe A* operated in the Baltic countries and advanced toward Leningrad; *Einsatzgruppe B* covered Belorussia and moved

¹⁷ Alexander Dallin, *German Rule in Russia 1941–1945*, London, 1957, ch. 5, pp. 84–103.

toward Moscow; *Einsatzgruppe C* acted in the Ukraine, advancing toward Kiev; and *Einsatzgruppe D* was operative in Moldavia and southern Ukraine, along the Black Sea coast, moving toward Crimea and the Caucasus. In addition to the *Einsatzgruppen*, special *Waffen SS* brigades were entrusted with the task of “purging” the newly-occupied areas and liquidating their Jewish population; these brigades operated in the area of the Polesie marshes and in southern Belorussia. Each of the areas in the rear of German fronts — North (*Nord*), Central (*Mitte*) and South (*Sud*) — had an appointed Senior Commander of SS and Police. Under his general command were forces of *Waffen SS*, the *Einsatzgruppen*, a German police regiment, some independent German police battalions, and police units and battalions composed of local volunteers.

There were about 170 mobile police battalions composed of local people, most of them from Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and the Ukraine. Some of the battalions consisted of Belorussians, Cossacks, Tatars and Russians, and other nationalities. Many of those were former prisoners of war. All these police forces, the local stations and the mobile battalions were subordinated to the German Order Police. In the *Reichskommissariat* of Ostland, in October 1942, 4,428 Germans and 55,562 local people served in the Order Police. In the Ukraine and south Russia, in November 1942, 10,194 Germans and 70,759 local people were in the ranks of the Order Police.¹⁸ Part of these forces was engaged, either directly or indirectly, in the persecution and extermination of the Jews. The above-mentioned numbers do not include local collaborators and volunteers, who participated in anti-Jewish actions as civilians, and those who served the Germans in the *Einsatzgruppen* of the SS, in the German or Security Police, or in native units in the framework of the German Army.

Throughout the occupied areas large numbers of local residents voluntarily collaborated with the German administration and assisted the *Einsatzgruppen* and the SS troops who engaged in the mass-scale murder of the Jews. This collaboration was particularly

¹⁸ *Zur Geschichte der Ordnungspolizei 1936–1945, Schriften des Bundesarchives*, 3, Koblenz, 1957, Teil II, pp. 54, 65, 101–106.

extensive in Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Moldavia and western Ukraine.

Who were these collaborators with the Nazis? Their ranks consisted of local anti-Semites, fascists and nationalists. Among them were also plain looters who coveted Jewish property and strove to take possession of apartments belonging to Jews. Some of the Soviet POWs who volunteered to serve the Germans saw this as a way to survive. Others were guided by nationalist, anti-Semitic and anti-Soviet motivations.¹⁹

In the very first days of the occupation local rioters killed thousands of Jews and looted their property. The initial wave of pogroms swept over the newly occupied areas even prior to the organized mass killings of Jews by the *Einsatzgruppen*.

On June 25–26, 1941, Lithuanian fascists murdered 800 Jews in the Slobodka quarter of Kaunas and set fire to Jewish houses and synagogues. According to the report of *Einsatzgruppe A*, in the pogroms carried out by Lithuanians 3,800 Jews were killed in Kaunas and 1,200 in other localities in Lithuania.²⁰ In Lvov, Ukraine, the Ukrainian fascists massacred 4,000 Jews between June 30 and July 3, 1941.²¹ Similar pogroms were initiated by local residents in Riga, as well as in other cities of Latvia, Lithuania and the Ukraine. In certain areas, mostly in small towns and villages, local policemen and volunteers killed Jews practically without any German participation.²² Without the active help of thousands of local volunteers, the Germans would not have succeeded in tracing, identifying and liquidating the Jews who lived there.

In some places in the occupied territories, close to the former

¹⁹ YVA-8350, testimonies gathered by Michael Rivkin on the fate of Jews in the town of Klimovichi, Belorussia, pp. 16–19, 21, 27.

²⁰ Summary report of *Einsatzgruppe A*, October 15, 1941, Nuremberg Documents, L-180; see also Nuremberg Documents, NO-2940, NO-4543; Leib Garfunkel, *The Destruction of Kovno's Jewry* (Hebrew), Jerusalem, 1959, pp. 31–32.

²¹ *Encyclopaedia of Jewish Communities, Poland*, vol. II: *Galicia*, Jerusalem, 1980, p. 86; *The Einsatzgruppen Reports*, eds. Y. Arad, S. Krakowski and S. Spektor (henceforth: *Einsatzgruppen Reports*), New York, 1989, pp. 30–31.

²² Spector, *Holocaust of Volhynian Jews*, pp. 59–65; *Einsatzgruppen Reports*, pp. 20, 29–32 (situation report no. 24); *Encyclopaedia of the Holocaust*, ed. Y. Gutman, New York, 1990, vol. III, p. 1276.

Soviet-German border, thousands of Jews were murdered by the special police commandos, organized in the General Government and in east Prussia for temporary activity of this nature. Such a police unit from Tilrit (east Prussia) liquidated Jews in the border areas of Lithuania; a police unit from Lublin carried out these actions in the city of Rovno (Ukraine); in Lvov a Security Police and SD unit from Cracow participated in the killings.²³

The police regiments attached to the three German Army groups were engaged in killing actions against the Jews on their way eastward. Police Battalion 322 from Police Regiment Central (*Mitte*) murdered hundreds of Jews in the Kobrin area (near Brest-Litovsk), Mogilev, Minsk and other places. Police Regiment South (*Sud*) shot 1,643 Jews in the area of Shepetovka Rovno (Ukraine) in the beginning of August 1941.²⁴

The *Einsatzgruppen*, which carried out most of the killings during this period, employed the following method of mass murder: Jews were removed from their homes and brought to pits prepared in advance on the edge of a forest, or to anti-tank ditches in the vicinity. The victims were then lined up in groups — men, women and children separately — along the edge of the pits, forced to undress and shot, and the pits were then covered with earth. On some occasions the victims were forced to dig the pits themselves. In eastern Ukraine, eastern Belorussia and other areas of Nazi occupation, special trucks (gas-vans) were used; after the victims had been crammed into the hermetically sealed vehicles, they were asphyxiated by exhaust fumes piped back into the trucks.

In the Nuremberg Trials, Otto Ohlendorf, commander of *Einsatzgruppe* D, described the methods employed by his unit as follows:

A company would enter a village or a town. The village chiefs were ordered to assemble all the Jews with the view to resettling them. The Jews were requested to leave all their valuables with the platoon

²³ *Einsatzgruppen Reports*, pp. 6, 10, 16–17, 38, 58; *Prestupnye tzely prestupnye sredstva. dokumenti*, Moscow, 1968, pp. 86–88.

²⁴ "Schöne Zeiten," *Judenmord aus der Sicht der Täter und Gaffer*, eds. E. Klee, W. Dressen and V. Riess (henceforth: "Schöne Zeiten") Frankfurt am Main, 1988, pp. 18–29 (logbook of the 322nd Police Regiment); *Einsatzgruppen Reports*, pp. 81, 324.

commanders. Overgarments were to be taken off before the execution. Men, women and children were led to the execution site which in most cases consisted of an anti-tank ditch near the locality. They were then shot, kneeling or standing up, and their corpses were thrown into the ditch.... The commander of the company or persons especially in charge of these things were assigned the task of finishing off those who were still alive....²⁵

Many mass graves marked the killing fields of the advancing *Einsatzgruppen*: Romboly near Riga, the Ninth Fort in Kaunas, Ponary near Vilnius, Maly Trostenets near Minsk, Babi Yar in Kiev, Drobytski Yar near Kharkov, and numerous other sites throughout areas of the Soviet Union occupied by the Wehrmacht.

The sphere of operations of *Einsatzgruppe A* included Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. At the time of transfer of authority over these territories from the military administration to the civilian administration, this *Einsatzgruppe* began fulfilling the tasks of Security Police and the SD, in the civil administration area.

Over 175,000 Jews, out of a total of 220,000–225,000 who found themselves under Nazi rule in Lithuania (including the Vilnius district, which became part of Lithuania), had been killed by December 1941. In smaller towns the Jews were liquidated in the course of a single *Aktion*. In larger towns and cities such operations usually lasted several weeks or months. The Jewish population of Vilnius before the occupation numbered 57,000. In July 1941, the first month of the occupation, some 5,500 Jewish men were shot there. In the course of two actions staged during the establishment of the Vilnius ghetto, from August 31 to September 6, 1941, 10,000–12,000 Jewish men, women and children were murdered. In the actions which followed, from September 15 to December 22, 1941, another 17,000–18,000 Jews were killed. The murder of the Vilnius Jews was carried out at Ponary, about 12 km from the city. When the killing operations ceased toward the end of December 1941, no more than 20,000 Jews were left in the Vilnius ghetto.²⁶

At least half of the 36,000 Jews resident in Kaunas were shot to

²⁵ Nuremberg Documents, PS-2620.

²⁶ Y. Arad, *Ghetto in Flames*, New York, 1982, pp. 209–211.

death in the Seventh and Ninth Forts from July to the end of October 1941. After the killing actions less than 17,000 Jews remained in the Kaunas ghetto.²⁷ In the ghetto of the town of Siauliai no more than 5,000 Jews survived,²⁸ and in Svencionys — about 500.²⁹ All other Jewish communities in Lithuania were completely destroyed before the end of 1941 and their members executed by shooting.³⁰

Out of over 75,000 Jews who found themselves under Nazi rule in occupied Latvia, 68,000 were put to death by the Germans before 1942. In Riga alone some 5,000 Jews were murdered in July 1941. On October 25, 1941, about 30,000–33,000 Jews were herded into the ghetto in Riga. In the course of two actions — on November 30 and December 7–9, 1941 — 27,000–28,000 Jews from the Riga ghetto were executed by shooting in the Rumbula forest, 16 km from that city. Less than 5,000 Jews were left alive in Riga.³¹

Between 14,000 and 16,000 Jews from Dvinsk (Daugavpils) and the surrounding townships were incarcerated in the Dvinsk ghetto. After a wave of three successive actions — on August 8, August 18–19 and November 7–9 — in the course of which 12,000–13,000 Jews were killed, only 1,000 remained in this ghetto.³² Of the 7,000 Jews in the town of Liepaja, some 1,000 were still alive at the end of December 1941; the others were shot to death in the course of several actions. In other towns and villages of Latvia all the Jewish inhabitants were liquidated.³³

About 2,000 Jews remained in Estonia at the beginning of the Nazi occupation. Nearly all the men were shot by the Germans and

²⁷ *Encyclopaedia of the Holocaust*, vol. II, p. 825.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. IV, p. 1349.

²⁹ Y. Arad, "'The Final Solution' in Lithuania in the Light of German Documentation," in: *Yad Vashem Studies*, vol. XI, p. 247.

³⁰ YVA, O-53/1, summary report of Jager, commander of *Einsatzkommando 3*, December 1, 1941, p. 7.

³¹ *Encyclopaedia of the Holocaust*, vol. III, pp. 1276–1277; *Encyclopaedia of the Jewish Communities, Latvia and Estonia*, Jerusalem, 1988, pp. 281–282.

³² *Encyclopaedia of the Holocaust*, vol. I, pp. 409–410; *Encyclopaedia of the Jewish Communities, Latvia and Estonia*, pp. 100–103.

³³ *Encyclopaedia of the Holocaust*, vol. III, pp. 874–875; *Encyclopaedia of the Jewish Communities, Latvia and Estonia*, pp. 38–40, 180–183; *Einsatzgruppen Reports*, p. 277.

their Estonian collaborators during the first weeks. The remaining 1,000 Jews (mostly women, children and the elderly) were incarcerated in the camp at Kharko, near Tallin. Many of them were murdered in this camp; 500 were moved to the city of Pskov in Russia at the end of 1941 and liquidated there.³⁴

In western Belorussia, the area of operations of *Einsatzgruppe B* and certain other SS units, no less than 50,000 Jews, mostly men, were murdered.

In the city of Pinsk (Polesie) 4,500 Jewish men, out of a total Jewish population of some 20,000, were massacred within three days (August 5–7, 1941). According to other sources, the ghetto of Pinsk was inhabited by some 30,000 Jews, and about 15,000 of them were killed.³⁵ In Brest-Litovsk about 5,000 Jewish men, out of a total Jewish population of some 21,000, were killed in the beginning of July 1941.³⁶ In the course of one action in Novogrudok on December 8, 1941, 4,000 Jews, out of a population of 7,000, were put to death.³⁷

Most of the killing actions in eastern Belorussia were carried out by *Einsatzgruppe B*. Only a small number of Jews succeeded in fleeing or being evacuated from Minsk prior to its capture by the Germans on June 30, 1941. About 100,000 Jews from Minsk and some brought from nearby towns were ghettoized on July 25, 1941. Killing operations directed against the city's Jewish population went on without respite. During the month of August 5,000 Jews, mostly men, were murdered; on November 7, the anniversary of the October Revolution, 12,000 Jews were killed; on November 20 another 7,000 were put to death. The execution site for the Minsk Jews was located at the village of Tochinka, not far from the city. On March 2, 1942, another 5,000 Jewish victims met their deaths; some of them were killed within the ghetto bounds and others shot at the huge pit on Ratomska Street.³⁸

³⁴ Nuremberg Documents, L-180; *Einsatzgruppen Reports*, pp. 183–184; *Encyclopaedia of the Jewish Communities, Latvia and Estonia*, pp. 313–314.

³⁵ *Einsatzgruppen Reports*, p. 94 (situation report no. 58); *Encyclopaedia of the Holocaust*, vol. III, p. 1132.

³⁶ *Encyclopaedia of the Holocaust*, vol. I, pp. 245–246.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 1072.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 974–975; *Einsatzgruppen Reports*, pp. 152–154, 246, 307.

In Mogilev (in the eastern part of Belorussia) some 10,000 Jews were killed in September–October 1941³⁹; in Vitebsk up to 20,000 Jews were slaughtered (most of them near the village of Tzerkovshchina) in three sweeps — from October 2–12, from November 6–8, and on November 19, 1941⁴⁰; On November 7, 1941, almost 20,000 Jews from Bobruysk were murdered near the village of Kiselevitch⁴¹; on October 20, some 8,000 Jews from Borisov were massacred⁴²; on November 21, 1941, about 5,000 Jews from Polotsk were killed.⁴³

Einsatzgruppe C operated in western Ukraine. On June 30, 1941, and on July 4, 1941, 2,300 Jewish men were murdered in the city of Lutsk in Volhynia.⁴⁴ Between 21,000 to 23,000 Jews out of a total Jewish population of 28,000 in the city of Rovno, also in Volhynia, were killed on November 6–8, 1941.⁴⁵ Mass killings of Jews also took place in other towns in western Ukraine.⁴⁶ In July 1941, 18,500 Jews were expelled from Trans-Carpathian Ukraine, then under Hungarian rule, to the Kamenets-Podolsk district in the Ukraine. Most of them were refugees from Poland, Germany and other countries, whom the Hungarian authorities regarded as foreign nationals. At the end of August 1941, 14,000 of these deportees were shot to death near Kamenets-Podolsk by *Einsatzgruppe D* and the Ukrainian police.⁴⁷ On September 29–30, 33,771 Jews were shot in

³⁹ *Encyclopaedia of the Holocaust*, vol. III, p. 985.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. IV, p. 1577; Shalom Cholavski, *In the Eye of the Hurricane. The Jews in Eastern Belorussia during World War II* (Hebrew), Tel Aviv, 1988, pp. 184–188.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 194–196.

⁴² Nuremberg Documents, PS–3047; Cholavski, *In the Eye of the Hurricane*, pp. 196–200.

⁴³ YVA, 033.2520, pp. 1–3; 03/4725, p. 4.

⁴⁴ Spektor, *Holocaust of Volhynian Jews*, p. 66; *Encyclopaedia of the Holocaust*, vol. III, pp. 923–924.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 1308.

⁴⁶ Spektor, *Holocaust of Volhynian Jews*, p. 96.

⁴⁷ *Einsatzgruppen Reports*, p. 129; according to this report, 23,600 Jews were murdered in Kamenets-Podolsk; this figure includes both local residents and Jews from Hungary; see also Randolph L. Braham, “The Kamenets-Podolsk and Delvidek Massacres, Prelude to the Holocaust in Hungary,” in: *Yad Vashem Studies*, vol. IX, Jerusalem, 1973, p. 141.

Babi Yar, and several tens of thousands more were murdered there in the following months.⁴⁸

On September 15, 1941, 12,000 Jews from Berdichev were killed near the city's airport⁴⁹; in the towns of Kherson and Nikolayev, about 22,000 Jews were liquidated in the second half of September 1941⁵⁰; in Dnepropetrovsk 11,000 Jews perished at German hands on October 13⁵¹; 8,000–9,000 Jews were murdered in Mariupol on October 20 and 11,000 in Simferopol on November 14, 1941⁵²; in Kremenchug 7,000–8,000 Jews were massacred from October 28 to November 7⁵³; from late December 1941–early January 1942 some 15,000 Jews were put to death in Drobitskyi Yar near Kharkov.⁵⁴

The mass extermination of Jews in Bessarabia and northern Bukovina was launched by the Nazis already in the course of fighting in these areas and the onset of their occupation by the German and Romanian Armies. In July–August 1941, units of the Romanian Army and gendarmerie, acting in cooperation with *Einsatzgruppe* D and local residents, killed about 150,000 Jews. The toll amounted to about half of the Jewish population resident in those areas prior to the war. This mass murder went hand-in-hand with the raping of women and looting of property. The surviving Jews were placed in ghettos and camps; ghettos were established in the cities of Chernovtsy, Kishinev and elsewhere.⁵⁵

In the months of September–October 1941, mass deportations

⁴⁸ *Einsatzgruppen Reports*, pp. 168, 172–173, 184–185.

⁴⁹ Ilya Ehrenburg and Vasili Grossman (eds.), *The Black Book*, New York, 1980, pp. 13–20.

⁵⁰ *Einsatzgruppen Reports*, p. 168.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 242.

⁵² Ehrenburg and Grossman (eds.), *The Black Book*, pp. 72–76; Klee and Dressen (eds.), "Gott mit Uns," p. 113; *Dokumenty obvinayut*, Moscow, 1943, vol. I, pp. 200–203.

⁵³ *Encyclopaedia of the Holocaust*, vol. II, pp. 834–835.

⁵⁴ *Einsatzgruppen Reports*, p. 289; *Encyclopaedia of the Holocaust*, vol. II, pp. 796–797.

⁵⁵ Jean Ancel (ed.), *Documents Concerning the Fate of Romanian Jewry during the Holocaust*, New York, 1986, (henceforth: Ancel), vol. V, doc. nos. 2 and 3; *Encyclopaedia of the Holocaust*, vol. III, p. 1296; *Encyclopaedia of the Jewish Communities, Romania*, vol. II, pp. 310–312, 413, 444, 506.

of the surviving Jews took place from Bessarabia, northern and southern Bukovina and the Dorohoi district to the Transnistria region. By the end of 1941 the number of deportees was close to 120,000. Between 20,000 and 25,000 Jews failed to reach Transnistria; they died en route due to inhuman conditions of transport, drowned in crossings of the Dnieper River, or were shot by their Romanian guards. Most of the 100,000 Jews who survived the journey were incarcerated in ghettos and camps in northern and central Transnistria.⁵⁶ Only several hundred Jews remained alive in Bessarabia, whereas in Bukovina and Chernovtsy about 20,000 Jews had survived toward the end of 1941.⁵⁷

The prewar Jewish population of Transnistria (the destination of the deportees from Bessarabia and Bukovina) numbered 300,000; some 180,000 of them lived in the city of Odessa. According to the data in our possession, about 185,000 Jews did not manage to be evacuated from these areas of the Ukraine in time and stayed behind in the occupied territories. Ninety thousand of them were Jews from Odessa.⁵⁸

Einsatzgruppe D began its task of mass extermination of Jews in Transnistria as early as July–August 1941. On October 17, 1941, one day after the capture of Odessa by German forces, 3,000–4,000 Jewish men were rounded up and shot. On October 22, 1941, toward evening, the headquarters of the Romanian Army in the city was blown up by delayed-action mines planted there in advance. Sixty-six Romanian and German officers and soldiers lost their lives in the explosion. The Romanian Command responded with terror. Within the next three days, from October 23 to 25, Romanian Army units shot, burned to death and killed with explosives some 35,000 Odessa Jews. Some of them were murdered in a park near the

⁵⁶ *Encyclopaedia of the Holocaust*, vol. IV, p. 1474; *Encyclopaedia of the Jewish Communities, Romania*, vol. I, pp. 353–358.

⁵⁷ *Encyclopaedia of the Holocaust*, vol. I, p. 287; *Encyclopaedia of the Jewish Communities, Romania*, vol. II, pp. 315–316, 444–445.

⁵⁸ *Encyclopaedia of the Holocaust*, vol. IV, p. 1473; Dora Litani, "The Destruction of the Jews of Odessa in the Light of Romanian Documents," in: *Yad Vashem Studies*, vol. VI, Jerusalem, 1967, pp. 136–138; *Encyclopaedia of the Jewish Communities, Romania*, vol. I, p. 391.

Odessa harbor, others in the village of Dalnik, not far from the city. The surviving Jews from Odessa and the vicinity were deported and incarcerated in camps in the Golta (now Pervomaisk) area and on the west bank of the Bug River. Their imprisonment, however, did not last long; from December 23 to 31, 1941, some 50,000 local Jews were murdered in the Bogdanoyka camp. Nearly 20,000 Jews were killed in January–February 1942 in the camps of Domanevka and Berezovka. Another 3,225 Jews perished over the period from March to May 1942. All these figures are based on reports of the Romanian gendarmerie. Most of the killing operations were carried out by SS units assisted by volunteers from among the local ethnic Germans (*Volksdeutsche*) who lived in Transnistria. In addition to the Germans, the Romanian gendarmerie and local Ukrainian police participated in the extermination actions. Local Jews, who survived the first sweep of killings, joined the deportees from Bessarabia and Bukovina in various camps and ghettos. Fate did not make any distinction between them; thousands died of starvation, diseases, cold, forced labor and the brutal treatment accorded to them in Transnistria.⁵⁹

Within one month, from November 16 to December 15, 1941, over 20,000 Jews, including 2,500 Krimchaks, were killed in Simferopol and western Crimea by *Einsatzgruppe D*. Several thousands were shot in Kerch (east Crimea) on December 1–3, 1941. These figures comprise only part of the victims of the first sweep.⁶⁰

Einsatzgruppen B and *C*, which moved rapidly eastward, behind the advancing German Army, left behind them, in the western regions of Belorussia and the Ukraine, most of the Jewish communities, whom they did not have the time to annihilate. Up to 15–20% of the Jews in these localities were murdered by the end of 1941. In their areas of operation in east Belorussia, east Ukraine

⁵⁹ *Einsatzgruppen Reports*, p. 209; Ancel, vol. VI, doc. nos. 26, 125, vol. V, doc. no. 133A; *Encyclopaedia of the Jewish Communities, Romania*, vol. II, pp. 393–390; Litani, "Destruction of Jews of Odessa," pp. 135–154.

⁶⁰ *Einsatzgruppen Reports*, p. 267; Klee and Dressen (eds.), "*Gott mit Uns*," p. 113; *Dokumenty obvinayut*, vol. I, pp. 190–192.

and the occupied parts of the RSFSR, these *Einsatzgruppen*, assisted by the other SS and local police units, had liquidated almost the entire Jewish population by the end of 1941.

For military reasons (the Wehrmacht's failure to capture Leningrad), *Einsatzgruppe A*, with its three *Einsatzkommandos*, remained located in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. This enabled them to continue their killing operations without any interruption, and by December 1941 they had murdered over 80% of the Jews living in these regions.

The advance eastward of *Einsatzgruppe D* on the southern flank of the German Army was slower than that of the other *Einsatzgruppen*. In addition, part of the killings in the zone of its operations (Bessarabia, northern Bukovina, southwest Ukraine and the Odessa district) was carried out by the Romanian Army and police. Therefore, the number of Jews murdered by them was smaller than that by the other three *Einsatzgruppen*.

The mass murder of the Jews in the southwestern regions of the Ukraine (Galicia district), which were incorporated into the General Government (GG) of Poland, began only in the spring of 1942, together with the extermination of the Jews who inhabited the GG territories, within the framework of "Operation Reinhard."

On the basis of German reports (by the *Einsatzgruppen* and others) and Jewish testimonies, it is possible to determine that in July 1941 most of those who perished in the course of murder operations of the *Einsatzgruppen* were Jewish men. Only a relatively small number of women and children were killed during this period.

About 5,500 Jewish men were murdered in July in Vilnius.⁶¹ Between 7,000 and 8,000 men met their deaths during the first week of July in the 7th Fort in Kaunas. A report listing the operations of *Einsatzkommando 3* in Lithuania for the period from the start of the invasion to December 1, 1941, makes it clear that from the beginning of July till mid-August mostly Jewish men were put to death, whereas later on the report also mentions large numbers of women and children.⁶² Three thousand Jewish men perished in July

⁶¹ Arad, *Ghetto in Flames*, pp. 209–212.

⁶² YVA, 0–53/1, summary report of Jager, commander of *Einsatzkommando 3*, pp. 1–3.

in the Drozdy camp in Minsk.⁶³ In Brest-Litovsk about 6,000 men were killed in the course of an operation in the first half of July.⁶⁴

The mass murder of Jews, which made no distinction between men, women, the elderly, or children, commenced at the end of July—beginning of August 1941. We have grounds to assume that prior to the invasion of the Soviet Union, the *Einsatzgruppen* were instructed to begin with the murder of Jewish men, whereas women at this stage were targeted only if suspected of communist activities in the past. Toward the end of July 1941, the *Einsatzgruppen* received an order to proceed with the liquidation of Jews, including women and children. The commander of *Einsatzkommando* 9, Albert Filberg, relates in the testimony given at his trial that at the end of July 1941, during his stay in the town of Vileyka (western Belorussia), he assembled the lower-ranking officers of his unit and told them that from then on women and children had to be killed together with men.⁶⁵ It should be noted that in an order issued on August 1 to the commander of the 2nd SS Cavalry Regiment, Himmler made some distinction between men and women. He instructed that the men be shot, whereas women were to be expelled to the swamps.⁶⁶ In fact, the expulsion into the swamps was also a death sentence.

In view of the fact that the murder of Jewish men throughout July was carried out in all areas of operation of the *Einsatzgruppen*, we may conclude that this was not the initiative of one or other commander, but a directive given from above. At the end of July 1941, this order was changed. It is plausible that the men were the

⁶³ Paul Kohl, *Ich wundere mich, das ich noch lebe*, Guterslo, 1990, pp. 84–85; Hersh Smolar, *Soviet Jews behind the Ghetto Barrier* (Hebrew), Tel Aviv, 1984, p. 27; *Einsatzgruppen Reports*, p. 84, dated August 12, 1941, indicates that the entire male population of the Vilejka township in western Belorussia, was liquidated.

⁶⁴ Kohl, *Ich wundere mich*, pp. 190–191, testimony of Heinrich MN, who served with the 307th Police Regiment which carried out the executions.

⁶⁵ YVA, 04/2–19–10, trial of Filberg, commander of *Einsatzkommando* 9.

⁶⁶ National Archives, Washington, Captured Nazi Documents, T–354, R–168, 318936.

first to be shot because the Germans were unable to eliminate the entire Jewish population in the first sweep. Therefore, they sought first to exterminate the element liable to start uprisings in the future. It was also psychologically easier for the murderers of the SS to shoot men than women and children.

*The Military Administration and the Atrocities
Committed against the Jews*

The German Army and the military administration established in the occupied areas pursued anti-Jewish policies in line with directives issued by the Wehrmacht High Command, and rendered assistance to the *Einsatzgruppen* of the SS in their activities, including operations against Jews. Thus in every newly-occupied city or town, one of the first acts of the military administration was to promulgate orders requiring the Jews to be registered and to wear the yellow badge so as to set them apart from other local inhabitants. At about the same time, the military authorities established Jewish Councils, the so-called *Judenräte*, which managed the affairs of the Jewish communities and ghettos. Members of *Judenräte* were held responsible, with their lives at stake, for the fulfillment of German orders. The military authorities issued decrees concerning forced labor for the Jews, placed them behind barbed-wire fences in the ghettos, and posted armed guards around them.⁶⁷ Thus the Army became an accomplice in the criminal acts of the *Einsatzgruppen*.

In Minsk the military governor of the city decreed the ghettoization of the local Jews by July 20, 1941 and also demanded a contribution from them.⁶⁸ In Orsha a contribution was imposed on the Jews and they were confined to the ghetto in September 1941, in accordance with an order of that city's military commander.⁶⁹ On December 14, 1941, the military commander of

⁶⁷ Norbert Müller, *Deutsche Besatzungspolitik in der UdSSR*, doc. 10, pp. 57–58, 60; doc. 15, pp. 69–70 (NOKW–586); doc. 16, p. 71 (NOKW–2209); doc. 17, p. 72 (NO–3157).

⁶⁸ Cholavski, *In the Eye of the Hurricane*, pp. 95–96.

⁶⁹ *Sudebnyi protsess po delu o zlodeyanyakh sovershennykh nemetsko-fashistskimi zakhvatchikami v belorusskoy SSR*, Minsk, 1947, pp. 155–158.

Kharkov issued a decree ordering the Vitebsk Jews to move into the ghetto. Similar procedures were applied in many other cities.⁷⁰ Almost without exception, the ghettoization of Jews behind barbed wire was the first step toward their liquidation. In certain localities, decrees ordering the Jews to report to an assembly point (allegedly in preparation for expulsion or work, while the true aim was their total extermination) were issued by the German military commander.⁷¹ In some cases the German military authorities urged the *Einsatzgruppen* to expedite the murder of Jews, since they were regarded as a security threat and economic burden. This occurred in Kiev, Simferopol and Dzhankoi in Crimea, as well as in many other localities.⁷² The military administration also dispatched Army units to guard Jews sent to the killing sites. The liquidation itself was usually performed by soldiers of the *Einsatzgruppen*, Waffen SS, SD men and local policemen, but in many actions soldiers and units of the Army also participated. Thus, for example, on August 1, 1941, General Zelmur ordered 300 soldiers of the 3rd Army Corps to take part in the killing of the Jews in the town of Kodyma in the Ukraine, together with *Einsatzkommando* 10.⁷³

In their daily and periodic reports, *Einsatzgruppen* commanders stressed on more than one occasion the assistance and cooperation they received from the Army and the military government in exterminating Jews.⁷⁴ In fact, the killing units of the SS could not have operated without the Army's support. Nearly all the Jews living under the jurisdiction of the German military government in the occupied areas were liquidated within the first months of the occupation, before the end of 1941. The participation of soldiers and units of the Wehrmacht in the killing actions carried out by the *Einsatzgruppen* and other units of the SS, sometimes even without

⁷⁰ *Dokumenty obvinayut*, vol. II, pp. 307–308; *Einsatzgruppen Reports*, p. 289.

⁷¹ The Rostov-on-Don District Archives, file 3613, I.D. 90, p. 3; *Dokumenty obvinayut*, vol. II, p. 142.

⁷² *Einsatzgruppen Reports*, pp. 165, 264; Klee and Dressen (eds.), "*Gott mit Uns*," pp. 112, 243.

⁷³ Müller, *Deutsche Besetzungspolitik*, doc. 15, pp. 69–70.

⁷⁴ *Einsatzgruppen Reports*, pp. 228, 234, 281, 331–332; Müller, *Deutsche Besetzungspolitik*, p. 87, NOKW–1863.

an order or permission, on a purely voluntary basis, led to objections on the part of some Army commanders. Orders forbidding such involvement were issued by the commander of the Army Rear Area South (*Sud*) on September 1, 1941, and by the *Oberquartiermeister* of the Sixth Army in August 1941.⁷⁵

In some cities the military administration allowed small groups of Jews to stay alive; sometimes they consisted of dozens or even hundreds of skilled workers who performed certain essential jobs for the local German administration. They were kept in labor camps and prisons under conditions of brutalization, cold and diseases.

The German Army shares full responsibility with the SS for the annihilation of the Jewish population which lived in the occupied areas of the Soviet Union.

The Demand for a Labor Force

Toward the end of 1941 the Germans realized that their failure to take Moscow as they had planned and hoped meant that the war would not end before the advent of the winter season, and that preparations had to be made for a protracted conflict. The task of organizing the rear to meet the needs of their war machine made it necessary to secure the supply of labor forces in general and skilled workers in particular. In view of this requirement, the German civilian administration in Ostland headed by *Reichskommissar* Lohse, often acting against the wishes of the SS, decided to slow down the pace of extermination of Jews in the areas under its jurisdiction, and preserve for the time being the surviving Jewish population in certain localities, where they were confined to the ghettos and labor camps. In certain cities the Army Rear Command, in charge of supplies, demanded a temporary halt in the liquidation of Jews who worked in industrial enterprises, workshops, etc., whose labor was urgently needed by the military. On December 2, 1941, Lohse issued an order to stop temporarily the killing of Jewish qualified workers and those needed as laborers by the Wehrmacht. As a result, it was decided to preserve for the time

⁷⁵ Klee and Dressen (eds.), "*Gott mit Uns*," pp. 102-103.

being the ghettos in larger cities such as Riga, Vilnius, Kaunas, Baranovichi and Minsk, as well as in some smaller towns in Ostland, where many Jews were deemed essential to the needs of the German war economy. This decision had been taken before Lohse received an answer to his inquiry from the Ministry for Occupied Territories in the East, which stated that economic considerations should not influence actions against the Jews.⁷⁶ Most of these ghettos were located in the territories annexed by the Soviet Union between 1939 and 1940. Of all the larger cities only Minsk, with its ghetto, was located within the borders of the U.S.S.R. proper, i.e., in territory belonging to the Soviet Union prior to the outbreak of World War II. The decision to maintain the Minsk ghetto was due in part to the fact that it came under the jurisdiction of the Ostland civilian administration, and the fate of this ghetto was similar to that of others in Ostland.

This decision did not put a stop to all the killing actions in Ostland. In some ghettos, where the German authorities estimated that not all the Jews were needed for essential work, exterminations continued. Such actions were carried out in the ghettos of Minsk, Vileyka, Baranovichi and others on March 2–3, 1942.⁷⁷

In the *Reichskommissariat* of the Ukraine, which was also under the jurisdiction of the German civilian administration, no decision to stop the killing of Jews for economic reasons was taken.⁷⁸

In the areas under the rule of the military administration, the *Einsatzgruppen* were given a free hand in their activities. In these territories the total annihilation of Jews proceeded at full speed, regardless of economic considerations and the need for Jewish manpower. Almost all the Jews living there were murdered by the end of 1941–beginning of 1942. At that time, when the military administration turned over the districts of Zhitomir, Nikolayev, Dnepropetrovsk and Melitopol in the eastern Ukraine to the

⁷⁶ YVA, 0/18–157, 0/18–165; PS–2273, PS–3664.

⁷⁷ *Einsatzgruppen Reports*, p. 307.

⁷⁸ Nuremberg Documents, PS–3257, letter from General Hans Leykauf, Ordnance Inspector of the Ukraine, to General Thomas, who was in charge of ordnance in the Wehrmacht Command, dated October 2, 1941.

civilian government, the *Einsatzgruppen* had already killed the majority of their Jewish inhabitants.⁷⁹

Extermination Operations. The Second Period: Spring 1942–Beginning of 1943

The first months of 1942 were relatively “calm”; the destruction of the Jews continued but on a smaller scale than in the second half of 1941. Harsh winter conditions, and especially the difficulties posed by digging burial pits for the victims, were the main reasons for the slowdown. Mass killing actions were resumed in the spring of 1942, mainly in western Belorussia and western Ukraine, where most of the Jewish population had not been killed in the first period. The demand for manpower, which prolonged the existence of the large ghettos established at the end of 1941 in Vilnius, Kaunas, Minsk and several other localities, did not stop the Germans from liquidating many ghettos elsewhere. This phenomenon was but one example of the contradictions in the operation of the German administration in the occupied areas; one part of this administration needed and sought Jewish workers, especially since this involved forced labor without wages, whereas another part, particularly the SS, was engaged in the mass destruction of this labor force.

Before the winter of 1942, hundreds of thousands of Jews living in western Belorussia and western Ukraine were murdered. On July 31, 1942, *Generalkommissar* Wilhelm Kube, ruler of western Belorussia and the city of Minsk, made the following report to Lohse, the *Reichskommissar* for Ostland:

In all the clashes with the partisans in Belorussia it has been established, both in the formerly Polish and the formerly Soviet parts of the District General (*Reichskommissariat*), that Jewry is the main sustainer of the partisan movement, together with the Polish resistance movement in the East and the Red Army from Moscow. In consequence, the treatment of Jewry in Belorussia is a matter of political importance owing to the danger to the entire economy. A

⁷⁹ Nuremberg Documents, NO-3240, NO-2659; *Einsatzgruppen Reports*, pp. 174, 194, 221, 242, 267, 272, 281, 296, 300, 305, 344.

solution must therefore be found in accordance with political considerations and not merely economic needs.... In the past ten weeks we have liquidated about 55,000 Jews in Belorussia. In the area of Minsk county the Jews have been completely eliminated without jeopardizing manpower requirements. In the predominantly Polish area of Lida, 16,000 Jews were liquidated, in Slonim, 8,000, etc.

...The district of Slutsk has also been rid of several thousand Jews. The same applies to Nowogrodek and Vilejka. Radical measures are planned for Baranovichi and Hanzewichi. In Baranovichi there are still 10,000 Jews in the city itself, of whom 9,000 will be liquidated next month.

In the city of Minsk about 2,600 Jews from Germany have remained. In addition, all of the 6,000 Russian Jews and Jewesses who were employed during the *Aktion* by various units [of the Wehrmacht] are still alive.⁸⁰

The extermination of Jews in the *Generalkommissariat* of Belorussia continued beyond the month of July 1942. The city of Grodno and the surrounding areas within the present borders of the U.S.S.R. were part of *Generalbezirk* Bialystok during the occupation. In the period from November 1942 to January 1943, 30,000 Jews who lived there were sent to the death camps of Treblinka and Auschwitz. Some of them had been placed temporarily in the transit camps of Volkovysk and Kolbasin, whereas others were transported directly to the death camps.⁸¹ During this period the mass murder of Jews was taking place also in the areas of Polesie and Volhynia, which belonged to the *Reichskommissariat* Ukraine. Between October 29 and November 1, 1942, some 17,000 Jews were shot in the city of Pinsk, and the ghetto was completely liquidated. The ghetto of Brest-Litovsk was similarly liquidated on October 15–18, 1942, and its residents killed by shooting. The ghetto of Lutsk, with its 17,500 residents, was liquidated on August 20–23, 1942, and the ghetto of Rovno, with its last 5,000 inhabitants, on

⁸⁰ Nuremberg Documents, PS-3428.

⁸¹ Yitzhak Arad, *Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka — The Operation Reinhard Death Camps*, Bloomington, 1987, pp. 131–134.

July 13, 1942. Tens of thousands of Jews were shot in the ghettos of Volhynia in August–October 1942.⁸²

During this second period of mass murder of Jews in the areas controlled by the civilian administration, most of the killings were carried out by the local police and police battalions composed of Ukrainians, Russians, Lithuanians, Latvians and other local inhabitants, commanded by native officers and by the Germans. At that time the *Einsatzgruppen* (with the exception of *Einsatzgruppe A*, as mentioned above) were active in the East, close to the front lines, within the areas under military administration. Senior policeman F. Zvirkun gave the following testimony during his interrogation on the execution by shooting in early March 1942 of Jews from the city of Kamenka in the Cherkassy district (Ukraine):

Gebietskommissar Lange and the commander of the gendarmerie and police, Nuzhdenko, conducted the executions. The following policemen took part: myself, F. Zvirkun, I.K. Orlik, S. Piven, S. Revyakov, Z. Harikh, N. Gladkikh and others.

The execution itself took the following form: in the evening the policemen moved over 100 Jews from the ghetto to the yard of the district police. There were women, children and old people among them. They were brought to the stable. *Gebietskommissar* Lange assembled the policemen who were to take part in the execution in the office of police chief Nuzhdenko. I was among them. He explained the tasks assigned to us, gave each of us a glass of vodka, and then we went out to the yard. I remained on duty upstairs in the police station. Sometime afterwards they began removing groups of 8–10 Jews from the stable, led them to the basement entrance, made them undress, and pushed them inside the basement; afterward shots were heard. After 40 minutes I too went down to the basement, where 50 or 60 bodies were lying around. Police chief Nuzhdenko met me in the basement and offered me the opportunity to take part in the execution. I drank up a glass of vodka — there was a bottle standing there — took a rifle from the corner, joined the row of other policemen, and began shooting groups of Jews who were lined up against the wall in front of us.

⁸² *Encyclopaedia of the Holocaust*, vol. I, pp. 246–247 — liquidation of the ghetto in Brest-Litovsk; vol. III, p. 923 — liquidation the ghetto in Lutsk; pp. 1132–1133 — liquidation of the ghetto in Pinsk; p. 1309 — liquidation of the ghetto in Rovno.

N. Gladkikh, the prison warden, was in charge of the execution; he received the new-arrivals, lined them up against the wall, gave the order "Fire!" and the shot people fell down. I fired three or four rounds, and each time I shot from a distance of four to five meters.

After the execution, policemen Orlik and Revyakov and others were assigned the task of removing the bodies. As they said afterwards, they used bayonets to extract gold teeth from the mouths of those shot, and filled their pockets.⁸³

The ghetto in the city of Smolensk, comprising some 2,000 Jews, was liquidated on July 15, 1942. All its residents were shot to death.⁸⁴ This was the last ghetto to remain in the area within the jurisdiction of the military administration. In some places small labor camps, containing dozens, sometimes hundreds of "Jewish specialists," still existed.

In 1942 the German Army overran territories of southern Russia, the northern Caucasus and Crimea. In these newly occupied territories some local Jews remained, as well as refugees from the western areas who did not succeed in escaping or joining the evacuation. On September 9, 1942, the military governor of the city of Kislovodsk issued an order to transport by train 2,000 Jews to the Mineralnye Vody railway station where they were shot to death. Jews of Pyatigorsk and Yessentuki, also brought by train to this execution site, were liquidated in a similar fashion. Altogether, 6,000 people were murdered at the Mineralnye Vody railway station in September 1942.⁸⁵ In Rostov-on-Don, recaptured by the Germans at the end of July 1942, the entire Jewish population of the

⁸³ YVA, 04/72-1; on participation of local policemen in the murder of Jews, see Mira and Gerhard Schoenberger, *Zeugen Zagen Aus*, Berlin, 1988, pp. 137-138 — the murder perpetrated in Slonim (western Belorussia); YVA, 033/2685, 03/4655, 033/154-1-4; "Schöne Zeiten", pp. 74-75; Central State Archives of the October Revolution of the USSR (Tsentralnyi Gosudarstvennoy Arkhivum Oktyabrskoy Revolyutsii — TsGAOR) in Moscow, file 7021, JM-10582; Spektor, *Holocaust of Volhynian Jews*, pp. 141-144.

⁸⁴ TsGAOR in Moscow, file 7021, JM-10582.

⁸⁵ *Dokumenty obvinayut*, vol. II, pp. 140-142; Lyana Glebova, *Raspakhannaya mogila* (forthcoming), pp. 140-142, testimonies from the trial which took place in 1968 of local residents who, together with the Germans, participated in the murder of Jews in Mineralnye Vody; Ehrenburg and Grossman (eds.), *The Black Book*, pp. 263-264.

city was annihilated as early as August 11, 1942. According to figures of the Municipal Council of the city of Rostov, during the occupation, which lasted up to February 13, 1943, 15,000–16,000 Jews were murdered in Rostov-on-Don. The Germans also used gas-vans to kill the Jews there.⁸⁶ The Jews of Stavropol were put to death on August 15, 1942.⁸⁷ Kerch, in the east of Crimea, was recaptured by the Germans on May 19, 1942, and a few days later the Jews who had survived the first occupation were shot there.⁸⁸ In Crimea the Germans killed not only Jews but Krimchaks as well, whom they considered Jews. They did not touch the Karaites, however, whom they assumed not to be Jews with regard to origin and race.⁸⁹ In the northern Caucasus the Germans were hesitant about regarding the Mountain Jews (Tats) living there as racial Jews, but before they could reach a decision they were driven out by the Red Army.⁹⁰

*Liquidation of Jews from Foreign Countries
in the Occupied Areas of the Soviet Union*

The first Jews from foreign countries to be murdered by the Germans in the occupied areas of the Soviet Union were Hungarian Jews. On August 27–28, 1941, 14,000–18,000 Jews deported by the Hungarian authorities to the Kamenets-Podolsk area in the Ukraine were shot by the Germans.⁹¹

Among the foreign Jews who perished in the occupied territories were tens of thousands of Jews who were mobilized in Hungary and sent there as “Labor Battalions.” They built roads and

⁸⁶ Rostov-on-Don District Archives, file 3613, I.D. 90, pp. 3–4, 15–16; Lev Ginzburg, *Bez dna*, Moscow, 1967, pp. 65–69; Ehrenburg and Grossman (eds.), *The Black Book*, 258–261.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 263–264.

⁸⁸ YVA, 33/60, 33/61, pp. 1–2.

⁸⁹ *Einsatzgruppen Reports*, pp. 250, 343–345.

⁹⁰ Otto Brautigam, *So hat es sich zugetragen*, Wurzburg, 1968, pp. 475–478, 535–536; Nuremberg Documents, NOKW-1851, March 19, 1942; Dallin, *German Rule in Russia*, p. 247.

⁹¹ *Einsatzgruppen Reports*, p. 129. The figure of 23,000 Jews mentioned in this report also includes several thousands of local Jews; *Encyclopaedia of the Holocaust*, vol. II, pp. 780–781.

fortifications, and were sent to blow up minefields with their own bodies. Some were shot by their Hungarian commanders and guards, others by the Germans. Many died of hunger and disease. Altogether 40,000–42,000 met their deaths in the occupied territories of the Soviet Union. Several hundred became prisoners of war in the U.S.S.R.⁹²

Nazi Germany planned to use the territory of the U.S.S.R. to carry out the extermination of Jews from Germany, Austria and the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, in addition to Soviet Jews. In late September–October 1941 it was decided that the Reich was to be “cleansed” of Jews (*Judenfrei*), and that some of the Jews living in the above-mentioned countries were to be transferred to the territories of *Reichskommissariat Ostland*, specifically to the cities of Kaunas, Minsk and Riga, where they would be exterminated. At that time Auschwitz, Treblinka and the other death camps had not yet been put into operation; the mass murder of Jews was carried out only in the occupied Soviet territories. The order for the transfer of Jews of the Third Reich was received in *Reichskommissariat Ostland* in Riga on November 7, 1941. It stated that 50,000 would be removed from the Reich; half of them were to be sent to Minsk and the other half to Riga. The transfer was scheduled to be carried out by special transports, each carrying 1,000 persons.⁹³ In fact, more Jews than planned were deported and murdered in the Ostland.

During the period from November 1941 to October 1942, over 35,000 Jews were sent from the Reich to Minsk. Some of them were placed in the Minsk ghetto but separated from the local Jewish residents, and were liquidated shortly thereafter. Other Reich Jews did not even reach the ghetto of Minsk; they were transferred

⁹² L. Rotkirchen, “Hungarian Jews in the Holocaust” (Hebrew), in: *Leadership of Hungarian Jewry*, eds. I Gutman, B. Vago and L. Rothkirchen, Jerusalem, 1976, pp. 35–38; Klee and Dressen (eds.), “*Gott mit Uns*,” p. 114; *Encyclopaedia of the Holocaust*, vol. II, p. 700; TsGAOR of the Ukraine in Kiev, file CMF–8,501.

⁹³ Nuremberg Documents, PS–3921; *Encyclopaedia of the Holocaust*, vol. I, p. 367; Gerald Reitlinger, *The Final Solution*, London, 1968, p. 94.

directly to Maly Trostinets and murdered there.⁹⁴ Several trains carrying German Jews arrived in Kaunas, and their passengers were shot to death in the Ninth Fort.⁹⁵

About 25,000 Jews were deported to Riga between December 1941 and spring 1942. Some of them were placed in the partly empty Riga ghetto whose original residents had been killed at the end of November and early in December 1941, whereas others were moved directly to Rumbula and shot there.⁹⁶ During their stay in the ghettos of Minsk and Riga, foreign Jews were kept apart from the local ones within the so-called "German ghettos." Due to their lesser adaptability to the trying conditions in these places, their death rate was higher. Without knowledge of the language and lacking connections, they were handicapped in their efforts to sell valuables to the locals or barter them for food. Those who survived starvation and disease were killed together with the local Jews. Only a handful of Jews from Germany and other countries brought to the ghettos of Minsk and Riga survived the war.⁹⁷

In the course of the liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto, 3,000–4,000 of its residents were moved in the summer of 1942 to the Forest Camp (*Waldlager*) in the woods near the city of Bobruysk. This camp served as an SS supply base. The Jews traveled by train from Warsaw to the Bobruysk railway station, and from there were driven in trucks to the *Waldlager*. In the camp itself these Jews were separated and kept in an area surrounded by barbed wire, and put to work under inhuman conditions. Executions in the camp began in the early fall of 1943, and by the end of summer–early fall of 1943, most of the Jewish inmates of the

⁹⁴ Cholavski, *In the Eye of the Hurricane*, pp. 206–210; *Einsatzgruppen Reports*, p. 269; J. Moser, *Die Judenverfolgung in Osterreich*, Vienna, 1966, pp. 35–36.

⁹⁵ Leib Garfunkel, *The Destruction of Kovno's Jewry* (Hebrew), Jerusalem, 1959, p. 122; Reitlinger, *The Final Solution*, p. 94.

⁹⁶ Nuremberg Documents, PS–3665; *My obvinayem*, eds. A. Kadikish, A. Rashkevich, V. Samson, Riga, 1967, pp. 68–69, operational report of *Einsatzkommando 2*.

⁹⁷ Nuremberg Documents, PS–3428; Cholavski, *In the Eye of the Hurricane*, pp. 213–216, 222–224.

Waldlager had already been shot. Ditches dug along the Bobruysk-Minsk railway line served as the execution site.⁹⁸

Mixed Marriages and Their Offspring

In the Soviet territories the German occupation authorities regarded as a Jew any person with at least one Jewish parent; such people were exterminated. Within the framework of the Nazi ideology, Slavs were viewed as inferior people, and the offspring of mixed Jewish-Slavic marriages were not considered worthy of life. Children of mixed marriages were forcibly taken away from their Russian, Ukrainian, Belorussian and other non-Jewish mothers, and brought to the death pits. In many cases non-Jewish mothers were shot together with their children. In some places the killing of these children was carried out at a later stage of the liquidation. The treatment accorded to the offspring of mixed marriages was much more cruel in the occupied territories than in Germany itself. Back in the Reich such persons were subject to persecution but were not sent to death camps.⁹⁹

In the town of Klimovichi in the Mogilev district, all the Jews were shot during November 1941. In April 1943, an operation was carried out against the offspring of mixed marriages. Russian mothers were rounded up together with their children and thrown into prison. Polina Aleksandrovna Stelmakh, a Russian woman married to a Jew, relates the following:

At first we stayed in the same cell together with the children. There were about ten of us Russian women, and another three or four Gypsy women. There were also many children, perhaps 50; they had been rounded up from the entire region. Some of them were without their mothers. We were supposed to be sent to Germany, whereas the

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 224–226.

⁹⁹ Nuremberg Documents, PS–1138; *Odesskaya Gazeta*, no. 8, November 20, 1941. This newspaper was published in Russian by the German and Romanian authorities in Odessa. In this particular issue an announcement was printed on behalf of the Romanian commandant of the city, Nikulescu, proclaiming that any person with at least one Jewish grandparent was to be considered a Jew. According to the Nuremberg laws, those with two or three Jewish grandparents were considered Jews, provided a number of other conditions were met; *My obvinayem*, p. 77. See also *Documents Accuse*, Vilnius, 1970, pp. 151–152.

children, so we were told, would be moved to Warsaw. The only way to save a child was to prove it was not born of a Jewish father. The Germans demanded the signatures of 20 witnesses.

On April 12, 1943, all these children of mixed marriages were shot together with all the Gypsies and several of the Russian mothers.¹⁰⁰ Spectacles similar to the one in Klimovichi took place in other towns and villages as well.

The Local Population and the Jewish Struggle for Survival

In the ghettos and camps that the Germans allowed to exist for the time being to supply their manpower requirements, life continued under the shadow of death which threatened to strike at any moment. Starvation, diseases, forced labor and ill-treatment were the daily fare of the Jewish inmates. Those deemed unfit for work — children, old people and the sick — continued to be murdered in the course of “actions” which went on without respite.

Jews in the ghettos of Vilnius, Kaunas, Minsk and elsewhere were engaged in a daily struggle for their lives and human dignity, with the help of the *Judenräte* and social organizations (some of them operating in the underground). To relieve starvation, food was smuggled into the ghettos, social welfare was provided for the needy, and soup kitchens were organized. Scores of ghetto residents paid with their lives for the illegal supply of food and other activities forbidden by the Germans. In their fight against disease and epidemics, Jewish doctors endeavored to supervise the sanitary conditions in the ghettos and camps, and to organize a rudimentary medical service, including clandestine hospitals. Nor were the education of children and cultural and religious life forgotten behind the barbed wire. In some ghettos, particularly in Vilnius, clandestine archives were established for the purpose of preserving for posterity documents and testimonies dealing with the crimes of the Germans, local Nazis and collaborators.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ YVA, 8350, testimonies gathered by Michael Rivkin on the fate of Jews from the town of Klimovichi, pp. 33–35.

¹⁰¹ Arad, *Ghetto in Flames*, pp. 296–327; Garfunkel, *Destruction of Kovno's Jewry*, pp. 101–118; *Encyclopaedia of the Diaspora* (Hebrew), Grodno volume, Jerusalem, 1973, pp. 531–536.

The Jews who had been consigned for total annihilation by Hitler's henchmen tried to escape from the ghettos and camps, and searched for ways and means to save themselves. Opportunities were but few and depended greatly on the attitude of the local population. An essential prerequisite for any successful attempt to survive was that the local non-Jewish residents, who were more adept than the Germans at spotting Jews, would not turn over the escapees to the occupation authorities or the local police.

There was no organized assistance to the Jews in the occupied areas of the U.S.S.R., either from the anti-Fascist underground or from other underground organizations. Such aid, although on a small scale, was available in several European countries.¹⁰² The absence of organized assistance in the occupied Soviet territories can be attributed to several factors. The anti-Nazi underground there was not as broadly-based as in the countries of Western Europe and in Poland, and the German terror it had to cope with was much harsher. Moreover, the underground was plagued by setbacks, and suffered from mass arrests of its leaders and rank-and-file.

As far as we know, neither the Soviet Government nor the Communist Party made any appeals to underground organizations or the local population in the occupied territories to render assistance to Soviet citizens of Jewish origin subjected to the Nazi policy of total extermination. No such appeals were broadcast over the radio, or included in the texts of leaflets dropped over these areas from Soviet air force planes. We may assume that during the war the Soviet Government never discussed the tragic fate of the Jews left behind in the occupied territories, since this did not bother them.

Stalin and those around him were also not concerned about the fate of the non-Jewish population. The acts of terror and atrocities committed by the Germans and their collaborators were used by the Soviet Government only for propaganda purposes within the

¹⁰² *Encyclopaedia of the Holocaust*, vol. I, pp. 364–365, on the rescue of the Danish Jews; vol. III, p. 1055, on the rescue of Jews in the Netherlands; vol. IV, pp. 1729, 1731, on the Żegota organization in Poland.

U.S.S.R. and abroad, and to promote the motivation of the Soviet people to fight the Germans.¹⁰³

The majority of the local population in the occupied territories took the stance of passive observers. Many of them were indifferent to the grim fate of their former Jewish neighbors. No doubt a variety of motives came into play in this attitude: fear of German reprisals, anti-Semitism, greed, etc. At the same time, however, throughout the areas under German control a small number of individuals helped the Jews on their own initiative. In doing so these outstandingly courageous and bold-spirited persons risked their lives and those of their families. There were hundreds, perhaps even as many as several thousand of them in all the occupied territories.¹⁰⁴

Only a few thousand Jews were rescued with the help of the local population. We lack even approximate figures relating to the number of survivors. We may assume that they made up less than one percent of all the Jews under the rule of German occupation.

Occasionally Jews married to non-Jewish spouses or the children of mixed marriages were saved thanks to the efforts of their non-Jewish relatives.¹⁰⁵

The Jewish Underground and Armed Struggle

Jews incarcerated in ghettos and camps did not confine themselves to passive resistance. They set up underground organizations aimed at an armed struggle against the Nazis. Underground organizations sprang up in the first months of the occupation. The nucleus of the underground organizations in the larger ghettos of Vilnius, Kaunas,

¹⁰³ Molotov's notes to countries having diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, dated November 25, 1941; January 6, 1942; April 27, 1942; May 11, 1943; *Dokumenty obvinayut*, vol. 1, pp. 9-45.

¹⁰⁴ Here are the names of some of the Righteous among the Nations who came to the aid of the Jews: Ona Shimaite helped the escapees from the Kaunas ghetto; Yanis Lipke hid 26 Jews from the Riga ghetto in his village; Vitold Fumenko from Lutsk in Volhynia saved the lives of 36 Jews; Elena Valendovich of Minsk saved a Jewish girl and then fled together with her to the woods; Jacob Sukhenko rescued Jews from the Rovno ghetto, was arrested and executed; Alexey Glagolev, a priest from Kiev, saved a number of Jews, furnishing them with Aryan papers and hiding places.

¹⁰⁵ YVA, 8350, testimonies gathered by Michael Rivkin, p. 20.

Grodno, Minsk and elsewhere was generally composed of members of political parties and youth movements. In most ghettos in the areas annexed by the Soviet Union in 1939–1940, the prime movers behind underground activity were members of the Zionist youth movements. In the ghetto of Minsk the initiators of the underground were veteran communists. They numbered hundreds of members in the larger ghettos and up to several dozen in the smaller ones. In some of the larger ghettos there were three or four underground groups, which sometimes acted together and sometimes independently. In the smaller ghettos, like Slonim, Svencionys, Nieswiez, Lachwa, Tuczyn, Novogrudok and Riga, the underground was based less on ideology and more on social connections.

Most of the underground organizations were set up in the territories annexed by the Soviet Union in the years 1939–1940, where the ghettos existed for 1–2 years after the German invasion and there was time to create the organizational network for such activities.

In the occupied territories within the prewar boundaries of the Soviet Union, the Jews were exterminated during the first months. Most of the ghettos there existed for a limited period of time and thus no underground activities were able to develop; the exceptions were Minsk and several ghettos in Transnistria. The limited underground activity and resistance in the ghettos and camps located in these areas was also due to the fact that the Jewish men there had either been mobilized into the Soviet Army before the retreat or evacuated, and thus the age group which could have formed the main force of the underground was greatly diminished.

The first underground groupings sprouted in the ghettos of Vilnius and Minsk during August–September 1941. The initial call for armed resistance came from the Zionist underground in the Vilnius ghetto, on January 1, 1942. This call was conveyed by underground couriers to other ghettos in Belorussia and Poland.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ Smolar, *Soviet Jews behind the Ghetto Barrier*, pp. 47–57; Cholavski, *In the Eye of the Hurricane*, pp. 140–141; YVA, 033/2690; testimony of Aharon Piterson, member of the underground in the Minsk ghetto; Arad, *Ghetto in Flames*, pp. 221–232.

Members of the underground procured firearms by purchasing them from local residents or stealing them from weapon depots of the Wehrmacht. Some weapons, such as homemade grenades, knives, etc., were manufactured within the ghetto itself. Needless to say, underground activity in the ghetto was extremely difficult and dangerous. It imperiled all ghetto residents, threatening their very existence. The disclosure of an armed underground could have provoked the rapid liquidation of the ghetto by the Germans. In a few ghettos, particularly the one in Vilnius, the underground hoped to organize an uprising followed by the flight of the ghetto residents to the woods. But in most ghettos, for example those in Minsk, Kaunas and smaller towns, the aim of the underground was to organize armed groups which would be able to escape to the woods and fight as partisans there.

Armed clashes between the ghetto underground and the German police occurred in Vilnius, Lachwa, Tuchin and other places, mostly in the course of ghetto liquidation actions.

Notwithstanding countless difficulties, thousands of Jewish youths left the ghettos for the woods of Belorussia and western Ukraine. Sometimes they set up their own partisan units in the forests or joined existing Soviet partisan forces. Thus partisan units that included dozens of Jews from the surrounding townships of Svencionys, Vidzy, Glubokoye and others operated in the Lake of Naroch forest (northwestern Belorussia). In the Naliboki forests (in the Novogrudok area, west Belorussia) hundreds of Jews from the ghettos of Lida, Novogrudok and smaller townships joined many partisan units. In Naliboki "family camps," populated by Jewish families from the Minsk ghetto and other towns of western Belorussia, were also established. Some of these camps, commanded by Tuvia Bielski and Shalom Zorin, accommodated hundreds of Jewish families. Jewish partisan units were also active in the Rudninkai forest south of Vilnius. They were composed of members of underground organizations from the ghettos in Vilnius, Kaunas and other places. Jewish partisans also operated in the woods of Polesie and in the Volhynia region, in the forests of eastern Belorussia, the Ukraine and in the occupied parts of the RSFSR, but on a much smaller scale. The total number of Jewish partisans in the

occupied areas of the Soviet Union is estimated at 25,000–30,000.¹⁰⁷

The Command of the Soviet partisan movement, organized as it was on the basis of a territorial division between national republics (the Ukraine, Belorussia, Lithuania, etc.), was opposed to the proliferation of independent Jewish partisan groups. Jewish units were disbanded and their members dispersed among non-Jewish units. This often involved the confiscation of weapons, thus leaving their owners to the cruel fate of a defenseless life in the woods. Incidents of this kind, in some cases motivated by anti-Semitism, occurred, for example, in the Naroch forest and other places in western Belorussia. A substantial number of Jews living in the “family camps,” among them women and children, lost their lives as a result of such anti-Semitic acts.¹⁰⁸ On the other hand, in certain areas of Belorussia, particularly in the Surazh region (Vitebsk district), Soviet partisans smuggled hundreds of Jews east across the front line.¹⁰⁹

In some areas of western Belorussia (mainly in the vicinity of Grodno and southeast of Vilnius), where Polish partisans operated in the first half of 1944, many Jews who sought refuge in the forests, including Jewish partisans, were shot by fascists and anti-Semitic elements among the Poles. Jewish partisans and civilians were also killed in the woods of western Ukraine — by Ukrainian nationalists belonging to UPA (Ukrainian Insurrectionary Army) and to other right-wing nationalist groupings. Anti-Semitism and the viewing of

¹⁰⁷ On the Jewish underground movement in some of the ghettos, see the chapters on the underground in Arad, *Ghetto in Flames*; Spektor, *Holocaust of Volhynian Jews*; Smolar, *Soviet Jews behind the Ghetto Barrier*; and also Dov Levin, *Fighting Back*, New York, 1985; Shalom Cholavski, *The Jews in Belorussia during World War II* (Hebrew), Tel Aviv, 1982, ch. 6–11; *Jewish Partisans' Book* (Hebrew), Merchavia, 1958; *Ghetto Wars Book* (Hebrew), Tel Aviv, 1954.

¹⁰⁸ Arad, *Ghetto in Flames*, pp. 449–450; Smolar, *Soviet Jews behind the Ghetto Barrier*, pp. 170–185; S. Neshamit-Shner, *The 51st Brigade* (Hebrew), Tel Aviv, 1990, pp. 143–144, 176, 182, 206.

¹⁰⁹ I. Arad, “Jewish Family Camps in the Forests — An Original Means of Rescue,” in: *Rescue Attempts during the Holocaust*, ed. Y. Gutman, Jerusalem, 1976, pp. 351–353.

Jews as a pro-Soviet element were mainly responsible for this phenomenon.¹¹⁰

Many Jewish partisans distinguished themselves in the fight against the Germans and their collaborators. They attacked police stations and Nazi garrisons, planted mines on transportation routes used by the enemy, and blew up trains traveling toward the front. Thousands of Jews lost their lives during underground activity, including ghetto uprisings and partisan battles. By making this contribution to the defeat of Nazi Germany and the expulsion of the enemy from the territory of the Soviet Union, Jewish fighters wrote an important chapter in the annals of the struggle waged by Soviet citizens and the Jewish people against the Nazi occupier.

Extermination Operations. The Third Period: Spring 1943–End of Occupation

After their rout at Stalingrad in the winter of 1942/43, the German forces began retreating. The end of the war and Germany's final defeat were clearly only a matter of time. The Nazi occupation authorities started exterminating the remaining Jews in the ghettos and camps in order not to allow even one Jew to survive the war. The process of liquidation of the ghettos was further accelerated due to the intensification of partisan warfare in the western areas of the Soviet Union, where tens of thousands of Jews were still incarcerated in the ghettos. Knowledge that Jewish youths who escaped from the ghettos were joining partisan units also served to speed up the liquidation process.

After the mass-killing operations carried out by the Germans in the summer and fall of 1942 in the western areas of the Ukraine and Belorussia, some ghettos still remained in the occupied Soviet territories. The largest of them were located in Vilnius, Kaunas, Riga, Minsk, Siauliai and Lida. At the beginning of summer 1943, there were some 70,000 Jews living in these ghettos. Some small

¹¹⁰ Spektor, *Holocaust of Volhynian Jews*, pp. 208–212, 256; Cholavski, *In the Eye of the Hurricane*, pp. 150, 219; YVA, 03/3205, p. 11; 03/2233, pp. 15–16; 03/703, p. 3; 03/2335, pp. 28–30; H. Lazar, *Destruction and Revolt* (Hebrew), Tel Aviv, 1950, pp. 187–194.

ghettos with populations of up to 4,000 Jews existed in several townships east and north of Vilnius. Their residents were shot in the Ponary massacre on April 4–5, 1943.¹¹¹

On June 21, 1943, Himmler issued a decree ordering the liquidation of all the remaining ghettos in the territory of Ostland. The able-bodied Jews were to be transferred to concentration camps run by the SS.¹¹²

The Minsk ghetto was liquidated in the months of September and October 1943. Some of its residents were deported in the second half of September 1943 to the Sobibor death camp in Poland, while the remainder were shot at Maly Trostinets.¹¹³ The Lida ghetto was liquidated on September 17–18, 1943, and its residents sent to Sobibor.¹¹⁴ The ghettos of Kaunas and Siauliai were converted into concentration camps in the autumn of 1943; prisoners unfit for work were shot.¹¹⁵ With the liquidation of the Vilnius ghetto, on September 23–25, 1943, the able-bodied Jews were sent to camps in Estonia (Klooga, Vaivera) and in Latvia (Kaiserwald); those unfit for work were killed in Ponary and Sobibor. Small labor camps with Jewish skilled workers remained in Vilnius.¹¹⁶ Residents of the Riga ghetto and the remnants from the ghettos of Liepaja and Dvinsk were transferred to the Kaiserwald concentration camp not far from Riga, in the months September–November 1943, while those unfit for work were put to death.¹¹⁷

In the summer of 1944, before the retreat of German forces from the Baltic republics and other occupied territories, some Jewish prisoners still held in camps were shot, while the remainder were evacuated to concentration camps such as Stutthof in Germany.¹¹⁸

¹¹¹ Arad, *Ghetto in Flames*, pp. 355–365.

¹¹² Nuremberg Documents, NO–2403.

¹¹³ Arad, *Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka*, pp. 136–137; Cholavski, *In the Eye of the Hurricane*, p. 135; YVA, TR–10/1072.

¹¹⁴ YVA, TR–10/1069, band 13, pp. 2575–2576, the trial of Bolender of Sobibor; *The Lida Book* (Hebrew), Tel Aviv, 1970, pp. 314–315.

¹¹⁵ *Encyclopaedia of the Holocaust*, vol. II, p. 826 (Kaunas); vol. IV, p. 1349 (Siauliai).

¹¹⁶ Arad, *Ghetto in Flames*, pp. 420–422, 429–432, 441–442.

¹¹⁷ *Encyclopaedia of the Holocaust*, vol. III, p. 1278.

¹¹⁸ YVA, TR–10/1196, the trial of Genth-Schnabel; M. Dvorzetski, *Jewish Camps in Estonia, 1942–1944* (Hebrew), Jerusalem, 1970, pp. 330–340.

In eastern Galicia (the districts of Lvov, Tarnopol and Stanislawow) the annihilation of Jews continued. From the end of 1942 to June 1943 some 180,000 Jews still living in these areas were massacred. The ghettos in Lvov, Tarnopol, Drohobych and several other towns were liquidated in June 1943. In the aftermath of numerous killing operations, as few as 21,000–25,000 Jews remained in this region in labor camps and the Yanovsky camp in the city of Lvov. Most of them were executed by shooting in the summer of 1944, on the eve of the liberation of these areas by the Soviet Army. Only 10,000–15,000 Jews, roughly 2% of the original Jewish population of eastern Galicia at the start of the occupation, survived the war.¹¹⁹

During 1943 the situation of the surviving Jews in Transnistria improved somewhat. After the Battle of Stalingrad, the Romanian Government concluded that Germany would not emerge victorious from the war, and began seeking opportunities to open a dialogue with the U.S. and Britain in the hope of switching sides. The main reason for this change in its policy toward Jews under its rule was the realization that the continued persecution of the Jews would not help it achieve this objective. At the end of 1943 over 50,000 Jews deported previously from Bessarabia and Bukovina were still alive in Transnistria, as well as 25,000–30,000 native Jewish residents. At the end of December 1943, and later, in March 1944, the Romanian authorities allowed the return to Romania of some 10,000–12,000 Jews from Transnistria who had been expelled there previously. Among those brought back were 2,000 orphans. Shortly before their retreat from the area in late March 1944, the Germans managed to murder several thousand Jews. When the advancing Soviet Army liberated Transnistria in the spring of 1944, 46,000–48,000 deported Jews were still alive. Only 15,000–20,000 local Jews, out of a total population of 185,000 living in Trans-

¹¹⁹ Nuremberg Documents, L-18, report by Fritz Katzman, SS and Police commander of the Galicia district; *Encyclopaedia of the Jewish Communities, Poland*, vol. II: *Eastern Galicia*, pp. 28–29.

nistria at the beginning of the occupation, survived to witness the liberation.¹²⁰

In February 1944, the Germans took over rule from the Romanians in Chernovtsy, and immediately began planning the liquidation of the surviving Jews there. However, they failed to implement these plans. With the liberation of this city in March 1944 by the Soviet Army, 16,000 Jews were saved from extermination. In the remaining towns of Bessarabia and Bukovina only a handful of Jews survived.¹²¹

For Jews living in Trans-Carpathian Ukraine, then under Hungarian rule, and for Hungarian Jews as well, the first years of the war were relatively “peaceful” when compared with the fate of their coreligionists in other parts of occupied Europe. However, on March 19, 1944, German troops occupied Hungary to prevent its quitting the war — the subject of secret negotiations then under way between representatives of the Hungarian Government and the Allies. Adolf Eichmann, the Gestapo’s chief plenipotentiary for Jewish affairs, came to Budapest on the day of the occupation, and set about making preparations for the deportation of Hungarian Jews to the death camp in Auschwitz. In the second half of April 1944, about 145,000 Jews living in Trans-Carpathian Ukraine were incarcerated in 17 ghettos and camps. Their deportation to Auschwitz commenced on May 15. By June 7, i.e., within three weeks, all the Jews in Trans-Carpathian Ukraine had been “resettled” in that death camp. They were the first Jews from Hungary to be sent to the death camps. The deportations were carried out by the Hungarian gendarmerie and police in cooperation with Eichmann’s headquarters. The Hungarian Jews were the last ones in Europe deported to death camps.¹²²

¹²⁰ *Encyclopaedia of the Jewish Communities, Romania*, vol. II, pp. 377–383; Avigdor Schachan, *Burning Ice, Ghettos in Transnistria* (Hebrew), Tel Aviv, 1988, pp. 265–271, 291–294, 299–301.

¹²¹ *Encyclopaedia of the Jewish Communities, Romania*, vol. II, pp. 509–510.

¹²² *Encyclopaedia of the Holocaust*, vol. III, pp. 1006–1007; vol. IV, pp. 1555–1556.

Erasing the Traces of the Crimes

The Germans did not content themselves with murdering Jews; they also strove to obliterate the evidence of their crimes. As early as spring 1942, Himmler began fearing that should Germany be defeated in the war, the Nazi leadership would be held responsible for its grievous crimes against humanity. He therefore ordered that a special SS unit — known as *Sonderkommando* 1005 — be formed under the command of *Standartenführer* Paul Blobel. They were assigned the task of unearthing the mass graves and burning the corpses of the victims. To prepare the commanders of *Sonderkommando* 1005 and staff members of the camps where mass graves were located for their duties, special courses were organized for them in the Yanovska camp in Lvov. In the years 1943–1944, before the Germans' withdrawal from the occupied territories, hundreds of mass graves were unearthed. The corpses were removed and burned, and the ashes thrown to the winds and mixed with the soil. Jewish camp inmates and POWs were brought in to perform this gruesome job.¹²³

In a number of places — Babi Yar in Kiev, the Ninth Fort in Kaunas, Ponary near Vilnius — the Jewish prisoners brought there to perform such “clean-ups” established underground organizations which undertook daring escapes. The escape from Babi Yar took place on September 29, 1943, and that from the Ninth Fort occurred at dawn, December 25, 1943, on Christmas day, when the SS sentries were drunk. In Ponary Jews managed to break out in the morning of April 15, 1944. Most escapees died in the course of these attempts, while others were later caught and shot. However, several dozen managed to flee and some of them joined the partisans.¹²⁴

Their testimonies revealed German deeds to the whole world. Despite all their efforts, the Germans did not succeed in concealing

¹²³ Nuremberg Documents, NO-3947, testimony of Paul Blobel; *Encyclopaedia of the Holocaust*, vol. I, pp. 11–14; Klee and Dressen (eds.), “*Gott mit Uns*,” pp. 227–228; Cholavski, *In the Eye of the Hurricane*, p. 137.

¹²⁴ Arad, *Ghetto in Flames*, pp. 444–445 (Ponary); C. Brown and D. Levin, *A History of the Underground* (Hebrew), Jerusalem, 1962, pp. 153–173 (Ninth Fort); Ehrenburg and Grossman (eds.), *The Black Book*, p. 12.

the evidence of their crimes in the occupied Soviet territories, or in erasing all traces of the mass murder of Jews, Soviet POWs and other Soviet citizens.

Summary

The Soviet Army found practically no Jews during the process of liberating the occupied territories, mainly in the summer of 1944. Out of a total of 2,750,000–2,900,000 Jews who came under German rule in the occupied territories of the Soviet Union (over one million of them had resided in Soviet territory prior to September 1, 1939), very few had survived, mostly in the western regions. The survivors were those who found refuge with local residents, or succeeded in disguising themselves as Aryans, or hid in the woods, or joined the partisans, as well as those fortunate enough to live through the dreadful experiences in the camps.

To the victims of the genocide of Soviet Jewry in World War II, we should add between 120,000 and 180,000 Jews who fell in various battles while serving in the Soviet Army, as well as about 80,000–85,000 shot in POW camps.¹²⁵ Together with other Soviet citizens, tens of thousands of Jews died due to hard living conditions, shellings and bombings during the blockades of Leningrad, Odessa and other cities in the Soviet Union.

The years of the German occupation, the years of the Holocaust (*Shoah*), were the most difficult and tragic in the centuries-long history of Russian Jewry.

¹²⁵ The number of soldiers who fell during the Second World War was never published in the Soviet Union. The number of 120,000 Jewish soldiers who fell in battle, is based on an estimate that about 7 million Soviet soldiers were killed in the war and the Jews made up 1.7% of this number. Some more up-to-date estimates raise the number of the Soviet soldiers to about 11 million (*Wojskowy Przegląd Historyczny*, Warszawa, 1990, nos. 1-2, p. 118). This estimate brings the number of Jews among them to over 180,000. The number of Jewish soldiers who were murdered or died as POWs in German captivity is based on an estimate of 5.7 million Soviet POWs and that all the Jews among them were shot.