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## Golden Pheasants and Eastern Kings: The German District Administration in the Occupied Soviet Union, 1941–1944

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**GOLDEN PHEASANTS AND EASTERN KINGS: THE GERMAN DISTRICT  
ADMINISTRATION IN THE OCCUPIED SOVIET UNION, 1941-1944**

by

Stephen A. Connor

Bachelor of Arts, University of Windsor, 1994

THESIS

Submitted to the Faculty of

History

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for

Doctor of Philosophy

Wilfrid Laurier University

2007

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Often while writing this dissertation I was reminded of James Joyce's words: "History is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake." One day, I realized that they didn't really apply to the fact that I was writing a dissertation but rather what I was writing about. So it goes. Without doubt there will be errors, omissions and oversimplifications, for which I take absolute responsibility.

SC, 2007

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## Abbreviations

DAF: *Deutsche Arbeitsfront*

GBA: *Generalbevollmächtigte für den Arbeitseinsatz*

KdS: *Kommandeur der SIPO und des SD*

NSDAP: *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei*

OET: *Occupied Eastern Territories*

OMi: *Reichsministerium für die besetzten Ostgebiete*

OT: *Organization Todt*

RKO: *Reichskommissariat Ostland*

RKU: *Reichskommissariat Ukraine*

RmfdbO: *Reichsministerium für die besetzten Ostgebiete*

RMI: *Reichsministerium des Inneren*

RSHA: *Reichssicherheitshauptamt*

SA: *Sturmabteilung*

SD: *Sicherheitsdienst des Reichsführers-SS*

Sipo: *Sicherheitspolizei*

SS: *Schutzstaffeln*

SSPF: *SS- und Polizeiführer*

SSPStOF: *SS – und Polizeistandortführer*

WiFüStabOst: *Wirtschaftsführungsstab Ost*

WiStabOst: *Wirtschaftsstab Ost*

ZHO: *Zentralhandelsgesellschaft Ost*

## Introduction

The scope and nature of German occupation in the east far surpassed any west of the Rhine. In terms of both geographical size and population, the east outstripped any other occupied territory. The military presence exceeded three million, the bureaucracy supported some 30,000 administrators and functionaries, and the occupied populations topped fifty-five million at its maximum in 1942.<sup>1</sup> Yet, even the extraordinary scope of the occupation paled in comparison to its nature. Beginning in June 1941, all historical precedents of a traditional occupation were rejected in favour of what one historian dubbed "Nazi Colonial Dreams," the racial and political restructuring of the east.<sup>2</sup> The captured territories, already battered by the racially underpinned war of annihilation, experienced numerous efforts undertaken by the German occupiers at racial, political and economic reorganization. In short, in the east Nazi policies were most fully undertaken.<sup>3</sup> Intention and feasibility converged like in no other area under the Nazi rule in the Occupied Eastern Territories (OET).

Already in the wake of rapid German advances into the Soviet Union, Hitler ordered on 20 August 1941 the transfer of conquered areas from military to

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<sup>1</sup> Rolf-Dieter Müller and Gerd R. Überschar, *Hitler's War in the East, 1941-1945: A Critical Assessment* (New York: Berghahn Books, 1997), 283.

<sup>2</sup> Wendy Lower, "Nazi Colonial Dreams: German Policies in Ukrainian Society in Zhytomyr, 1941-1944" PhD thesis American University, 1999. Such a rejection also implied that the occupation differed fundamentally from the traditional German *Drang nach Osten*. Also see Wendy Lower, *Nazi Empire-Building and the Holocaust in Ukraine* (Chapel Hill : University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Steinberg, "The Third Reich Reflected: German Civil Administration in the Occupied Soviet Union, 1941-1944," *English Historical Review*. 1995; cx: 624.

civil administration. Previously, among numerous directives, Hitler determined that a multitude of agencies would operate in the east, foremost Göring's Four Year Plan, Alfred Rosenberg's Reich Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories or *Ostministerium* (OMi), Himmler's SS-police complex and Sauckel's General Plenipotentiary for the Employment of Labour (*Generalbevollmächtigter für den Arbeitseinsatz*). Consequently, from the outset the Occupied Eastern Territories assumed a chaotic, polycratic character as rival organizations waged a "Hobbesian war of all against all" to implement their own competing policies in accordance with what they perceived to be Hitler's vision.<sup>4</sup> In this Darwinian struggle, historians have traditionally asserted that the civil administration fared badly.<sup>5</sup>

The captured territories were broken up into *Reichskommissariat Ukraine* (RKU) and *Reichskommissariat Ostland* (RKO). These territories were then further sub-divided into regional *Generalkommissariate* and finally, into *Gebietskommissariate* or sub-regional administrative areas.<sup>6</sup> The civil administration of these areas was organized as a vast bureaucracy populated by administrative commissars, agricultural officials, statisticians and specialists expected to implement broad Nazi policies with a minimum of centralized

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<sup>4</sup> Steinberg, "Third Reich Reflected," 624.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 626, 632.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 634-35. The actual organization of the OET differed substantially from what was initially planned due to wartime complications. Further in *Weißruthenien*, a *Hauptgebiet*, a coordinating administrative level between *Generalbezirke* and *Kreisgebiete* existed. Additionally, larger cities were administered by a *Stadtkommissar*, in many ways an urban *Gebietskommissar*.

supervision.<sup>7</sup> At the head of the civil administration in the *Gebietskommissariate* sat the *Gebietskommissare* (District Commissars). In theory, as Rosenberg stated, “the weight of the entire administration” rested on the local administration of the various sub-regions (*Gebiete*).<sup>8</sup> Yet despite their centrality, little research has been conducted on the composition of the new colonial elite apart from the upper echelons.

The objective of this study is to investigate the nature of the Nazi civil administration at the local level in the occupied territories of the Soviet Union between 1941 and 1944, concentrating specifically on determining the identity of the *Gebietskommissars* and their role in implementing German rule with respect to: (a) population and Jewish policy; (b) genocide; and (c) taxation, food economics and labour policy.

Certainly, past scholarship has recognized the importance of the civil administration in understanding both German occupation policy and the nature of the Nazi state. Recent articles by Jonathan Steinberg and Bernhard Chiari both maintain that the occupied east provides “laboratory conditions for understanding the essential features of the Nazi state.”<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, current scholarship has engendered a shift in focus from the centre outwards to the periphery which, when applied to the case of the civil administration, raises important new

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<sup>7</sup> Lower, “Nazi Colonial Dreams,” 2-3. Just how vast the original intentions were is evidenced by the theoretical organisation plan of the OMi listing every area they hoped to control and who they intended to have in charge. BA R43/685, 3737-48, *Braune Mappe*. Hereafter cited as *Braune Mappe*.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Lower, “Nazi Colonial Dreams,” 3.

<sup>9</sup> Steinberg, “Third Reich Reflected,” 621, fn. 2. Bernhard Chiari, “Deutsche Zivilverwaltung in Weißrußland, 1941-1944: Die lokale Perspektive der Besatzungsgeschichte,” *Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen*, iii, 1993, 75-6.

questions. The previously dominant “history from above” approach has been modified by studies dealing with “everyday life” and administrative activity at the lower levels of the regional commissariats.<sup>10</sup> Such work is highly relevant to the understanding of the Third Reich, the mind frame of its officials and their function in the ruthless exploitation and genocidal policy perpetrated in the east.

“Periphery studies” have yet to provide a broad, comprehensive reconstruction of the organisation and function of the civil administration at the local level.<sup>11</sup> Rather, recent research such as Christian Gerlach’s study of mass murder, Martin Dean’s account of the police complex, and Wendy Lower’s case study of Generalbezirk Zhytomyr have all focussed on theoretical organisational models and particular aspects and actions of the local administration.<sup>12</sup>

Consequently, space remains for this effort to bring the pieces of the puzzle together, to provide a thorough detailing of the organisational arrangement of the *Gebietskommissariate* broad enough to be generally representative yet specific

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<sup>10</sup> See Lower, “Nazi Colonial Dreams,” 3. Also see Karel Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair: Life and Death in Ukraine under Nazi Rule* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 35-58.

<sup>11</sup> Such limitations have also been noted in Christopher Browning, “German Killers: Orders from Above, Initiative from Below and the Scope of Local Autonomy: The Case of Brest-Litovsk,” in Christopher Browning, *Nazi Policy, Jewish Workers, German Killers* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 116-43.

<sup>12</sup> Christian Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde: Die deutsche Wirtschafts- und Vernichtungspolitik in Weissrussland 1941 bis 1944* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1999); Martin Dean, *Collaboration in the Holocaust: Crimes of the Local Police in Belorussia and Ukraine, 1941-44* (Basingstoke: Macmillan in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum; New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000); Bogdan Musial, *Deutsche Zivilverwaltung und Judenverfolgung im Generalgouvernement: eine Fallstudie zum Distrikt Lublin, 1939-1944* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1999) and Lower, *Nazi Empire-Building*.

enough to appreciate the inevitable gap between theoretical organisation and practical implementation.

Historians have detailed the organisational structure and theoretical tasks of the OMi based primarily on Alfred Rosenberg's vision of the civil administration outlined in his brief, *Braune Mappe*.<sup>13</sup> Again, responsibilities, questions of jurisdiction and authority have been addressed in terms of official, theoretical chains of command and with emphasis on the various special arrangements made between the OMi and other agencies. More often than not, such arrangements are perceived solely as detrimental to the civil authorities' power and influence and little consideration is given to how such arrangements were comprehensively enacted locally.

Within the historiography, the translation of these tasks to practice below the *Generalbezirk* is largely unaddressed. Further, analysis of the activities, influence and involvement of the "numerous other agencies" has not filtered down the power-pyramid to the *Gebiet* level.<sup>14</sup> In general, only in passing or in reference to specific relationships, such as the police, is the jurisdiction and authority of the *Gebietskommissariate* addressed at all. Again, the theoretical and institutional focus of past research is obvious.

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<sup>13</sup> *Braune Mappe*, 3693-3736. Also see GARF, 7021-148-4 and Alexander Dallin, *German Rule in Russia, 1941-1945 : A Study of Occupation Policies* (London: Macmillan, 1981), 53-8, 93. Gerald Reitlinger, *The House Built on Sand: The Conflicts of German Policy in Russia, 1939-1945* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1960), 137-43.

<sup>14</sup> See Dallin, *German Rule*, 99. Also see *Ibid*, 80-103. A notable exception in this regard were tasks involving the SS-police complex.

Similar to questions of tasks and authority, the relationships between various agencies at the local level had been largely overlooked. While important research has addressed the civil administration-police relationship, association and interaction with other agencies as diverse as Army Security commands, Army Economics Command, War Administrative Agencies, the Forest administration, the Railway Ministry, *Zentralen Handelsgesellschaft Ost* (ZHG) and *Organization Todt* have received virtually no attention.<sup>15</sup>

Certainly, both character sketches and comprehensive studies of the Nazi elite prove legion. However, such scholarship is not paralleled at the *Gebiet* level.<sup>16</sup> Further, even a comprehensive cataloging of Gebietskommissars and their staffs is absent in the secondary literature. While a close reading of this material can often produce individual names and, at best, some broad indication of their position and activities, the Gebietskommissars remain merely bit players and are denied systematic or detailed analysis.<sup>17</sup> For instance, only vague

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<sup>15</sup> For an examination of the police-civil administration relationship see Erich Haberer, "The German Police and Genocide in Belorussia, 1941-1944," *Journal of Genocide Research*, 1-3 (2001): 13-29, 207-18, 391-403; Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde*, 180-96; Dean, *Collaboration*. For mention of agriculture leaders and foresters see Steinberg, "Third Reich Reflected"; Bernard Chiari, *Alltag hinter der Front : Besatzung, Kollaboration und Widerstand in Weissrusland 1941-1944* (Düsseldorf : Droste, 1998), 64-5; Michael Imort, "Forestopia: The Use of Forest Landscape in Naturalizing National Socialist Ideologies of *Volk*, Race Lebensraum, 1918-1945" (PhD. Dissertation, Queen's University, Kingston, 2000), 449-60 and Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde*, 169.

<sup>16</sup> The unsatisfactory nature of research on the civil administration is candidly noted in Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde*, 170.

<sup>17</sup> For representative examples see Steinberg, "Third Reich Reflected," 620-51, Dallin, *German Rule*, 101-103, Reitlinger, *The House*, 128-59, Chiari, "Deutsche Zivilverwaltung," 75-6; Chiari, *Alltag hinter der Front*, 51-95; Haberer, "German Police," 391-403; Dean, *Collaboration*, 60-77, 105-18; Timothy Mulligan, *Politics*

references are made to the selection and training of the Gebietskommissars in terms of party affiliation.

The perceptions, activities and actions of the Gebietskommissars have been most fully investigated in terms of their complicity in genocide and exploitation and maltreatment of the indigenous populations. Yet here too scholars have largely ignored the vast bulk of administrative functionaries that oversaw the day to day operations of the OET. The picture that does emerge from the scanty research portrays an administration staffed by an ill-prepared, corrupt, immoral and sadistic collection of Nazi thugs. Thus we are presented a composite sketch of the civil administrator as *Ostnieten*, a rabble of:

job-seekers, unemployed party hacks, disgruntled *Gauleiter* looking for empires to build, bored city and county officials who saw themselves strutting a grander stage than domestic administration offered, aging *Altkämpfer*...who seized their chance to act out their sadistic urges.<sup>18</sup>

Lower is somewhat more discriminating in her appraisal of the administrators in the RKU. Required to ensure "that 60% of his staff be Nazi party members," Generalkommissar Kurt Klemm turned to members of the *Ordensjunker*, SA officials and others "with some Party affiliation."<sup>19</sup> Further,

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*of Illusion and Empire: German Occupation Policies in the Soviet Union, 1942-43* (New York : Praeger, 1988), 21-31 and Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde*, 56-79.

<sup>18</sup> Steinberg, "Third Reich Reflected," 621. This trend in the historiography is noted also by Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde*, 171.

<sup>19</sup> Lower, "Nazi Colonial Dreams," 6-7. The contention that the civil administration turned to *Ordensjunker* is mirrored in Chiari, *Alltag*, 82-3. Additionally, Raul Hilberg noted: "...most of the high officials in the Rosenberg apparatus were party men." See Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews: Volume One* (New York: Holmes & Meier), 1985, 345-67, fn 14.



Lower asserts that commissars were not a “tightly-knit organization controlled by a group of Nazi fanatics.”<sup>20</sup> Such a conclusion suggests that possibilities to maintain local autonomy and act outside prescribed patterns existed. Overall, these “Golden Pheasants”, as they were referred to by military personnel, indiscriminately plundered the local population and displayed a keen taste for vodka, women and public executions.<sup>21</sup> In short, the civil administration was supposedly composed of “blockheads and ass-lickers,” “drunk on power.”<sup>22</sup> While such conclusions prove an interesting narrative, little headway has been made in de-coding behaviour in an effort to understand efficiency, effectiveness and motivation. Questions remain such as: is behaviour a reflection of training? Does efficiency, effectiveness and behaviour change over time? Is it dependent on location? Are current characterizations universal or even valid? Are there exceptions to this characterization, if they indeed exist? What was the place of ideology in both the mindset and behaviour of civil administrators?

Given the absence of any comprehensive or even broad study of the Gebietskommissars further research is necessary to firm up and empirically test current, not to say provisional, conclusions and characterisations. Further, while *how* Gebietskommissars functioned and behaved has received some attention,

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<sup>20</sup> Lower, “Nazi Colonial Dreams,” 11.

<sup>21</sup> “Golden Pheasant” (*Goldfasanen*) was a derogatory term to describe the civil administration. The phrase itself referred to the yellow-brown uniform. According to Fritz Hillenbrand, it was also used to describe long time Nazis “who were given important positions in the Party or one of its organisations.” Fritz Hillenbrand, *Underground Humour in Nazi Germany: 1933-1945*, Routledge: London, 1995, 51.

<sup>22</sup> Steinberg, “Third Reich Reflected,” 621, 636. For a fuller examination of the conduct of the *Goldfasanen* see Lower, “Nazi Colonial Dreams,” 11-20.

why they acted in such ways remains almost entirely neglected. Certainly, of late, much headway has been made in understanding the personal motivations of other Germans in the east, yet little attention has been paid to the Golden Pheasants.<sup>23</sup> Equally surprising is the lack of mono-causal explanations among the motivations that are suggested. While anti-Semitism and anti-Bolshevism cannot be discounted as motives, rarely do historians consider them primary.<sup>24</sup> However, by extrapolating motive from behaviour, perhaps some historians have swung too far in the other direction, seeing motivations as entirely self-serving, base and immoral. Steinberg, for example, presents the civil administration as composed of “cranks” and sociopaths.<sup>25</sup> If colonizers and social planners went east to realize their various visions, Steinberg asserts that the realities of occupation quickly subordinated their unrealistic ideas to more diabolical ones of plunder and sadism.<sup>26</sup>

Lower too details the various cruelties and crimes of the civil administration in RKU. While not claiming universality, her analysis portrays the Gebietskommissars in Zhytomyr as swaggering petty tyrants indifferent to the

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<sup>23</sup> For two representative examples see Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: Harper-Collins, 1992) and Omer Bartov, *Hitler's Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

<sup>24</sup> For the suggestion of anti-Bolshevism as a motivation see Chiari, “*Deutsche Zivilverwaltung*,” 82-3.

<sup>25</sup> This characterization certainly owes much to Strauch's July 1943 letter to Chief of Guerrilla Combat Units SS-Obergruppenführer and General of the Police von dem Bach. In this “report” primarily regarding his disdain for Wilhelm Kube, he accuses two local civil administrators (Stadtkommissar Janetzke and Gebietskommissar Hachmann) of gross incompetence. Reprinted in Willi Dressen, Ernst Klee, Volker Riess, *“The Good Old Days”: The Holocaust as seen by its Perpetrators and Bystanders* (New York: Free Press, 1991), 183-94.

<sup>26</sup> See Steinberg, “Third Reich Reflected,” 629, 636.

needs and conditions of their charges. However, despite such behaviour, among some officials a degree of professional pride and belief in an eastern mission existed. Certainly corruption, the black market and looting were hallmarks of the occupation. Yet a number of senior officials took great pains to ensure that plunder found its way into the Reich's coffers. Ultimately however, Lower tends to agree with General Commissar Leyser's assessment: "district commissars...were disgracing the German uniform, and some had to be sent back to Germany."<sup>27</sup> Finally, Lower asserts that that *Abenteuerlust*, lust for adventure, motivated the actions of some commissars.<sup>28</sup>

While focussed primarily on the police and motives behind participation in shooting operations, Haberer does provide some insights applicable to the civil administration as a whole. To understand motives beyond personal greed, Haberer asks why the civil administration at times acted outside their prerogative, particularly in the implementation of genocide. First, many accepted the extermination policy "as a mission of their own."<sup>29</sup> Second, this overarching motivation could be combined with a variety of others such as ideological commitment, however "difficult to assess" and careerism. Further, Haberer notes that in the context of a particular environment normal moral judgements were malleable and "hierarchies of authority" magnified.<sup>30</sup> Such factors may be as applicable to the Gebietskommissars as it is to their police subordinates.

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<sup>27</sup> See Lower, "Nazi Colonial Dreams," 19. Unfortunately, precisely which Gebietskommissars and why they were sent back to Germany is not discussed.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 42.

<sup>29</sup> Haberer, "German Police," 396-7.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 398.

By looking to other disciplines, particularly social psychology, historians have much to gain in terms of understanding motivation. When addressing perpetrators of genocide and explaining “extraordinary human evil,” the research of James Waller proves particularly insightful. Of importance to Waller’s study is the necessity of providing a “psychological explanation of how people come to commit extraordinary evil.”<sup>31</sup> In short, Waller rejects traditional claims of the extraordinary origins of extraordinary evil in favour of an explanation focussing on a combination of evolutionary, individual, social and situational factors.<sup>32</sup> Ultimately, Waller’s model is most useful in that it can help address the question of *why* the Gebietskommissars themselves acted and *how* they came to commit their heinous crimes. Such insights promise not only to further illuminate a community of perpetrators previously relegated to the historical shadows but also, more broadly, to provide new insights into the process and nature of Nazi genocidal activities in the east.

The nature of the policies that the civil administration was expected to carry out is highly contested within the current historiography. Particularly cantankerous is the debate over the variable weights given to economic and ideological determinants of genocide. Christoph Dieckmann and Christian

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<sup>31</sup> James Waller, “Perpetrators of Genocide: An Explanatory Model of Extraordinary Human Evil,” *Journal of Hate Studies*, 1, 1, 2001, 7. A fuller analysis was presented in James Waller, *Becoming Evil : How Ordinary People Commit Genocide and Mass Killing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>32</sup> Perhaps most poignant for scholars of Nazi genocide is Waller’s articulate rejection of the primacy of “the influence of an extraordinary ideology” as a mono-causal explanation of extraordinary evil. Here Waller adds his voice, from the perspective of a psychologist, to the overwhelming evidence against the feasibility of the “Goldhagen Thesis.” See Waller, “Perpetrators,” 10-11.

Gerlach both contend that pressures from the *centre* based on the primacy of food economics proved cardinal factors in both genocide and the civil administration's role in it.

Dieckmann maintains that in August 1941, the German civil administration in occupied Lithuania transformed their selective genocide of Jewish men and Communists to encompass "very nearly the entire Jewish population- men, women, children -in the rural areas."<sup>33</sup> A lethal combination of food shortage and growing security concerns legitimized this radicalization of anti-Jewish policy in the eyes of the perpetrators. While ideology engendered a genocidal frame of mind, these twin concerns "made the decisive changes and transitions possible."<sup>34</sup>

Interestingly, Dieckmann suggests that an unexpected reversal in the war occurred as early as late summer 1941. Having failed to defeat the Soviet regime in the first six weeks of war, supplies and security became increasingly important and intertwined concerns. Given that the priority for supplies lay with the Wehrmacht, the civilian authorities faced the alarming prospect of too little food and too many mouths.<sup>35</sup> Pressured by increased demands from the Reich that adequate food supplies were ensured, the regional occupation authorities sought to "reduce the cost of supplying provisions at the cost of the Jewish

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<sup>33</sup> Christoph Dieckmann, "The War and the Killing of the Lithuanian Jews," in Ulrich Herbert (ed.), *National Socialist Extermination Policies : Contemporary German Perspectives and Controversies* (New York : Berghahn Books, 2000), 241, 250. This decision proves all the more striking as, according to Dieckmann, "no order had been given for the total annihilation of the Lithuanian Jews by the beginning of the war in June 1941."

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 266.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 258.

population.”<sup>36</sup> The most superfluous mouths, Jews, faced elimination.<sup>37</sup> When combined with the impracticality of resettlement, the civil administration turned to outright murder as a “definitive solution” to both the Jewish and provisions problem. For Dieckmann, massive pressure on the regional administration from Berlin forced radical action more functional than intentional. Yet their solution, mass murder, was unthinkable without authorization at the highest levels in Berlin.<sup>38</sup> To accept Dieckmann’s argument is also to accept that the civil administration in Lithuania in 1941 was far from incompetent or lacking in vision and purposefulness. Rather, Lohse and company proved highly effective, if homicidal, problem-solvers.<sup>39</sup>

In his examination of Byelorussia, Christian Gerlach too sees the civil administration as capable of adapting to the rapidly evolving and radicalizing anti-Jewish policy.<sup>40</sup> Again, akin to Dieckmann, Gerlach perceives that food economics and scarcity set the tempo of extermination policy and was the axis upon which it developed.<sup>41</sup> In this analysis, the primary goal of the Byelorussian

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 258-9. Importantly, Dieckmann maintains that the wish that the Jews “be completely removed from the area” was perceived by RKO administration (and Lohse himself) as “the decision of the Führer.” In this way, the ideological, rather than purely functional, underpinning of genocide remains intact. See Dieckmann, “The War,” 260.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 260-261.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 264.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 266. For cooperation with the SS-police complex see Ibid, 259.

<sup>40</sup> Christian Gerlach, “German Economic Interests, Occupation Policy, and the Murder of Jews in Belorussia, 1941-43” in Ulrich Herbert, *National Socialist Extermination Policies: Contemporary German Perspectives and Controversies*, New York, 288.

<sup>41</sup> Significantly, contrary to Dieckmann, Gerlach maintains that, in broad terms, the fate of the Jews was sealed prior to Barbarossa, claiming that “most important elements of the German leadership had determined intention to kill the

occupation was the extraction of food surplus, de-industrialization and de-urbanization.<sup>42</sup> Beginning in autumn 1941, vague utopian plans (a starvation policy) were transformed into an “implemental program of mass murder” as the civil officials sought practical methods to sidestep the potential problems presented by attempting the wholesale starvation of the Jewish population.<sup>43</sup> In close cooperation with the Security Police and the SD, the civil administration turned to shootings and gas vans to escape an economically generated cul-de-sac.<sup>44</sup>

Gerlach’s challenging thesis offers three essential conclusions for understanding the role, activities and place of the civil administration in Byelorussia. First, the primacy of an economic determinant casts doubt on the absolute centrality of ideology in Nazi extermination policy. Rational, if repugnant, calculation replaces irrational anti-Semitism and anti-Bolshevism as the sole basis of mass murder. While these factors were certainly “preconditions for these murders,” economic necessity was the dynamic agent that fuelled the machinery of destruction.<sup>45</sup> Second, while pressures from Berlin certainly affected the decision-making process at the regional and local levels, Gerlach interprets the civil officials as central interpreters and innovators of policy: “they

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vast majority of Soviet Jews...above all by starvation, supported by brutal occupation policies.” See Gerlach, “German Economic Interests,” 215-16, 222.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 217. As Gerlach notes, Belorussia prove unique due to the marginal nature of its industry. This reality also negatively impacted the chances of survival for “work Jews.”

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 224-25.

<sup>44</sup> This cooperation and coordination continued through the occupation. See Ibid, 226.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 227.

were one of the driving forces behind the destruction of the Jews.”<sup>46</sup> As extermination became increasingly an institutionalized part of occupation policy, the civil administration proved a dominant feature to the point where “the massive liquidation campaigns took place only when they accorded with the combined interests of the administrative authorities.”<sup>47</sup> Third, Gerlach is correct in his assertion that, practically speaking, no single order to kill all Jews was necessary. Rather: “Mass murder always required supplementary local or regional planning, and it required interest, consensus, and initiative to ensure that the far-reaching destruction became reality.”<sup>48</sup> Thus, research suggests that in the transformation from idea to reality, civil administrators and functionaries stood perilously close to the centre of the whirlwind.

For both Dieckmann and Gerlach ideology appears resigned to context, a part of the overall environment in which the occupiers operated but not central to the origins, nature or scope of their activities themselves. Christopher Browning has argued that such conclusions are the result of the regional and local focus of much of the current literature and wholly undervalue the importance of ideology as a determinant of genocide. For Browning, the Nazi regime held ideological “policies in principle” that were predicated on a racist worldview. By 1942, these

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 228. For the relative independence of the Gebietskommissars see Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde*, 167. Gerlach does note that in *Weißbruthenien*, local civil administrators “could operate their own policy...when Minsk gave them enough rope.” Ibid, 167.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 228. The well documented conflicts between the civil administration and the SS-police complex are, for Gerlach, over-emphasised. Such conflict was largely over means rather than ends and, in the case of Kube and the SS, “limited to a personal level.” Lower concurs with Gerlach’s assessment that too much has been made of the conflicts.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 229.



principles had radicalized to a point where ideological considerations assumed primacy over all others.<sup>49</sup> Once these policies in principle included the “implementation of the Final Solution,” economically grounded arguments...were totally in vain.”<sup>50</sup>

Using a case study of Brest-Litovsk where local authorities attempted to “drag their feet” in an effort to exempt Jewish labour from shootings, Browning argued for the pre-eminence of these ideological policies (that is, Berlin’s dominance in the decision-making process). While directives from Berlin were initially open enough to be interpreted differently by local authorities and instituted in ways that “best suited their purposes,” definitive limitations existed.<sup>51</sup> When resolve hardened among the top Nazi leadership that a final solution to the Jewish Question be undertaken, any contrary initiatives “were crushed with draconic severity.”<sup>52</sup> In Brest, the civilian authorities would be simply brushed aside and the ideologically motivated directives from Berlin carried out. Regardless of how the administrators perceived the orders from centre, in the end they were realized “with terrible and total compliance.”<sup>53</sup>

While historians have begun asking questions about the role of the district commissar and the nature of his authority and relationship with other agencies in the context of studying genocide in the east, little research has been forthcoming

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<sup>49</sup> Browning, “German Killers,” 118, 141-2. For the case of Brest, Browning presents the genocide of the Jews as having three increasingly radical phases ending in mid-October 1942 when “the entire Jewish population, including all workers, was murdered.”

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 138-39.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 126, 140.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 138, 142.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 141.

on precisely the men who implemented Nazi policy on the ground. At this level, economic and ideological determinants are intimately tied to the debate surrounding the issue of local initiative and leverage in the decision-making process. Further, such considerations also suggest significant differences among historians concerning cooperation and coordination amongst competing agencies at the regional and local levels. As noted, Browning allows for some measure of local autonomy in interpreting directives. However, a definitive line existed demarcating acceptable from unacceptable deviation or translation of policy. In the case of retaining Jewish labour in Brest, “sharp criticism of occupation policy” was even permissible.<sup>54</sup> While the exercise of local autonomy that conflicted with the “long term goals and policies of the regime [were] temporarily tolerated,” when confronted with nonnegotiable ideologically motivated “policies in principle,” regional and local authorities quickly fell into line.<sup>55</sup> Any subsequent deviation could result in dismissal, as in the case of Klemm or execution as was the fate of Kovel Gebietskommissar Arwed Kempf.<sup>56</sup> For Browning, the question of local autonomy is largely moot. Rather the focus of investigation should more accurately be placed on the dynamic interaction between local and central authorities rather than local initiatives.

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 140. Such criticism did not negatively affect Berlin’s perceptions of local authorities who continued to be seen as “fundamentally loyal to the Nazi regime.”

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 142.

<sup>56</sup> For the case of Kempf see Browning, “German Killers,” 141-42. Such a conclusion raises the question, largely unanswered, as to the factors that influenced the dramatically different fates of Klemm and Kempf. Addressing this issue would certainly contribute to a fuller understanding both the nature and limitations of authority and autonomy at the local and regional levels.

Steinberg is even less certain of the civil administration's autonomy and position in either the development or implementation of policy.<sup>57</sup> From top to bottom, the civil administration was largely ineffective in this respect. Only the *Reichskommissar* of Ukraine Erich Koch, who "simply refused to obey any of Rosenberg's orders," exercised any real autonomy at all. For the rest of the civil administration, staffed with supposed misbehaving incompetents at the regional and local levels, any real power or autonomy proved negligible. Rather the dynamic SS-police complex increasingly ruled the east and the civil authorities were "simply swept aside."<sup>58</sup>

Chiari concurs with Steinberg's belief in the growing power of the SS.<sup>59</sup> He does not however suggest that the sweeping aside of the civil administration removed them from the implementation of policy. Rather, the administration acted as a cog in the "requisitioning machinery."<sup>60</sup> While limited to areas such as food requisition, propaganda and cultural policy, civil authorities enjoyed a large measure of autonomy, as "each area commissar was to a large extent his own man."<sup>61</sup> Yet such islands of autonomy proved largely marginal and detached from reality. Ultimately, the civilian administration formed the weakest link within

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<sup>57</sup> See Steinberg, "Third Reich Reflected," 624-6. Such autonomy was based on Party connections and access to the central power cartels in Berlin. See *Ibid*, 639.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, 647. Also see 640-3.

<sup>59</sup> Chiari, "Deutsche Zivilverwaltung," 74.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, 74.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, 75.

the Nazi eastern hierarchy and was subjected to a “rapid loss of meaning of all administrative structures...in favour of brutal SS rule.”<sup>62</sup>

The perception of a powerless and marginalized civil administration is not universally accepted among historians. Rather questions of autonomy are addressed within a framework that sees power as containing a hidden transcript and subject to constant questioning and negotiating from below.<sup>63</sup> Building on Chiari, Wendy Lower asserts local civilian authorities quickly realized that their power hinged upon the ability to juggle ideological imperatives and the demands of establishing and maintaining a workable occupation system. As a result, to a large degree, civilian authorities enjoyed considerable autonomy in the day-to-day functioning of the occupation. Moreover, personal choice, “unpredictable variables of local conditions and the changing relations with other powerful German agencies” allowed space for local initiative and interpretation of initial occupation policies.<sup>64</sup> While Himmler battled Rosenberg in Berlin, in the OET administrators “enjoyed a certain independence... and could conduct themselves in ways that were not limited by official policies or the expectations of their superiors.”<sup>65</sup>

Rather than limiting the autonomy of the civil administration, the Himmler-Rosenberg conflict engendered ill-defined policies that effectively decentralized

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 88.

<sup>63</sup> For the application of this theory in another (military) context see Leonard Smith’s seminal, *Between Mutiny and Obedience: the Case of the French Fifth Infantry Division during World War I*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

<sup>64</sup> Lower, “Nazi Colonial Dreams,” 11.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, 11-12.

power and demanded initiative and improvisation. In this way, “ad hoc and arbitrary methods,” determined at the local level marked the transfer of power “into the hands of regional leaders.”<sup>66</sup> In short, local administrators enjoyed a certain “latitude to test out certain methods of rule” and exercised their power with almost universal brutality.<sup>67</sup>

Still, Lower does insist that limits of authority did exist. In many ways akin to Browning, she perceives that ideological imperatives, enforced by the SS, placed significant boundaries on the power of local civilian authorities.<sup>68</sup> In the case of genocide in Zhytomyr, centrally mandated extermination directives allowed no space for local autonomy and ensured that the civilian administration carried out its orders regardless of their own needs or criticisms.<sup>69</sup>

Erich Haberer questions such conclusions based on the experience in Byelorussia. While the civil administration showed some initial reluctance to implement genocidal directives in 1941, by 1942 they had “dispensed with any qualms and became actively engaged in the whole process of genocide.”<sup>70</sup> At this point, the Gebietskommissar who “was pretty well ruling his domain as he

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 21 23.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 28 46.

<sup>68</sup> Wendy Lower, “Anticipatory Obedience” and the Nazi Implementation of the Holocaust in the Ukraine: A Case Study of Central and Peripheral Forces in the Generalbezirk Zhytomyr, 1941–1944,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 16 (2002):16 and Lower, “Nazi Colonial Dreams,” 34, 39.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 14. This point is echoed in Martin Dean, “The German Gendarmerie, the Ukrainian Schutzmannschaft and the ‘Second Wave’ of Jewish Killings in Occupied Ukraine: German Policing at the Local Level in the Zhytomir Region, 1941-1944,” *German History*, (1996): 181-183, 192.

<sup>70</sup> Haberer, “German Police,” 23-24, 210-211. For the nature of their reluctance see 392-3.

pleased” demonstrated not just cooperation and compliance, but initiative.<sup>71</sup> While in theory the chain of command may have imposed restrictions on the autonomy of the Gebietskommissar, in reality they tended to wield much more authority at the sharp end of genocidal actions than previous analyses have recognized.<sup>72</sup> While Haberer maintains that the overall push for genocide came from Berlin, the civil administration demonstrated autonomy and initiative in its implementation. In short, the civil administration was not marginalized or swept aside but proved central to the entire extermination process.

In terms of cooperation and coordination, Steinberg emphasizes the degree to which in-fighting and the effectiveness of the SS-police complex in imposing their authority marked the process of genocide.<sup>73</sup> Unfortunately, how this was reflected at the local level is not addressed. Steinberg’s useful analysis of the upper echelons notwithstanding, Lower and Haberer assert that the turmoil in Berlin was not replicated at the regional/local levels in RKU and RKO. In Zhytomyr, Lower argues that, on balance, cases of inter-agency cooperation outnumbered conflict. Further, this reality cannot be attributed solely to the effort of ambitious local functionaries to garner recognition from superiors.<sup>74</sup> Rather collaboration proved the result of close contact between the functionaries of the various agencies in the field. Often, Lower notes, several agencies shared the same office. Cooperation however did not mean that each agency enjoyed the

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 20-21, 212, 216.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 21, 211-12. After Chiari, Haberer asserts that the Gebietskommissar was “*weitgehend sein eigener Herr.*”

<sup>73</sup> Steinberg, “Third Reich Reflected,” 646-7.

<sup>74</sup> Lower, “Nazi Colonial Dreams,” 29-30.

same level of influence or role in the implementation of policy.<sup>75</sup> For the civil administration, this meant limitations existed and while “their participation was almost imperative...their power [was] limited.” As noted, the case of Klemm made plain the reality that cooperation was *expected* and the real power of the civil administration rested on the ability to “cooperate by embracing their ‘competitors’ policies.”<sup>76</sup> Tacitly Lower suggests that Klemm’s case may have been exceptional. As Klemm’s replacement, Leyser discovered interagency cooperation in the Final Solution was more the norm than the exception.<sup>77</sup> While individual functionaries might have harboured hard feelings and petty jealousies toward other agencies, the nature of rule in the east, the scarcity of resources and of manpower ensured that the civil administration maintained a large measure of power through “the central coordinating role that they played in implanting Nazi policy at the lowest levels.”<sup>78</sup>

If Lower maintains that the role of the civil administration in genocide proved “almost imperative,” Haberer asserts that in Byelorussia it was definitive. While “persistent jurisdictional squabbles” ensured the civil administration initially came only willy-nilly to accept the extermination of Jewry as official policy, they quickly dropped any reservations and cooperated by employing the resources at

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 30.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 40.

<sup>77</sup> As Leyser discovered, RKU Gebietskommissars were sensitive to this even if Klemm was not. Lower asserts that “Leyser...investigated the Gebietskommissars’ record regarding the Final Solution; he found that his subordinates had cooperated with the SS and police in the implementation of this policy.” See Lower, “Nazi Colonial Dreams,” 41. Further, Lower argued that only in 1943 in the closing days of the RKU occupation did cooperation break down. Ibid, 45.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 46.

their disposal, most importantly the police. In some cases they went as far as “active participation in genocide.”<sup>79</sup> While Haberer does not downplay the significance and influence of the SS-police complex in the process of genocide he does identify a significant broadening that encompassed a “lethal combination of Sipo/SD and civil-police administrative agencies.”<sup>80</sup> Given the scarcity of resources, “the killing of Jews depended on the Gebietskommissar’s initiative and the Gendarmerie’s execution of his directives “to clean up” the rural rayons.”<sup>81</sup> In this analysis, the role of the Gebietskommissar is not as second fiddle to the SD. Instead, he “functioned essentially as a linchpin of genocide.”<sup>82</sup> The ambitious and dedicated Gebietskommissar could wield *real* power, set the tone and enjoy an unrivalled measure of influence through the strategic use of the assets at his disposal. In short, while conflict certainly existed at higher levels, it did not preclude interagency cooperation at the local level between the SD, Gebietskommissar and his Gendarmerie. In Byelorussia, extermination on the scale intended by the Nazis was impossible without this collusion.<sup>83</sup>

As noted, a full catalogue of the competencies and tasks of the Gebietskommissar has yet to be produced. As with the majority of research focussed on the OMi, significant attention has only been paid to tasks related to genocide and Nazi war crimes. Yet here too, research remains centered on

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<sup>79</sup> Haberer, “German Police,” 23.

<sup>80</sup> Haberer, “German Police,” 391-2.

<sup>81</sup> NARB 370/55/11, Glebokie, November 1941. Also see Haberer, “German Police,” 212, 216.

<sup>82</sup> Haberer, “German Police,” 397. Chiari noted that “only in one case [did] the civil administration offer resistance against the murder of the Byelorussian Jews,” see Chiari, *Alltag*, 57.

<sup>83</sup> Haberer, “German Police,” 396.



other agencies such as the police and the SS and pays only marginal attention to either the tasks or function of the Gebietskommissar in the both the preparation for and commission of Nazi crimes. Thus investigations of the civilian administration and genocide in the east have remained engaged primarily in the two debates detailed above. Consequently, not only is the scope of research limited but also many questions concerning the OMi and in the *process* of genocide are unaddressed.

In terms of Jewish affairs (*Judensachen*), the regional civil administration played a cardinal core in the coordination and procedures that greased the wheels of genocide. As others have noted, the OMi proved open and adaptable, despite some jurisdictional squabbling, to radical transformations in Jewish policy and often cooperated readily with agencies such as the Security Police. While not charged directly with solving the “Jewish Question,” the volume of directives, memos and decrees implicating Gebietskommissars suggests that this is not only a question of participation in the process of genocide, but also of degree. In short, the cooperation of the civil administration proved indispensable in the management of Jewish affairs in that the Gebietskommissar was responsible for:

- Collection and registration of all Jews.
- Marking of Jews with yellow stars.
- Abolition of charity (liberality) for Jews.
- Establishment and administration of ghettos.
- Transfer of rural and urban Jews into the ghettos.
- Installation of Jewish Councils of Elders in the ghettos.
- Installation of a Jewish order service in the ghettos.
- Seizure and delivery of the Jewish possessions and assets.
- Elimination of Jews from various professions.
- Introduction of a hard labour obligation.
- Determination of work and non-work Jews
- Determination of who was to be regarded as a Jew.

Oddly, despite the obvious centrality of these tasks in implementing Jewish policy at the local level, both research and analysis are wanting. Rather investigation has focussed on questions surrounding the radicalization of policy toward genocide on the one hand and, on the other hand, efforts to more fully understand the nature of local authority/autonomy and the nuances of inter-agency relations. Certainly, if Haberer and Lower are correct, the role of the civil administration in genocide requires further research.

Obviously, a central problem exists in the historiography of the civil administration. Simply, no study has yet comprehensively addressed the Gebietskommissars or their authority and ability to influence, if not determine, policies and events in their areas of jurisdiction. While work in other similar areas may provide some insights, only a rough fit is possible. Accurate assessments and conclusions for understanding of the Gebietskommissars themselves remain illusive. The state of the current historiography requires a more in-depth analysis. First, focusing on the district commissars promises important new opportunities for understanding how decisions were actually implemented at the local level within an organization labelled an “administrative monstrosity” guided by “egotistical hyenas” and how this reflected wider Nazi policies and administrative chaos. As we have seen, historians have begun asking questions about the role of the district commissar and the nature of his authority and relationship with other agencies in the context of studying the Holocaust in the East. However, no research has been forthcoming on precisely the impact of the

men who implemented Nazi policy “on the ground.” Other essential questions remain largely unanswered: Who were these administrators? What was their social background and ideological experience? What did they perceive as their main function? What was their relationship with the indigenous population and their role in mass murder and the genocide of the Jews? How did they exercise their power?

In addressing such questions this study aims at not only advancing our knowledge and understanding of the Nazi regime but also of the men who translated, adapted and helped to carry out Nazi policies of pacification, exploitation and extermination. To focus on the lowest level of civil government, where the interaction between occupier and occupied was most immediate and potent, is overdue and will fill an obvious gap in the historiography and our understanding of the structure and operation of the occupation administration.

## Part I

### The German Civil Administration in Nazi Occupied Soviet Territory

Destroying the Soviet Union was Hitler's real war aim. From its vastness, the thousand year Reich would be sustained. Only in capturing and exploiting the East could the German people survive. As early plans were laid for the administration of the occupied east, Hitler intended that civilians rather than the military would play the predominant role.<sup>84</sup> Under their leadership, Hitler envisioned the spoliation of the Soviet Union. Hitler's 17 July 1941 decree established the Eastern Ministry (*Reichsministerium für die besetzten Ostgebiete*, also known as *Ostministerium* or, in short, OMi), the mechanism by which the captured territories would be administered. The overall functions and authority of the civil administration were spelled out prior to deployment, yet came rather late in July 1941. Hitler determined that the civil administration should not have free reign in the east. Important restrictions and limitations were placed on its authority, to preserve both the place of other agencies and Hitler himself. Both the "independent prerogatives" of Göring and Himmler were maintained while Hitler appointed administrative heads and retained the role of arbitrator for "differences of opinion that cannot be settled by direct negotiations."<sup>85</sup>

At the top of the OMi in Berlin was Alfred Rosenberg, *Reichsministerium für die besetzten Ostgebiete* (RmfdbO) and the Party's leading eastern "expert"

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<sup>84</sup> Dallin, *German Rule*, 24. Reitlinger, *The House*, 128.

<sup>85</sup> Mulligan, *Politics*, 22.

and self-styled philosopher.<sup>86</sup> From his office, theoretically, the east would be carved-up, ruled and exploited. Yet, from the outset neither the area nor the configuration of the occupied territories matched the expectations of *Ostministerium* officials.<sup>87</sup> Wedged between the more integrated western areas Poland and Czechoslovakia and eastern zones remaining under military control, civilian administrated districts never reached their intended size.<sup>88</sup> Of the four areas intended for *Ostministerium* proprietorship, only two, *Reichskommissariat Ukraine* (RKU) and *Reichskommissariat Ostland* (RKO) were actually established. Heading these administrations was a pair of *Reichskommissars*, Erich Koch in Rowno and Heinrich Lohse in Riga.<sup>89</sup> Under this level sat the *Generalkommissariat* or *Generalbezirk* (region) headed by a *Generalkommissar* and finally, the *Gebietskommissariat* or *Kreisgebiet* (district).<sup>90</sup> In terms of overall personnel, the German presence was surprisingly limited. While the upper levels of the administration supported between 350 (RKO) and 450 (RKU)

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<sup>86</sup> Ernst Piper, *Alfred Rosenberg: Hitlers Chefideologe* (Munich: Karl Blessing Verlag, 2005), 509-611. For additional discussions of Rosenberg see Reitlinger, *The House*, 128-36; Dallin, *German Rule*, 24-26.

<sup>87</sup> *Braune Mappe*, 3737-3748 clearly shows this disconnect between the expectations and the final shape of the Occupied Eastern Territories.

<sup>88</sup> Dallin, *German Rule*, 90-1.

<sup>89</sup> Koch assumed command on 1 September 1941. See Reitlinger, *The House*, 136-38. Also see Uwe Danker, "Der schleswig-holsteinische NSDAP-Gauleiter Heinrich Lohse" in Michael Ruck and Karl Heinrich Pohl, *Regionen im Nationalsozialismus* (Bielefeld: Verlag für Regionalgeschichte, 2003), 91-120.

<sup>90</sup> Steinberg, "Third Reich Reflected," 626, 632, 634-5. The actual organization of the OET differed substantially from what was initially planned due to wartime complications. Further in *Weißruthenien a Hauptgebiet*, a coordinating administrative level between *Generalbezirk* and *Kreisgebiet* existed. Additionally, larger cities were administered by a *Stadtkommissar*, in many ways an urban *Gebietskommissar*.

functionaries, in the Gebiet, the number generally ranged between a mere 8-12 individuals to oversee populations in the hundreds of thousands.<sup>91</sup>

In terms of ethnicity, the bulk of the indigenous population, more rural than urban, varied according to geography and (former) national boundaries. As early as September 1941, the OMi had compiled a list of the multitude of ethnic groups in the USSR. The list was not ordered according to demographic proportion and certainly reflected the heterogeneous complexion of the Soviet Union. Not surprisingly, Ethnic Germans were at the top. Listed were: "Ethnic Germans, Russians, Ukrainians, Byelorussians, Caucasians, Turkistanish, Volga-Ural, Balts, Finns, Mongolians, Romanians, Bulgars and Greeks." Despite the fact that Poles, Jews and Roma-Sinti represented significant populations, they were not included on the list.<sup>92</sup>

Lohse's RKO was composed of four Generalkommissariate consisting of the former Baltic states: Estonia (*Estland*), Latvia (*Lettland*) and Lithuania (*Litauen*) and a truncated Byelorussia (*Weißruthenien*).<sup>93</sup> In total, the area encompassed 493,300 km<sup>2</sup> with a population of over ten million. To administer

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<sup>91</sup> To this number should also be added the approximately 6400 Landwirtschaftsführer (La-Führer). See Andreas Zellhuber, *Unsere Verwaltung treibt einer Katastrophe zu: Das Reichsministerium für die besetzten Ostgebiete und die deutsche Besatzungsherrschaft in der Sowjetunion 1941-1945* (München: Verlag Ernst Vögel, 2006), 141. Unfortunately, Zellhuber's excellent study was unavailable for this dissertation until the final revision stage.

<sup>92</sup> USHMM RG 31.002M Reel 11, "Völker und Volksgruppen der Sowjetunion," 20.9.1941.

<sup>93</sup> As the war turned against Hitler, he decreed on 1 April 1944 that *Weißruthenien* be detached from the RKO.

this area, the Reichskommissar selected Generalkommissars.<sup>94</sup> In Lettland was Hugo Wittrock, in Estland Karl-Sigismund Litzmann, in Litauen Otto Heinrich Drechsler and Wilhelm Kube in Weißruthenien. Beneath them were 26 Gebietskommissars and Stadtkommissars.<sup>95</sup> The size and population of Gebiets varied. In Weißruthenien, for example, Glebokie encompassed 9,000 km<sup>2</sup> and a population of 2.5 million while a smaller Lida included an area of 2,500 km<sup>2</sup> and a population of 280,000.<sup>96</sup>

To the south, based on the former Soviet republic of Ukraine, was the RKU. Essentially, the RKU extended to Charkow with two noted exceptions detached: Galicia (*Generalgouvernement*) and Transnistria (Romania). In the RKU, the civil administration occupied about 339,000 km<sup>2</sup> and that supported a population of about 25 million. In the end, the realities of the war ensured that the RKU was roughly only half the size of what the OMi had planned.<sup>97</sup>

The first Generalkommissariate established were Wolhynien-Podolien headed by Heinrich Schöne and Shitomir under Kurt Klemm. As the front pushed east, the RKU expanded to include Kiew (Waldemar Magunia), Nikolajew (Ewald Oppermann) and Dnjepropetrowsk (Nikolaus Selzner). Finally, military success in the summer of 1942 enabled the establishment of Taurien under

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<sup>94</sup> In *Lettland* was Hugo Wittrock, Karl-Sigismund Litzmann (*Estland*), Otto Heinrich Drechsler (*Litauen*) and Wilhelm Kube (*Weißruthenien*).

<sup>95</sup> Zellhuber, *Unsere Verwaltung*, 134.

<sup>96</sup> Chiari, *Alltag*, 55. Appendix II contains a full discussion of Lida.

<sup>97</sup> Zellhuber, *Unsere Verwaltung*, 139.

Alfred Frauenfeld.<sup>98</sup> Under this administrative level, the RKU deployed 103 Gebiets-Stadtkommissars.<sup>99</sup>

Once in place, the tasks of the civil administration were governed by Hitler's political goals and worldview. For their part, Gebietskommissars would play significant roles as they and their staff occupied the lowest level of the German administration where they acted as heads of the entire administration.<sup>100</sup> As Gebietskommissars prepared for eastern service beginning in the late summer of 1941, they were informed that whatever duties they might be required to complete, "the first task of the civil administration in the occupied East was to represent the interests of the Reich."<sup>101</sup>

Organizationally, as discussed in chapter two, the civil administration conformed broadly to the Nazi inclination for multiple layers, hierarchies and subordinations. Theoretically, the demands and expectations on the civil administration were spelled out and accessible. Yet critically a divide existed from the beginning between what was on paper and the realities of occupation.

Overall, Gebietskommissars came to their posts burdened with high prospects from the Eastern Ministry. OMi directives notwithstanding,

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid, 136-7.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid, 137. *Braune Mappe*, 3737-48.

<sup>100</sup> In the larger urban areas, the role of the Gebietskommissar was assumed by a Stadtkommissar. CIDK, 1275/3/662, "Report by FK 675, Abt. VII (Military Administration) to SD," 11.8.1941. Also see Dallin, *German Rule* and BA R6/230, "*Gedanken zur Behördenorganisation in der RKU*," 30.8.1943, 42. The size of city warranting a Stadtkommissar was set by OMi decree on 7 August 1942. The minimum population required to determine the city in need of a Stadtkommissar was 12500. Smaller urban areas would simply be combined into the larger Gebiet. In general, the Stadtkommissar was parallel to the Gebietskommissar in terms of organizational position.

<sup>101</sup> *Braune Mappe*, 3714.



Gebietskommissars were expected to wear many hats and interact regularly with numerous other agencies and organizations. Not surprisingly some fared worse than others. To more fully understand the Gebietskommissars themselves, chapter three discusses, by way of collective biography, the identity and “ideal type” of national socialist civil administrator. Gebietskommissars held important positions in intimate contact with the occupied population. Given their roles in both genocide and broader policies, it is essential to understand both how their office “fit” into the polycratic occupied territories and both who they were and where they came from.

## Chapter 2

### Organisation and Guidelines

"A threatened nation can react to uncertain dangers solely through administrative channels, to the truly embarrassing situation of perhaps overreacting." *Jürgen Habermas*

From 1941-1944, the ranks of the OMi numbered about 13,000 at the various levels.<sup>102</sup> Further, approximately half served in leadership positions, the remainder consigned to jobs within the day-to-day functioning of the occupation. As of 28 June, 1941, Rosenberg determined that the leadership corps of the civil administration would encompass four Reichskommissars, twenty-four Generalkommissars, about approximately eighty Hauptkommissars and over 900 Gebietskommissars. In the end, only a fraction, 129 Gebietskommissare and Stadtkommissare, were ever deployed.<sup>103</sup>

In early July 1941, a list of about 1000 candidates for the Haupt and Gebietskommissar positions was drawn up. Initially, Rosenberg intended that these offices would be filled by men drawn from a variety of agency including the *Sturmabteilung (SA)*, *Deutsche Arbeitsfront (DAF)*, *Reichsministerium des Innern (RMI)* and SS. However, manpower shortages and the independent-mindedness of the SS ensured that personnel policy never met initial expectations.<sup>104</sup> To fill these positions, the OMi looked primarily to the party apparatus and the SA.

As seen in chapter three, party membership was not a requirement for eastern service, Gebietskommissars and above were almost universally party-

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<sup>102</sup> Zellhuber, *Unsere Verwaltung*, 170.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid*, 174.

<sup>104</sup> Zellhuber, *Unsere Verwaltung*, 170.

men effectively ensuring that the civil administration was a “party Ministry.”<sup>105</sup> Rosenberg hoped that their backgrounds and “party spirit” would provide a bulwark against any negative experiences while on duty and the hardships that would arise from close contact with “strange nationalities.” With these considerations in mind, the OMi believed that SA-men were excellent candidates. From the SA’s perspective, eastern service promised new possibilities and opportunities to recapture some of the influence and prestige that was lost in the Reich. However, while the SA leadership certainly perceived this possibility, they also portrayed themselves as “genuine Germans” and loyal to the OMi in contrast to the economically motivated SS.<sup>106</sup>

While Mulligan’s assertion that approximately 90% of the civil administration belonged to the SA has been challenged, Gebietskommissars tended to be SA-men and graduates (*Ordensjunker*) of the Nazi training schools.<sup>107</sup> Initially, these men often found their way east on the coat-tails of former party superiors with whom they were familiar. For example, in Lohse’s RKO, Generalkommissar Heinrich Drechsler and sixteen Gebiets-Stadtkommissars followed the Reichskommissar from Schleswig-Holstein.<sup>108</sup> Likewise, in *Weißruthenien* Generalkommissar Wilhelm Kube brought with him Wilhelm Janetzke to serve as Stadtkommissar. IN RKU, the trend continued as Reichskommissar Erich Koch appointed numerous functionaries, including Gebietskommissars, from his former command in East Prussia. It was not until

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 171.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Mulligan, *Politics*, 22.

<sup>108</sup> Zellhuber, *Unsere Verwaltung*, 176.

November 1941 that the OMi was sufficiently functional to assert a fuller authority of over personnel selection. By that time, however, many of the post in the western areas of the civilian controlled east had already been filled.

Throughout the occupation, district administrations suffered from a chronic manpower shortage. As mentioned, on average, a *Gebietskommissar* could expect a staff of about ten German officials and employees, some agricultural specialists and a smaller number of interpreters and secretaries.<sup>109</sup> Clearly, at the local level, Nazi rule would have to be realized “on the cheap.” As a result, local civil administrations tended to adapt their organization, often combining and in some cases simply abandoning prescribed administrative departments. In some cases, local conditions dictated the necessity and number of subordinate departments. However, in theory, a *Gebietskommissar* presided over an office organized into several departments (*Referate*): I. Politics, Race and Nationality, II. Economics and Industry, III. Labour, IV. Administration and Taxation, V. Forestry, VI. Agriculture.<sup>110</sup> Given the lack of German personnel at the local level, some native officials tended to continue as the civil administration supervised and interacted with low level indigenous functionaries such as mayors and *Rayonchefs*. Based on this structure, the *Gebietskommissar* was expected to ensure the effective policing of his district and the exploitation of its resources in the service of the Reich. In practice, *Gebietkommissariats* were superimposed on former Soviet administrative blocs (*rayons*), establishing a pattern of piggy-

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<sup>109</sup> An excellent example is found in BA-L AR-Z 262/59. “Testimony of Heinrich Carl,” 15.12.1959.

<sup>110</sup> BA-L AR-Z 94d/59 v.1, 80, v.17, 2442. See Appendix IV. CSA-Kiev 3206/1/11 indicates 1943 district level organisational changes in RKU.

backing Soviet forms that was repeated in numerous other areas. At this level, the practical work of the occupation would be carried out.

The primary security and enforcement arm of the local civil administration was the German police and locally recruited indigenous auxiliaries (*Schutzmannschaft*). Again reflecting the chronic shortage of Germans, these locals greatly outnumbered their German counterparts and proved diverse in both reliability and their ability. The German police were nominally subordinated to the civil administration. Following directives from Heinrich Himmler, “the Higher SS and Police Leader was directly and personally subordinated to the Reich Commissar.” Such semantic gymnastics not only appeased Himmler in his capacity as Head of German Police but also conformed to Hitler’s own predilection for institutional rivalry engendered by foggy competences and jurisdictions. At the local level, directives issued in November 1941 established the Gebietskommissar, the “bearer of the majesty of the Reich,” as technically in control of the police apparatus.<sup>111</sup> Not surprisingly, at higher levels such an arrangement could produce inter-agency friction.<sup>112</sup> Yet, as we shall see, Gebietskommissars could and did enjoy better relationships with their police than their superiors in Minsk, Kowno or Berlin. In important cases cooperation rather than friction proved the most common result of the union.<sup>113</sup>

What were the objectives and purposes of the civil administration? According to initial guidelines, the goal of the occupation administration in the east was

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<sup>111</sup> See Dean, *Collaboration*, 72-3; BA-L, AR-Z 94d/59, v. 5 p.867, v.14 p. 2007, v.16, p.2237.

<sup>112</sup> Dean, *Collaboration*, 73.

<sup>113</sup> For an example from the RKO, see Haberer, “German Police,” 208-12.

maximum spoliation and exploitation.<sup>114</sup> To that end, the civil administration was predicated on several broad principles outlined in Rosenberg's Brown Portfolio (*Braune Mappe*):

1. The first task of the civil administration in the OET was to represent the interests of the Reich.
2. While the final form and composition of the OET was fluid, it was perceived that it would "lead a certain independent existence."
3. However, these areas were still part of the greater German *Lebensraum*. As a result, the OET was not considered subject to the terms of the Hague Land Warfare Convention as the USSR was "to be regarded...as dissolved." "Consequently the obligation to exercise all government and other sovereignty powers in the interest of the national inhabitants" lay with the German authorities. Accordingly, "all measures, which appear to the German administration necessary for the execution of this comprehensive task, were considered suitable and permissible."<sup>115</sup>

To facilitate implementation, the OMi's *Braune Mappe*, explained in greater detail the goals and intentions of the new regime. In it, new civil administrators were informed not only of the broad precepts of the occupation, but also the particular means and methods favoured by their superiors. Thus, from the outset the Gebietskommissars were presented with a theoretical framework of guidelines and expectations for their tenure in the east. By understanding these initial expectations and presumptions, the actual work and practice of rule at the local level is more clearly brought into focus.

The OMi's political guidelines were dominated by anti-Communist rhetoric that thinly camouflaged more practical (and traditional) sentiments concerned with Soviet expansion and drive for economic hegemony. On the

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<sup>114</sup> Also see Alex Kay, *Exploitation, Resettlement, Mass Murder: Political and Economic Planning for German Occupation Policy in the Soviet Union, 1940-1941* (New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2006), 1-13.

<sup>115</sup> *Braune Mappe*, 3714.

whole, it centered on the perceived expansionist aims of the Moscow regime and the threat posed by “Red troops...[on] the German border.” For the OMi, the Communist “release of the proletariat from the capitalist yoke” in the Baltic states and Poland had clearly demonstrated Russia’s “aggressive Imperialism.” Given Rosenberg’s Baltic roots, such an analysis seems hardly surprising.

In line with the larger Nazi worldview, Rosenberg focused on the necessity of securing raw materials both as the means to continue the war effort against Britain and to ensure Germany’s control over the vast resources of the east. His solution to these dangers was a final settling with the “Bolshevik danger,” preceded by the creation of German-dominated buffer states, fashioned on the basis of racial criteria. With this development, the OMi predicted a substantial double-victory. Not only would the Reich be saved from the Red Army but also claim “an enormous increase in political and economic power” and the control of “all important raw materials.”<sup>116</sup>

Rosenberg held that Soviet occupation, repression and mismanagement presented Germany with invaluable capital for ensuring the collaboration of the eastern populations. To guarantee this, the OMi maintained that Germany present itself as liberator and ensure that this fact was not lost on the liberated. Significantly, Rosenberg bluntly stated: “The most important condition for this is the appropriate treatment of the country and the population.” Consequently, while German wartime needs were to be satisfied, newly occupied territories were not to be regarded as sole objects of exploitation. The populations,

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<sup>116</sup> Also see Mulligan, *Politics*, 29-31.

Rosenberg asserted, had already endured enough hardship under the Bolshevik yoke and would “hold no hatred” for their Nazi conquerors if efforts were made to redress the ravages of Soviet occupation. To this end, Rosenberg asserted that no empty promises be issued.<sup>117</sup> However much time it took, the impression was to be avoided (“over all conditions”) that the Germans offered only pompous promises.

Essential to civilian rule was the issue of food economics. The OMi understood that successful grain requisition required the “willing cooperation of farmers.” Collaboration would ensure that the nutritional needs of the cities could be met. Along with the expectation of “extraordinary successes in agriculture,” local OMi officials were instructed to seek the farmers’ “willing cooperation” in the re-building of the agricultural sector. Further, cooperation at the local level was to entail, through suitable advisors, consultation with the population.<sup>118</sup> Indeed, close association between occupied and occupier was to expand beyond simply the agricultural sector. Rosenberg ordered that his Generalkommissars and Gebietskommissars assemble trusted indigenous advisors, headed by a municipal mayor (*Bürgermeister*) from “reliable representatives of the native population.”<sup>119</sup> Such arrangements were to encompass “cities, villages, (workers’) housing estates, urban settlements etc.”<sup>120</sup> Indigenous assistance was envisioned as an arrangement by which advice pertaining to mutual interests

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<sup>117</sup> “The peasantry will be interested primarily in the question of the agricultural collective system.” See *Braune Mappe*, 3714-16.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*



(primarily cultural and economic) could be gleaned by the civilian administration and, with the return of normality, relations between the Gebietskommissar and the local population facilitated.<sup>121</sup>

Central to Rosenberg's planning for the newly occupied east was a solution to the Jewish question. From the outset, all measures concerning this were predicated on an understanding that the war allowed for a complete solution to be realized, despite the logistics of such a massive undertaking.<sup>122</sup> Further, any solution could not be based simply upon "using chicanery" and would require the cooperation of the indigenous populations. Consequently, Rosenberg ordered that within the confines of maintaining law and order in the rear of the Army, "any actions by the local civilian population against the Jews [was] not to be prevented."<sup>123</sup> Such actions were perceived as political with strict instructions that neither mobs (*Straßenpöbels*) nor criminal elements be allowed to use anti-Jewish actions as a opportunity to plunder Jewish businesses or enrich themselves at the expense of the population.<sup>124</sup>

The OMI recognized the enormity of the "Jewish problem" in the east and understood that, at least initially, only limited and conservative measures were possible. Consequently, administrators were presented with a three-stage blueprint. Apart from, at minimum, not obstructing anti-Jewish actions undertaken by the gentile native populations, the civilian authorities' first step

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<sup>121</sup> If such arrangements had already been established by military authorities, Rosenberg ordered that they be retained.

<sup>122</sup> *Braune Mappe*, 3716-17.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

would be mandatory registration and marking (with a yellow star of David) of all Jews.<sup>125</sup> Once defined, the Jewish population was to be strictly separated from the non-Jewish population and removed from public life.<sup>126</sup>

From the beginning, the OMi planned the ghettoization of Jews.<sup>127</sup> Significantly, Rosenberg anticipated the active cooperation of Jews in the process and determined that they supervise and police themselves, thereby ensuring that the *Kommissariatspolizei* be responsible only for the security of the Ghetto boundaries and beyond.<sup>128</sup>

Isolation and concentration would be followed by expropriation and exploitation of the Jewish population. For Rosenberg, the first precept upon which the process of economic manipulation rested was that “due to the war, it is to be made certain that in all measures against the Jews, economic interests are not substantially damaged.”<sup>129</sup> Yet while substantial damage was to be avoided, the OMi recognized the necessity of restructuring Jewish economic life to ensure

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<sup>125</sup> Rosenberg wrote at some length of the difficulties in uncovering Jews after 24 years of Bolshevik rule. He contented that Jews camouflaged themselves within the Soviet Union and attempted to assimilate into the larger population. He also asserted that in the RKU and RKO, a larger number of Jews remained unassimilated making their identification easier. Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> This policy was also seen in cultural terms to effect the complete segregation of Jews. Jews were to have their (supervised) schools, press, theatres and cinemas within the confines of the Ghetto.

<sup>127</sup> In the cases of *Weissruthenien* and the Ukraine, Rosenberg noted that such efforts were aided by the existence of “numerous, more or less closed Jewish settlements.”

<sup>128</sup> *Braune Mappe*, 3717. An excellent general summary is Gustavo Corni, *Hitler's Ghettos: Voices From a Beleaguered Society, 1939-1944* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 22-40.

<sup>129</sup> *Braune Mappe*, 3716-18.

both the proscription and restriction of Jews from certain professions.<sup>130</sup>

However, such measures were to be undertaken with a degree of pragmatism lest the indigenous population suffer deprivations. Jews employed in factories, cottage industries and as craftsmen would continue to work under civil administrative supervision. Further, Jews were to be increasingly active in the agricultural sector and, in the case of Jewish collectives (agricultural enterprises), continue to operate under the watchful eye of the civilian authorities.

For the OMi, the Social Question (*soziale Frage*) was primarily one of ensuring the effective organisation of labour. To guarantee that eastern workers achieved the highest productivity possible “in the interest of the German economy” Rosenberg recognized that not only must labour be well-organised but also well supervised and, to a certain extent, well treated. To ensure this, all workers would be responsible to a labour manager (*Werksleiter*) who, in turn, answered to the German agencies. In this manner, at the local level, discipline rested with indigenous workers themselves. With industry-wide trade unions banned, representation was to be localized with the *Werksleiter* responsible not only for discipline but also for accommodation, food supply, health support, wages and the organisation of work within a framework set by German agencies.<sup>131</sup>

Rosenberg understood that little of the Soviet administration would remain intact. That which did survive, primarily “village Soviets”, were to be

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<sup>130</sup> Jews “freed-up” by such restrictions were to be put to work primarily as manual labourers. Further, all Jewish assets were to be registered and all transactions were to require authorization.

<sup>131</sup> *Braune Mappe*, 3718.

dissolved immediately. Consequently, upon entry into the east, the German civil administration was to begin *tabula rasa* in the political reconstruction of occupied areas. Only former Soviet administrative divisions would be retained in order to ease the transition for both the local populations and the new civilian authorities.

Reich administrators were cautioned against excessive use of their law-making powers lest the new regime “suffocate in regimentation.”<sup>132</sup> By the same token, the OMi understood that comprehensive legislation was largely impossible given the absence of any specific knowledge of local conditions, affairs and populations. Consequently, as few binding arrangements as possible were to be issued. Rather, higher agencies were directed to leave room for local authorities to act in accordance with area conditions.<sup>133</sup>

The handling of sabotage cases was to be a matter for the SS/police. However, the authority for the use of collective reprisals against the indigenous population would lay with the appropriate Commissar in consultation with his SS/police leader.<sup>134</sup> Further, Rosenberg discouraged hostage-taking and only in necessary cases when the effect would outweigh the negative consequences of such actions.<sup>135</sup>

The initial principles of the OMi's occupation demonstrate a hybrid of ideological imperatives and practical considerations. How these precepts were translated and modified, embraced or ignored is the central story at the local

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid, 3719. Rosenberg also insisted that all decrees of statutory orders be submitted to him as drafts.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid, 3720. Further, with the Gebietskommissar lay the option of calling-up locals for guard tasks.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

level. As we shall see, important disconnects certainly existed. Still, as early as Fall 1941, OMi officials received analyses and summaries laying out numerous aspects of their new territories.<sup>136</sup> In short, some resources were available to the leadership corps of the occupation, provided they chose to look.

For the civil administration, Rosenberg's *Braune Mappe* presented a translation of Hitler's worldview into broad guidelines. As we have seen, the Reichsminister tied together important aspects such as the political, racial, and economic reorganization of captured territories. Yet Rosenberg's *Braune Mappe* was not a set of concrete or practical guidelines for district administrators. The late establishment of the OMi and the practical difficulties of producing clear guidelines and policies on short order plagued the civil administration from its inception. Further, not only were specific policy details lacking but guidelines for preparing functionaries for eastern service was not produced until January 1942 or implemented until 1943. Only in January 1943, in fact, did Rosenberg finally produce official regulations on the "legal and financial position of OMi office-holders as well as their rights and obligations."<sup>137</sup> If Gebietskommissars were apprised of broad policy aims, in significant ways they were unprepared, even unaware of the finer points as they assumed their posts in the east.

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<sup>136</sup> Yivo Library, Reel y-2000-1798, 10. This reel contains reports for RKO published in November-December 1941 by *OMi Hauptabteilung I: Raumplanung*. In these reports, numerous topics were addressed from climate to industry to agriculture and population. CSA-Kiev 3206, 1, 169 contains population figures and administrative areas for 1941. Early 1943 population figures and administrative areas are listed in CSA-Kiev, 3206, 2, 231.

<sup>137</sup> Zellhuber, *Unsere Verwaltung*, 177.

## Chapter 3

### The Gebietskommissar: The Making of an “Ideal” National Socialist Administrator

“When a person identifies himself with a group his critical faculties are diminished and his passions enhanced by a kind of emotive resonance. The individual is not a killer, the group is, and by identifying with it, the individual becomes one. This is the infernal dialectic reflected in man’s history.” *Arthur Koestler*

The ideal candidate for eastern service was to possess a combination of political reliability, loyalty and the ability to work alongside other agencies.

Certainly little mention was made of practical or administrative skill and ability.

As one OMi official noted: “combat experience, party badges and secured party offices [was] an absolute priority” for selection.<sup>138</sup> Given the personal nature of initial selections, however, space existed for superior candidates, as well as inferior ones, to be selected. While specific training and preparation for eastern service was generally lacking, Gebietskommissars were not deployed wholly unprepared. At Ordensburg Krössinsee in Falkenburg, Pomerania, all Gebietskommissars were given rudimentary training for “practical administrative activity.”<sup>139</sup>

Whatever training and education future civil administrators received prior to 1941, all passed through Krössinsee before assuming their posts in the occupied east. One of three Nazi training schools, Ordensburg Krössinsee opened in April

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<sup>138</sup> Zellhuber, *Unsere Verwaltung*, 179.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid*, 182. This training was also to include language instruction for officials posted to the RKU and *Weissruthenien*.

1936.<sup>140</sup> First conceived in 1933, construction of the school began in September 1934 as a project of Robert Ley's German Labour Front. So physically impressive was the installation and noteworthy the ideological commitment it represented that Ordensburg Krössinsee rated a visit from the suspect Duke of Windsor, the former Edward VIII, in October 1937.<sup>141</sup>

Future Gebietskommissars attended the school in the 1930s. Consequently, they certainly conformed to both the ideological and physical selection criteria. In 1938, the NSDAP set a number of qualifying preconditions for candidates to attend the school:

1. Male
2. A Party member or candidate.
3. Active in the party or its federations for several years where they displayed leadership characteristics.
4. German citizenship
5. Engaged in labour and military service (*Arbeits-und Wehrdienstes*)
6. 23-26 years of age
7. At least 160 cm tall
8. Physically healthy and without physical handicaps (without eyeglasses or physical deformations)
9. Proof of marriage fitness and the family's hereditary health. ("*Nachweis der Eheauglichkeit sowie der Erbgesundheit der Sippe*")
10. Proof of Aryan descent<sup>142</sup>

Clearly, the party envisioned the successful candidate as the hybrid of the Nazi ideological, physical and racial perfection. Yet, despite the seemingly strict application criteria there was no shortage of applicants. In fact, a round of examinations was administered to hopefuls by local *Kreis* and *Gauleiters*.

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<sup>140</sup> Rolf Sawinski, *Die Ordensburg Krössinsee in Pommern: von der NS-Ordensburg zur polnischen Kaserne* (Aachen: Helios, 2004), 6.

<sup>141</sup> Robert Ley personally escorted Edward on his tour. Sawinski, *Die Ordensburg*, 29, 31.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*

Further physical examinations were conducted by physicians with the Office for Public Health. Finally, the last decision was frequently made personally by Robert Ley. Consequently, in 1937 the Nazi training school admitted only 540 candidates from 1044 applications.

Ley envisioned the training as a four-year process. The first two schools attended would be Krössinsee and Vogelsang. Originally the Pomeranian facility was intended as the “freshman” year of National Socialist education. Here the Nazi obsession with physicality was stressed as students would undergo physical and military training. *Ordensjunker* were to attend for one year before passing on to Ordensburg Vogelsang in the Eifel, Ordensburg Sonthofen in the Allgäu and Ordensburg Marienburg near Danzig.<sup>143</sup>

However, in practice the process proved less rigid. Marienburg was never more than an architectural blueprint. Vogelsang and Krössinsee offered a hybrid curriculum and aspiring *Ordensjunker* were expected to attend both to receive both physical and ideological training. After about ten months at each facility, trainees would then serve an apprenticeship in a local party office gleaning

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<sup>143</sup> Students at the Nazi training academies received various designations ranging from *Ordensjunker*, *Junker*, *Nachwuchsführer* and *Führerwärter*. Only in 1939 was the uniform designation *Nachwuchsführer* formalized. Further, some variance remained in the official designation of graduates. In March 1939, this issue was also settled. Previously, recent attendees were designated *Führeranwärter* or *ehemaliger Führeranwärter* (leader candidates or former leader candidate). However, according to the Head of Reich Organisations, such a title failed to sufficiently differentiate the graduate from the *Politischer Führer* designation already in use. Therefore, to suggest the arrival of a “new breed”, graduates were designed *Nachwuchsführer*. But in 1943 Krössinsee commandant Otto Gohnes successfully lobbied for the designation to be changed to *Ordensjunker*. Interestingly, while this came long after the Gebietskommissars graduated *Ordensjunker* remains the designation by which they are consistently identified. Sawinski, *Die Ordensburg*, 12.



practical experience. The final educational leg was attendance at Ordensburg Sonthofen where students received the practical political training essential for commanding various party organizations.<sup>144</sup> Not only was the selection process rigorous but graduation from each course was not automatic. Rather, at each level between fifteen to twenty per cent of the participants failed. According to one participant, practices in the school did not ignore the demands for “absolute physical and mental health.” Simply, the significant failure rate was due primarily to the stress of extensive physical training. While ideological preparation was certainly a part of the regimen, prospective candidates could expect a gruelling four to five hours of physical training daily.<sup>145</sup>

Evidently, the Ordensburg pedagogical philosophy proved a reflection of the Nazi worldview. Academically, students received a seven part curriculum:

1. Racial theory comprising biological and philosophical components.
2. History (ancient, early modern and modern)
3. Worldview (*weltanschauung*) and philosophy
4. Art and culture
5. Economics and *Soziallehre*
6. Military science
7. Practical political Party work

Parallel to the academic process, future *Ordensjunker* absorbed a comprehensive physical education.<sup>146</sup> Overall, the intention was clear, over the course of four years, the Party would educate *Ordensjunker* at several facilities,

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid, 8-11, 13. This facility only received its first students 25 September 1939.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid, 9. The variety of sports included boxing, swimming, riding, skiing, and sailing.

each with its own training emphasis.<sup>147</sup> The first courses at Vogelsang, with an initial enrolment of about 500, began 1 May 1936 and ran until March 1937 while the second course began in May 1937, ending 30 June 1938.<sup>148</sup> Only in October 1937, did Krössinsee officially open its doors to students.

The *Ordensjunker* day at Krössinsee began at 6:00 with personal grooming and hygiene followed by sports (*Frühspport*), breakfast and “flag parade.” The remainder of the morning was spent in lectures given by the senior instructors followed by more athletics in the early afternoon. At Krössinsee this consisted mostly of water sports.<sup>149</sup> Beginning with the second training course in 1938, some trainees participated in basic flight training at the local airfield.<sup>150</sup> The afternoon was then spent engaged in military exercises and drilling. Obviously, the disgruntled trainee’s assessment that 4-5 hours per day were taken with physical exercise appears accurate. Prior to the evening meal, served at 19:00, *Ordensjunker* students met in small study groups to prepare for the next morning’s lectures. Following dinner, candidates could finally enjoy some free time until lights out at 22:00.

Life at the training schools was not without distraction. Candidates could expect inspections from visitors and dignitaries as well as a variety of cultural events. Monthly, the Krössinsee *Ordensjunker* traveled to nearby Stettin to

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<sup>147</sup> Initial training duration was set at one year. The fourth facility, at Marienburg, never saw use in the training system.

<sup>148</sup> This number was only limited by the availability of instructors, the optimal number of students being 1200.

<sup>149</sup> Sawinski, *Die Ordensburg*, 29-30.

<sup>150</sup> Some trainees who received this training went on to fly combat mission in the war.

attend the local theatre or, on occasion, further afield. Additionally, interaction with the local population and the staging of cultural events proved reciprocal. For example, in March 1938, Krössinsee hosted a *Kultur-Abend* open to the general public. Not surprisingly, the program proved typically Nazi. Musical selections featured four periods: the classical period, the 1813 war of liberation, the National Socialist “time of struggle”, and after the Nazi seizure of power.

The beginning of the war in 1939 signalled the end of the practical training for *Ordensjunker*. Trainees were transferred immediately to the Wehrmacht offices in their respective *Gau*. Despite less than three years of operation, the Nazi training schools made a significant contribution to the initial war effort. In January 1940, the Main Personnel Office of the NSDAP reported that *Stammführer* (353) and *Ordensjunker* (1109) from the *Ordensburgen* were well represented in the military and civil administration areas.<sup>151</sup>

With the start of the “real war” against the USSR, Ordensburg Krössinsee, recently re-named the more dramatic *Die Falkenburg am Krössinsee* opened its doors to the OMi. With only 39 original *Stammführer* spread through the Nazi Ordensburg system, emphasis had shifted from preparation to action. Yet, the facility remained a centre of learning even after 1939. For example, as Gebietskommissars moved east to take up their positions, Krössinsee continued

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<sup>151</sup> Wehrmacht: *Stammführer* 281, *Ordensjunker*, 752

1. In Reichsgauen Wartheland, Danzig/Westpreussen, Gouvernemen Polen: *Stammführer*, 21, *Ordensjunker*, 249.
2. Heimatgauen: *Stammführer* 12, *Ordensjunker*, 108.
3. Ordenburgen and Adolf-Hitler Schools: *Stammführer*, 39.

as a training centre. In late September 1941, the first courses for disabled soldiers began.<sup>152</sup>

Beginning in the late summer 1941, Rosenberg envisioned Krössinsee as the launch pad for his various agencies (OMi and *Sonderstab 'R'*) into the newly occupied areas. Here the civil administration officials would be assembled, trained and deployed for eastern service. Not surprisingly, with the immediate need for administrators in occupied areas, the training regime was significantly shortened. Rather than receiving the traditional three-part program, as of summer 1941 recruits were posted to Ordensburg Krössinsee as their last stop before going to the east.<sup>153</sup> Thus, whatever serious or significant training and preparation future Gebietskommissars received would certainly have taken place prior to their appointment.

The 1941 summer training at Krössinsee proved little more than a preparatory “pep talk.” According to Generalkommissar Waldemar Magunia, the effect was dramatic. As the noose tightened on Nazi Germany in 1944, he wrote that at Krössinsee otherwise reasonable men had their heads filled with simplistic rhetoric.<sup>154</sup> Clearly, the strict yet comprehensive nature of training at Krössinsee

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<sup>152</sup> Sawinski, *Die Ordensburg*, 35.

<sup>153</sup> Krössinsee had previously been used as a staging ground for Einsatzgruppen IV in August 1939 in anticipation of the invasion of Poland. As would happen two years later, EG IV personnel “received weapons, equipment and uniforms” at the facility. See Alexander Rossino, *Hitler Strikes Poland: Blitzkrieg, Ideology, and Atrocity* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003), 43, 45, 60.

<sup>154</sup> Magunia stated literally: “Aber auch vielen vernünftigen Menschen waren dicke Rosinen in den Kopf gesetzt worden.” BA R6/15/146-178, “Erfahrungsbericht über 2 1/2 –jährige Tätigkeit im Generalbezirk Kiew,” 31.5.1944.

did not extend into 1941. Rather than the bio-philosophical underpinnings of the Nazi worldview taught in the 1930s, the 1941 preparatory lectures consisted of crude rants reinforcing the basest elements. Repeatedly civil administrations were reminded they went to the east as gentlemen representing the majesty of the Reich. “You are Kings”, they were informed, “with everything at your disposal.” The result, Magunia contended, was as striking as predictable. Attending courses long on speeches and short of practical training, otherwise competent men failed to understand the exact obligations and work ahead of them.<sup>155</sup>

Be that as it may, clearly the final round of training served as a clear break for students from either previous assignments as well as an indication that something dramatic and permanent had occurred with the invasion of the USSR. For *Ordensjunker*, the majority of whom had moved to the military after their Ordensburg experience in the 1930s, the Krössinsee 1941 summer school clearly signaled a break from the structure and demands of the military. Moving from a “corporal to a king” would have had an important impact on the outlook and behaviour of civil administrators. Also, preparatory inoculations would surely sharpen the sense that one would soon be moving beyond the pale. If the moniker of the OMi suggested occupation, the Krössinsee experience could leave little doubt in the minds of the students of the permanence of their stay. The overtly “imperial” language of the lectures surely reinforced the reality that a

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<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*

genesis process was underway in the east. The Gebietskommissars would be pioneers in creating a new reality, morality and society.

Finally, the tone of the language suggests prospective Gebietskommissars were encouraged to be more autocrat than benevolent monarch. Perhaps the most significant effect of such coaching was the level of authority that Gebietskommissars could *expect* to wield. Even if the specific "*Arbeit und Verpflichtung*" remained foggy, there could be no confusion in the expectations raised by lectures reinforcing civil administrator's role as *König*. Such proclamations were not foreign to Nazi functionaries educated within the Party in 1930s. However, what the Krössinsee summer school ensured was that the contours, if not the specific attributes of occupation were made clear prior to the Gebietskommissar assuming his post. In short, Krössinsee broadly established both the expectations for him and of him. Akin to the spirit of permanence suggested by the language, the parting words to civil administrators bore the sense of victory euphoria that resulted from the rapid military success in the east and the understandable expectation that more would follow. Gebietskommissars (and their staffs) left Falkenburg fully aware that the nature of their work in the east was permanent, imperial and absolute. Whatever realities on the ground might later temper such expectations, the behaviour of the Gebietskommissars in the east must be considered in light of the combination of experience, training and coaching received prior to their arrival in the east.

The scarcity of surviving personal data (particularly personnel records) complicates a broad-based construction of a collective biography. Broad

conclusions on the sociology of the civil administration as a whole certainly cannot be made from available data. However, enough material exists to answer core biographical questions that will allow us to sketch the social contours of a select group of Byelorussian Gebietskommissars as a collective.

The offices of the civil administration at the local level consisted of some Reich Germans. To this number must also be added the families of these OMI personnel. However, certainly, the number of Germans permanently assigned to a Gebietskommissar remained limited. Of this number, the vast majority were men. While women, generally support staff and spouses, were on site, women remained in subordinate positions. However, while limited to administrative or domestic concerns, their relationships could create space for the application of soft or unofficial influence. Apart from spouses and secretaries, the Gebietskommissars and their staff were exclusively male.

Gebietskommissars ranged in age from thirty-one to forty-eight.<sup>156</sup> In general, they tended to be in their mid to late 30s with an average age of 38. Thus, Gebietskommissars were born under the *Kaiserreich*. They would all have had at least some memory of life before the Great War. Most were teenagers at the time of the Armistice and received the upper levels of their formal education under the Weimar Republic. Given this range, these administrators straddled three ages, *Kaiserreich*, war years, and new republic and came of age amidst

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<sup>156</sup> NA BDC SS Officier Personnel Files. A3343, SSO, "Wilhelm Traub" and NA BDC SA Personnel Files. A3341, Series SA-Kartei, "Paul Hachmann." Traub was 31 and Hachmann 48.

sweeping changes that impacted their entire civilization. Patterns in their response to this reality can certainly be identified.

Given the consistency in the age range, age was likely one criterion for selection. As experienced Party men, their age matched their position as a kind of upper management of the lowest level of the civilian administration. In their late 30s, Gebietskommissars made up an important Nazi cadre: old enough to remember the “old world” and young enough to have rejected its Weimar successor.

Gebietskommissars would have received their formal education prior to the Third Reich. Yet it must be recognized that this formal education, at least beyond primary school, took place within the context of war, defeat, revolution, economic misery and broader social upheaval. If the formal education was conventional, their supplementary education would be military and later Nazi ones. Significantly, most came of age in uniform within a militarized culture. Further, as young adults they would find an identity in the Party with the movement serving as a framework. For many, therefore, their identity and career was intractably tied to the Party.

As for broader development, by their late 30s, with personality formation largely completed, older men were in a better position to square pre-set (age specific) characteristics, behavioural norms and long held personal idiosyncrasies with the realities found in the east. Thus, the Gebietskommissar was less malleable than younger personnel serving at the front or in the occupied



rear areas, again suggesting the value of considering age in the selection process.

In terms of geographical origin, the sampled *Weißruthenien* Gebietskommissars prove diverse, representing seven different German regions: Saxony, Lower Saxony, Bavaria, Schleswig-Holstein, Baden-Württemberg, North Rhine-Westphalia (Ruhr) and Upper Silesia. From this group, most prominently represented was Saxony with three. Two hailed from Lower Saxony and one each from the remaining *Länder*. While no distinct pattern emerges, important trends are discernable.<sup>157</sup>

Many came from frontier regions with Reich borders. Importantly, six cases represented areas of “lost lands” or regions in neighbouring states that benefited at Germany’s expense with the re-drawing of the European borders in 1918. While there were certainly significant differences in the relations between

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<sup>157</sup> Origin by Area

- Lower Saxony: 2
- Saxony: 2 (3 with RKU Marschall)
- Bavaria: 1
- Schleswig Holstein: 2
- Baden-Württemberg: 1
- North Rhine-Westphalia, Ruhr: 1
- Upper Silesia: 1

Origins by Place:

Braunschweig, Lower Saxony- city, 200, 000  
Buoch, Baden-Württemberg (small town/rural-less than 1000)  
Chemnitz, Saxony (city 351,000)  
Dortmund, North Rhine-Westphalia, Ruhr (city 541, 000)  
Grossrückerswalde, Saxony (town less than 10000)  
Hannover, Lower Saxony (city 444,000)  
Löbau, Upper Lusatia, Saxony (small city)  
Mittenbrück, Upper Silesia (Oberschlesien) (town 1000)  
Schleswig Holstein  
Würzburg, Bavaria (city 100,000+)

Germany and each of the benefiting states, specifically in the east and south, border areas are overrepresented. Thus, the majority of sampled Gebietskommissars originated in regions that had experienced considerable resistance to new post-war geopolitical realities. In four areas (representing six cases)<sup>158</sup>, subsequent resistance was particularly acute and in three regions was accompanied by significant paramilitary violence over re-drawn boundaries.<sup>159</sup> Second, Gebietskommissars tended to come from urban rather than rural areas. Four were born in large cities (Braunschweig, Chemnitz, Dortmund, Hannover), two in smaller cities (Löbau, Würzburg), two in towns (Grossrückerswalde, Mittenbrück) and only one in a very small town.

Determining the social background of members of the Nazi Party has proven a challenging task. Certainly, the availability of data for determining the social origins of the Nazi Party's membership proves limited. In general, the use of membership cards offers both valuable data for analysis but also raises questions of interpretation and extrapolation. For this study, membership cards are supplemented with data gleaned from other sources, primarily personnel records that provide a fuller picture of select members.

Despite methodological difficulties, the social background of the Gebietskommissars may be addressed by considering several factors.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Lower Saxony [3], Schleswig-Holstein, North Rhine-Westphalia-Ruhr, and Upper Silesia.

<sup>159</sup> Lower Saxony [3], North Rhine-Westphalia, Ruhr, and Upper Silesia.

<sup>160</sup> Detlef Mühlberger, *The Social Bases of Nazism, 1919-1933* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 24.

Detlef Mühlberger's "Social ranking and occupational distribution" formula provides a valuable means by which the social background of the Gebietskommissars may be accessed.<sup>161</sup> Based on sufficient supporting data available in six cases, their social ranking is:

<b>Name</b>	<b>Class</b>	<b>Occupation/Training</b>
Werner	Lower class	Skilled Worker
Söhlmann	Lower middle class	Salesman
Buschmann	Lower middle class	Pharmacist
Marschall	Middle class	White collar office worker
Erren	Middle class	Physical Education Teacher
Müller	Upper middle class	Party Functionary/University

Using this formula, together with data from individual biographies, in terms of social background, the lower middle and middle classes are strongly overrepresented in the ranks of the Gebietskommissars.<sup>162</sup>

In terms of education, the Gebietskommissars received their formal schooling before the Nazi seizure of power and all completed *Volksschule* under the *Kaiserreich*. Thus, as was the norm, all Gebietskommissars did receive a basic elementary education. However, following graduation from primary school, educational paths diverge significantly. In general, the majority moved on to a secondary education in the Weimar years.<sup>163</sup> For most, this was in form of trade,

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid, 24.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid, 68.

<sup>163</sup> This development occurred in five of seven cases.

technical or professional schools.<sup>164</sup> Finally, a small number did attend University.<sup>165</sup>

Educational level suggests several conclusions. Their educational experience was either limited to lower levels, or, for those going on to post-secondary environments, was strongly directed towards a particular occupation or profession. In most cases, this meant trade or professional schools which prepared the individual for a working life in a particular occupation. Therefore, the pedagogical goals were generally limited to achieve specific career-orientated outcomes.

In many cases seminal life events outside the classroom suggest that studies were not the only consideration for future Gebietskommissars. Throughout the 1920s, as they were coming of age, formal educations were generally either interrupted, supplemented or closely followed by paramilitary and radical political participation. At this level, life revolved on an axis outside the classroom which involved paramilitarism and radical politics. While most certainly did receive higher education, participation in such activities and their later career paths suggests individuals preferring action over academics. This cohort can therefore be understood as being educated but not particularly well nor broadly learned. Further, whatever authoritarian tendencies or racist ideologies they may have later subscribed to likely did not come as a component of their studies. Rather extra-curricular involvement in sub-cultures of violence

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<sup>164</sup> In four of seven cases, this proved the educational experience.

<sup>165</sup> Only one of seven attended a university.

contributed in creating Nazis not unaccustomed to considering “tough solutions” and radical problem-solving.

However diverse their formal schooling paths may have been, in all cases a levelling took place after enlistment in the NSDAP. At a basic level, all Gebietskommissars enjoyed some measure of “Nazi education.” For most, this came in the form of attending Nazi schools such as Ordensburg Vogelsang and Ordensburg Krössinsee beginning in the second half of the 1930s. In all cases, as a final preparation for eastern deployment, all Gebietskommissars participated in a training course at Krössinsee in mid-1941. In general, future Gebietskommissars tended toward a combination of “life learning” and a voluntary learning path associated with radical politics and paramilitarism rather than a higher formal education.

One of the most striking findings in the biographical data is the universality of military, paramilitary and radical activity as military service or membership in a *Freikorps* organization generally proved a precursor to later Nazi Party membership. Further, for a significant number, war service and paramilitary membership entailed more than strutting in uniform and parading through the city centre. Importantly, their activities intimately involved pre-Nazi violence.

For most, opportunities for violent performance came at a young age. Not surprisingly, these young men tended to train and qualify in (para)military roles heavily favouring infantry service and first-hand familiarization with weapons and methods of killing. Even those who had seen action in the war tended to be front-soldiers. Seen in this way, the initial stages of adult self-definition and

identity took place in a militarized and radical setting in which “might made right” and grievances, as well as place and status, were tied to martial prowess. Equally, for these young men an understanding of human relations, hierarchies of authority and problem- solving would be developed within, if not entirely shaped by, the particular modes and constraints of military life. This Army and *Freikorps* cohort surely possessed a fuller experience with violent coaching, violent performance and magnified hierarchies of authority. Simply, for most, they came of age fully immersed in a culture of violence antithetical to the norms of civil society.<sup>166</sup>

In some cases, service in the Imperial Army (or its attendant agencies) was experienced even prior to paramilitary involvement. For these men, *Freikorps* service signalled a continued acceptance of martial solutions. Further it also suggests a rejection altogether of the constraints that kept the military reasonably loyal and accepting of civilian oversight and to its right to sole interpretation of the national will.

Finally, a significant number of Gebietskommissars returned to military life either after leaving the Krössinsee training school or with the outbreak of war in 1939. While none were career professional military men, most seemed well-suited and inclined to involvement in the soldier’s life and initiated in violence and

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<sup>166</sup> The concept of a “lost generation”, men disillusioned in the trenches and unable to integrate back into “normal” society was well developed and applied by Michael Wildt in his study of the leadership of the Reich Security Main Office. This leadership corps however differed from the Gebietskommissars in a number of ways including subsequent education and experiences in the Nazi Party and agencies. Michael Wildt, *Generation des Unbedingten: Das Führerkorps des Reichssicherheitshauptamtes* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2003).

martial culture. Considering the existence of a strong continuity from (para)military to SA to Gebietskommissar, local civil administrators were not entirely out of their element upon arrival in the east. As well, their trajectory from soldier to Nazi functionary ensured a relative familiarity with institutional arrangements and norms.

By the late 1920s, the post-Landsberg transformation of the NSDAP from a largely regional party to national reach was largely complete. In 1929, for example, the party issued 70,000 membership cards. Yet however effective Nazi political machinery may have been, world events proved a cardinal factor in its explosive growth of the early 1930s.<sup>167</sup> As the rest of the western world, Germany plunged into crisis as the effects of economic collapse in the United States spread depression and misery across the Atlantic. This period lent new opportunities and fresh appeal to radical political solutions, whether Red or Brown, a reality effectively exploited at both fringes. Beginning in 1930, the Nazis effectively made use of the growing climate of uncertainty, deprivation, disillusionment and fear and party enrolment exploded.

The Gebietskommissar cadre followed a common enrolment pattern. With the exceptions of Hanweg and Buschmann who joined the Nazis in 1928 and 1929 respectively, the remainder all enrolled after the infamous Wall Street crash that plunged Weimar Germany into economic and political turmoil.<sup>168</sup> Fully half of

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<sup>167</sup> Richard F. Hamilton, *Who Voted for Hitler?* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1982), 482-85. Mühlberger, *Social Bases*, 45-6.

<sup>168</sup> Interestingly, Heinrich Carl, joined the NSDAP 1 November 1929 only two days after the end of the New York Stock Exchange's "Black October" (24-29 October, 1929). It is more likely that Carl had some affinity for the Nazi cause

the sample enrolled between 1930 and the seizure of power in early 1933, a pattern of enrolment mirrored in wider enlistment trends. Interestingly, the two latecomers were also the two Gebietskommissars who would end the war in the ranks of the notorious SS, Gerhard Erren (1933) and Wilhelm Traub (1937).<sup>169</sup> In terms of year of enlistment, 1930 proves overrepresented. However, it was precisely this year in which the Weimar experiment entered its death throes. Yet it is unlikely that the five enlistments between 1930 and 1931 were the result of either precognitive intuition of a German *Sonderweg* or the effect of disillusionment wrought by sustained deprivation. Rather most entered the Nazi Party early enough to suggest that they possessed an overwhelming anxiety or feeling of acute threat to place and position engendered in the earliest stages of the depression and a longer-standing attraction to and disposition towards the ideas and goals of the NSDAP. Seen in this way, the pressures of the 1930s appear more a nudge towards a third way for vulnerable individuals not unaccustomed to the comforts offered by paramilitarism, radicalism and jack-booted political solutions.

Age at the time of enlistment provides some further important insights.

Prior to the 1929 collapse and the harsh political climate of the early 1930s,

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previously rather than some acute insight into the long terms effects of events in Manhattan. BA-L AR-Z 262/59. "Testimony of Heinrich Carl," 15.12.1959.

<sup>169</sup> Erren's reasoning for his late enrolment is detailed in Appendix 1. Given his admission that he supported the NSDAP publicly beginning in 1931 but was unable to enlist due to previous commitment, he might well be effectively placed in the cadre that joined the Party from 1929-1933. It is likely that Erren would have enrolled if he could have. Traub, born in 1910, joined the Party the latest and was also the youngest Gebietskommissar in *Weißruthenien* at 31. His relatively young age did not impede his ruthlessly effective knack for mass murder. Yad Vashem, M-33/1159.



membership in the NSDAP tended to attract younger men and, as evidenced in the case of Fritz Buschmann, practiced agitators.<sup>170</sup> Enrolment in 1930-1931 shows a Nazi Party appealing broadly to diverse age groups and resonating with individuals beyond their twenties. Finally, the post-January 1933 enlistments again suggest the Party's attraction to young men whose entire political consciousness, development and experience was rooted in the Weimar experiment. In general future Gebietskommissars came to the Party at a relatively young age.<sup>171</sup> Given their martial experience and attendant worldviews, coupled with the troubling socio-political developments in late Weimar Germany, affiliation with the Nazi Party seems an eminently likely, if not predestined, outcome. Yet participation was not limited only to membership in the NSDAP.

A final important consideration remains the span of Nazi activism in relation to other adult activities. For almost the entire cadre, by 1941, over one-third of their adult life was spent in the Party, with nearly half spending fifty percent or more.<sup>172</sup> Given the significant portions of adult life spent within the Nazi movement, personal identity would certainly be largely inseparable from the Party. Moreover, ties to the party would be reinforced at the career level. For these men, the NSDAP offered career opportunities in a time of severe labour crisis. Additionally, given their social origin, previous profession and extrapolating the realistic chances for social mobility, a career with the Nazi Party

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<sup>170</sup> See Appendix 1.

<sup>171</sup> Of the sample, five of ten were in their twenties and four of ten in their thirties.

<sup>172</sup> In three cases, 30-39% of adulthood was spent as an NSDAP member, two ranged 40-48%, two 61-67%, one 71% and one 93%.

provided prospects better than could be expected elsewhere. Nazi political success and the seizure of power could only buttress such perceptions. In simplest terms, participation in the Nazi movement not only helped define who one was but what one was and could be. While individual self-awareness of this dynamic remains impossible to determine, such motives did not undermine, but in fact strengthened the ideological solidarity and motivations at the heart of identification with and continued support of the Nazis. Consistent with their previous experience and life-choices as men of action, enrolment in the SA was the next step.

While the NSDAP's membership rolls swelled in the early 1930s, so too did the ranks of attendant National Socialist organizations. The *Sturmabteilung* (SA) exploded as tens of thousands flocked to its banner. In just over a year, the SA grew from 30,000 in August 1929 to about 60,000 in November 1930. Growth would continue through 1931-1932.<sup>173</sup>

The majority of Gebietskommissars were SA members in long standing prior to eastern service in 1941.<sup>174</sup> Almost universally, they held leadership positions. While they tended to rise through the ranks of the SA from relatively humble beginnings in the SA, by 1941, for example, this sample contained an *Oberführer*, *Standartenführer*, *Obersturmbannführer*, and a *Hauptsturmführer*.<sup>175</sup> As Conan Fischer noted, the SA leadership proved predominantly middle class

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<sup>173</sup> Conan Fischer, *Stormtroopers: A Social, Economic, and Ideological Analysis, 1929-35* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1983), 5.

<sup>174</sup> The exception is W. Traub, an SS man. NA BDC SS Officier Personnel Files. A3343, SSO, "Wilhelm Traub."

<sup>175</sup> These ranks are the equivalent of Brigadier general, Colonel, Lieutenant Colonel and Captain.

and few working class and lower class men ever enjoyed promotion above the rank of *Scharführer*.<sup>176</sup> According to Mühlberger, 86.6% of the SA leadership was either of lower middle class (74.5%) or upper middle class (12.2%) origin.<sup>177</sup> As higher ranking SA men, future Gebietskommissars fit in this pattern as about 83% (5/6) of the sample were from these social groups.<sup>178</sup>

The SA consistently attracted youth: “given that over half of the stormtroopers were under 25 years old and around 80% under 30 years of age before 30 January 1933.”<sup>179</sup> However, in this area Gebietskommissars diverged from national norms as only 44% were under that age at their time of enlistment. Yet if the age grouping is expanded to under 35, the figure jumps to 77%.<sup>180</sup> The result suggests that while age was broadly consistent with wider trends, they were generally drawn from a slightly older cohort. Importantly, future Gebietskommissars tended to enjoy frequent promotion and SA leaders were generally older than their men. At the rank of *Sturmführer* and above, only

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<sup>176</sup> Fischer, *Stormtroopers*, 59. Also see Detlef Mühlberger, *Hitler's Followers: Studies in the Sociology of the Nazi Movement* (London: Routledge, 1991), 168-71 and Detlef Mühlberger, “Germany” in Detlef Mühlberger (ed.) *Social Bases of European Fascist Movements* (London: Croom Helm, 1987), 40-139.

<sup>177</sup> Mühlberger, *Social Bases*, 68. This should be contrasted to the largely lower-lower middle class origins of the SA rank and file. See Fischer, *Stormtroopers*, 49, Peter Stachura, *Nazi Youth in the Weimar Republic* (Santa Barbara: Clio Books, 1975), 58-9, Mühlberger, *Hitler's Followers*, 257.

<sup>178</sup> This number of cases reflects the scarcity of existing data to determine SA rank.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid*, 62-3.

<sup>180</sup> Under 30: 4  
30-35: 3  
36-40: 1  
40+: 1

26.3% were under age 30.<sup>181</sup> In this area, where adequate data exists to determine SA rank and age, Gebietskommissars conform very closely to the trend toward an older leadership cohort, more experienced in both adult life and Nazi radicalism.

As mentioned, the lower middle and middle classes were strongly overrepresented among the ranks of the Gebietskommissars. Given links between class and leadership position in both the NSDAP and the SA, this reality runs in line with broader trends. In general, those of high social origin tended to finish better than their inferiors in the “scramble for posts” within the Party.<sup>182</sup> Further, as leaders, most Gebietskommissars possessed some form of higher education suggesting a level of “administrative competence” valued by the SA and reflected in the tendency to promote those with more education.<sup>183</sup>

While the movement itself slowly moved to a more heterogeneous reflection of wider German society, the social background of functionaries remained considerably more rigid, as the “functionary corps...at the lower and intermediary level of the party’s organizational hierarchy in the *Gaue*” remained in the hands of “individuals with a middle class background.”<sup>184</sup> In short, the further up the ladder the position, the greater the proportions of middle class and elite backgrounds were represented. As Michael Kater noted, this reality should not be surprising as the Nazi functionary corps “was closely related to the

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<sup>181</sup> See Fischer, *Stormtroopers*, 61. Note that this sample was not national but rather from BDC/North Rhineland. In “pre-taken Nordmark,” the 24% were under 30.

<sup>182</sup> Mühlberger, *Social Bases*, 56.

<sup>183</sup> Fischer, *Stormtroopers*, 61.

<sup>184</sup> Mühlberger, *Social Bases*, 52.

complex system of administrative tasks to be performed by the party hierarchy: the higher the degree of skill required, the more qualified and sophisticated were the administrative personnel.”<sup>185</sup> Further, Kater stated, this was firmly in step with the “the same laws of rationality that governed other institutions, corporations, and even other political parties in the Weimar Republic.”<sup>186</sup>

Competition for positions in the party tended to give a distinct advantage to those of a higher social background. A university education proved a “leg up” over working class comrades as the Party tended to perceive formal education as an indicator of expertise and ability. Consequently, while the party did steadily move toward a more homogenous reflection of the broader German society, changes proved more wide than deep.<sup>187</sup>

A similar pattern emerged in the ranks of the SA, where lower class representation was even higher. Akin to other associate organizations, the middle class and elites were again strongly over-represented in leadership positions engendering a distinct disconnect in terms of social origins between SA “chiefs and Indians.” Within the higher echelons (*Standartenführer* and above), the split was acute as “before the Nazi seizure of power, the higher ranks of the SA leadership corps were the almost exclusive preserve of the middle class and elite with a few workers reaching the higher ranks of an organization which had predominantly working class rank and file.”<sup>188</sup> Only at the lower ranks were

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<sup>185</sup> Michael Kater, *The Nazi Party: A Social Profile of Members and Leaders, 1919-1945* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), 169-89.

<sup>186</sup> Quoted in Mühlberger, *Social Bases*, 55.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid*, 55.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid*, 67-69.

recruits from the lower classes able to make their mark. Again, like the Party, the “complexity of the administrative tasks which were performed by the middle and higher-ranking SA leaders generally excluded the less educated from advancing within the SA hierarchy beyond the non-commissioned officer level.”<sup>189</sup> Simply, the lower classes were seen as being better street-brawlers than paper-pushers or party big-wigs.

Future Gebietskommissars generally reflected these patterns. As mentioned, they conformed to norms in terms of social background, education and age. Further, Gebietskommissars reflected the “military ethos” that permeated the SA in general and particularly the leadership.<sup>190</sup> While most were not war veterans, as were 50.4% of SA *Sturmführer* or above, they were not without some form of combat or military experience. If military and paramilitary service is taken together, Gebietskommissars again conformed to broader characterizations of the SA leadership. Like most SA leaders, they possessed military and political experience that both assisted promotion and matched wider patterns of right-wing activity and the SA leadership’s links to paramilitary organisations.<sup>191</sup> In significant ways, future Gebietskommissars backgrounds were generally consistent with other SA leaders.

Given their later reputation as “eastern nobodies, these “party hacks” could hardly have been expected to exhibit significant ability.<sup>192</sup> However, later judgments notwithstanding, evidence suggests an important number enjoyed

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<sup>189</sup> Quoted in *Ibid*, 68.

<sup>190</sup> Fischer, *Stormtroopers*, 61.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid*, 63.

<sup>192</sup> Steinberg, “Third Reich Reflected,” 624.

successful, even mercurial careers in the SA. Three examples demonstrate how successful pre-war SA careers could actually be.

Despite his late entry into the Party and SA ranks, Gerhard Erren successfully moved from *Scharführer* to *Sturmführer* prior to eastern deployment. A teacher by profession and a Nazi by inclination, he parlayed his experience and commitment into an instructor's position at Krössinsee by 1939. Fritz Buschmann, the former *Wehrwolfmann* and pharmacist, experienced similar success. In 1931 he held the rank of *Truppenführer* but just three years later was an *Obersturmbannführer* and the leader of *Standarte 205* in Soldin. The case of Rudolf Werner proves the most remarkable. From *Truppenführer* in 1931, he shot through the ranks of the SA to attain *Standartenführer* by 1934 and *Oberführer* in 1940.<sup>193</sup> While Werner was exceptional in this respect, future *Gebietskommissars*, in general, enjoyed successful careers in Nazi Germany. They exhibited a consistent vertical movement in the organizational hierarchy. Outside the Party, one was consigned to a middle class occupation or minor NCO (usually corporal), but by donning the Brown shirt a transformation occurred. Only when they were transferred to the military after the outbreak of war, was any significant career regression evident.

It is difficult to imagine a career that offered such open-ended opportunities. Certainly, the SA and later the civil administration presented future *Gebietskommissars* with opportunities that were simply not possible in the civil service or the Army. While certainly not the norm, the transformation from

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<sup>193</sup> See Appendix 1.

corporal to officer, proved possible within the ranks of the Gebietskommissars. Indeed, the importance of the career factor must be recognized. Steady promotion and generally positive assessments suggest that many had found their place, demonstrated some measure of ability, cultivated advancement through the ranks and at a minimum appeared committed Nazis. Such aptitude certainly is not universal but does suggest that Gebietskommissars genuinely were men of ability and ardent Nazis. Whatever their capabilities, eastern deployment in 1941 would provide their grandest stage and greatest opportunity.

This sketch of the social profile, combined with other key biographical data, yields a composite picture that allows for a Weberian “ideal type” characterization of a Gebietskommissar archetype.<sup>194</sup> While duly recognizing that Gebietskommissar motives and choices were legion, there is a certain level of commonality suggesting a chain of likely outcomes leading the individual from youthful paramilitary to Nazi functionary and radical problem-solver. While aspects of personal disposition, the filter through which historical circumstance is most intimately filtered, is perhaps impossible to fully understand, broader processes, cultures and relationships prove more accessible. Consequently, it is possible to construct a composite formula that illuminates the path to the east and allows for the construction of a Gebietskommissar X archetype.

Gebietskommissar X was born on the fringe of the *fin-de-siècle* *Kaiserreich* into a lower class family. He was educated in a local primary school before completing his education in a trade school. Throughout this process he

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<sup>194</sup> See Appendix I for full biographies.



could see the apparent rise of Germany to the centre of the world stage and enter a war for European hegemony. The Great War dominated his youth. Defeat in 1918 shook the foundations of his worldview and demand participation in the action. In war and defeat, the transformation from boy to man would be forged in institutions of violence. Clearly, the cardinal lesson of both the Great War and subsequent chaos was that dominance and power established through violence was the cornerstone of human relations. Significantly, he also became a decorated and experienced killer. Voluntary participation in (para)military activities proved an entirely likely outcome. With his early adult life set firmly within this context, his career trajectory altered radically from one rather narrowly defined by class and formal education to one of open-ended possibility based on martial virtues and the meritocracy of violence.

The continuity of violence throughout his career suggests the strength and lure of the uniform, the regimented life of paramilitarism and the understandable tough talk of radical ideologues. By the early 1930s, it was clear that life on the “outside” offered, at best, the grind of class-specific work and at worst, joining the swelling ranks of the unemployed and impoverished. Nazism clearly offered a solution: the re-creation of familiar institutional cultures and power relationships and the opportunity for individual recognition. Outside the movement, Gebietskommissar X was nobody; within it, his experience was valued, ability praised and commitment rewarded. The Party trained, employed and valued him. By mid-1933, the outsider was now the insider as the core power dynamic shifted from the centre to the fringe. As a functionary within the power

apparatus, Gebietskommissar X's identity and basis of his individual self-recognition was intimately tied to his Brown shirt. Such links were reinforced throughout the 1930s as he attended marches, courses and training schools. He was not *Arbeiter* or *Kaufmann* but *Ordensjunker* of Teutonic lore. He rose through the ranks and learned his methods of rule and relationship management there.

War in 1939 was an important reality check. Despite the apparent success of his Nazi career, the invasion of Poland saw his return to the military. Importantly, he retained neither the rank nor the associated privileges attendant to his party status but rather returned to combat as an infantry corporal. In 1941, his selection to the civilian administration would allow a return to the good days of his pre-war Nazi career. Even more, eastern deployment not only removed important constraints but also actively cemented his ascension from nobody to eastern royalty. For Gebietskommissar X, this validated his life-choices and affirmed the correctness of the institutional culture. In the late summer of 1941 as he drove into his new fiefdom, how could he be anything but dizzy with success?

Gebietskommissars were likely Nazis. Overall, most were drawn from constituencies favourable to the National Socialist worldview. In terms of social origin, they fit firmly into the broader membership pattern of the early 1930s that saw significant lower middle and middle class elements moving into the Party's ranks. For religious confession, again the broader trend of Protestant

(Evangelical-Lutheran) predominance is duplicated. At least in these aspects, future *Goldfasanen* seem entirely “ordinary.”

While the majority of enlistment occurred under the age of 35, it remains difficult to see enrolment as the result of youthful impulsiveness or idealism. Rather most came to the Party with a significant life experience which certainly predisposed them to the Nazi worldview but left space to consider their enlistment based more on rational consideration than youthful rashness or radicalism.

For most, already quite mature upon entering the Party, their youth was not spent in a political or ideological vacuum. In fact, a core cadre was involved early and youthfully in violent performance, in the military ranks or various *Freikorps*. Perhaps the most significant outcome of this early experience was the initiation of a “violentization process” at a young age.<sup>195</sup> Active membership and certainly combat ensured that members had, at minimum, undergone the first two stages of this process: brutalization and belligerency. The brutalization stage was marked by the individual’s subjugation to an authority figure and violent coaching reinforced by the glorification of violence. This allowed the overcoming of religious and cultural norms that had ensured civil behaviour. In the second stage, belligerency, the resolution of provocation and conflict by the use of force and violence was engendered and reinforced. For those who saw military action, two final stages were experienced, violent performance and virulence, during which actual violent behaviour was inflicted on victims and the combatant

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<sup>195</sup> Lonnie Athens, *The Creation of Dangerous Violent Criminals* (London: Routledge, 1989), 16-17, 63-72.

perceived a change in social status as a result of the violent performance. He was feared while simultaneously being rewarded and congratulated by his “intimates.” Consequently, future violent performance often resulted from minimal provocation. While this did not mean either a predisposition or tendency toward violent performance, it confirms both experience and capacity with it. This socialization in a wider culture of violence did not necessarily lead to Nazi affiliation. However, it does help explain the ideological preference towards Nazism and a familiarity with the language and later, the actions of such a racist ideology.

In terms of when most joined the movement, the cohort can be classified as older, if not, Old Nazis (*Altkämpfer*). The majority joined the Party between 1929 and 1933, prior to the seizure of power. While electoral prospects certainly improved within the context of the socio-economic crisis of the early 1930s, it is difficult to see Party membership as simply opportunism. While Gebietskommissars were rarely pre-Depression Nazis, neither were they “March Flowers” who flocked to the Party after January 1933. Still their post-enlistment Nazi careers suggest a strong core of commitment expected of full-time Nazis. In short, future Gebietskommissars enjoyed relatively successful and long-running careers in the lower/mid echelons of the Party apparatus throughout the 1930s. In important ways, they were career Nazis.

Intimately tied to the positive outcomes of membership are the possible negative outcomes in living outside the Party. Given the social and educational background of the Gebietskommissar cadre, what counted was not only what

membership allowed but also what it *prevented*. The majority came from classes that, by the early 1930s, were particularly vulnerable to social marginality, downward mobility and unemployment.

Gebietskommissars prove the consummate “foot-soldier made good.” Almost exclusively drawn from the lower middle and middle classes they represented the German “everyman.” But Gebietskommissars were not “ordinary men,” they were long-term Nazis by the time of eastern deployment. While most joined the Party after 1929, the role of a particular social context of crisis as well as ideological solidarity with Nazism must be recognized. In terms of continuity, a disproportionate number had records of pre-war radical activity, paramilitarism and political violence. Most Great War soldiers simply went home and even fewer youths flocked to the *Freikorps*. But most future Gebietskommissars mark an important divergence from the broader post-war male experience. In the early 1930s, socialization and ideological preference favoured affiliation with the Nazi movement and upon enlistment they enjoyed established careers within the Party itself.

Collective biography provides important clues and insights into Gebietskommissar behaviour and performance in the east. Additionally, it also sheds important light on the way the local administration functioned and the ways in which occupier and occupied interacted. Ultimately, this approach raises significant questions: how did a Gebietskommissar’s background interact with the demands of eastern deployment? In what ways did previous experience shape

responses to these demands? Did similarities in background prompt similar responses?

Finally, collective biography provides an important element in our better understanding of the Nazi occupation of the Soviet Union. By examining and detailing the background and “path” of Gebietskommissars to the east, a stronger sense of the process of cumulative radicalization of Jewish policy is possible. Consequently, collective biography not only highlights the individual, but important aspects of the Nazi regime itself.

## Part II

### Jewish Policy and Genocide in the Gebietskommissariats, 1941-1943

"When the Lord your God brings you into the land you are entering to possess and drives out before you many nations . . . then you must destroy them totally. Make no treaty with them, and show them no mercy." *Deuteronomy 7:1-2*

Operation Barbarossa unleashed Germany's *Weltanschauungskrieg* against the Soviet Union. At the heart of this worldview were the twin pillars of Nazism: race and space. From its very inception, the OMi possessed a keen sense of the importance of the Jewish Question and eastern expansion. In Memorandum No.1, of 2 April 1941, Rosenberg offered his initial and provisional "systematic construction plan" for the occupied territories. Here Jews were specifically mentioned in regards to their concentration in *Weißruthenien* and implicitly linked to the region's cultural and economic underdevelopment.<sup>196</sup> Rosenberg's position was more clearly stated at the end of the month when detailing the organization and tasks of the OMi in "handling problems in the Eastern territories."<sup>197</sup> Here the need for a "general treatment" of the Jewish problem was recognized and forced labour and ghettoization were offered as "temporary solutions." This necessity was the first task specifically detailed for the yet to be created political office of the eastern administration. However, by 7 May 1941, such temporary solutions had become, in Rosenberg's mind,

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<sup>196</sup> Office of United States Chief of Counsel for Prosecution of Axis Criminality, *Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression* (Washington: U.S. G.P.O., 1946), v.3, 676.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid*, 676.

“decisive” solutions modeled on existing practices in Lodz.<sup>198</sup> While organizing the OMi in the days prior to the Barbarossa invasion, Rosenberg envisioned the exploitation and concentration of Soviet Jewry, a vision that did not include genocide as a solution to the Nazi-defined “Jewish Question.” However, potentially lethal intent was not outside Rosenberg’s worldview. In the case of Russians, the *Reichsleiter* understood that feeding Germans sat “at the top of the list of Germany’s claims on the East.” Consequently, the new masters bore no responsibility for feeding the indigenous Russian population. Yet even here Rosenberg envisioned “extensive evacuation” rather than *systematic* murder as the harsh necessity in store for the conquered population.<sup>199</sup> The fact remains however that at an official level, mass murder was not directed by Rosenberg.

The most sophisticated official declaration of OMi Jewish policy prior to its widespread assumption of control was the working guidelines issued on 3 September, 1941. This statement, in Rosenberg’s *Braune Mappe*, predicated Jewish policy on four important concepts: (I) After the war, the so-called “Jewish Question” would be “solved for all Europe,” (II) given that Eastern Jews formed the largest concentration of European Jewry, “the experiences in the east could be definitive for the solution in general,” (III) any solution would not involve un-German “chicanery,” (IV) as the solution to the Jewish problem would ultimately

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<sup>198</sup> “Memorandum from Rosenberg File, 7 May 1941” in *Nazi Conspiracy*, v.3, 690. Also see Christopher Browning, *The Path to Genocide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 28-58, 125-144.

<sup>199</sup> “Extract from a speech of *Reichsleiter* Rosenberg before the closest participants in the problem of the East,” 20.6.1940 in *Nazi Conspiracy*, v.3, 716.



be a massive undertaking, “occasional actions against Jews on the part of the local population [were not] to be hindered.”<sup>200</sup>

In terms of ghettoization, both the process and the final product took on a kind of *ad hoc* quality in occupied Soviet areas. If the OMI’s Jewish policy was formulated broadly in Berlin, Reichskommissar Heinrich Lohse in Ostland proved considerably more concrete and practical. In mid-August 1941, Lohse circulated “provisional directives on the treatment of Jews in the area of the Reichskommissariat Ostland” based on oral instructions given at an address in Kovno on 27 July 1941.<sup>201</sup> Lohse understood that his directions, however provisional, were the basis for realizing the “final settlement of the Jewish question” in his realm.<sup>202</sup> This basis, deemed preliminary, encompassed five chief minimum measures to be applied by the civil administration, including Gebietskommissars, “where and for as long as further measures are not possible in the direction of the final solution of the Jewish question.”<sup>203</sup>

Not surprisingly, Lohse’s first task was to determine who, exactly, was a Jew and which Jews would be subject to the directives. In short, Jews were defined both biologically (racially) and religiously and extended to include

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<sup>200</sup> BA-L AR-Z 94d/59, 94. “Working Guidelines of the Reichsminister for the Occupied Eastern Territories,” 3 September, 1941, Section III.

<sup>201</sup> “Provisional directives on the treatment of Jews in the area of the Reichskommissariat Ostland,” 13 August, 1941. Reprinted in *Nazi Conspiracy*, v.3, 800.

<sup>202</sup> Significantly, Lohse claims to have ensured that the *Sicherheitspolizei* (SIPO) would “carry out my oral instructions” [on the treatment of Jews in the area of the Reichskommissariat Ostland]. *Ibid*, 800.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid*, 800.

spouses (married and common-law) of racially and religiously defined Jews.<sup>204</sup> Further, only those Jews originating from areas directly occupied by the regime would be subject to the directives.<sup>205</sup> “Foreign Jews” and gentiles “not ready to share the fate of their Jewish spouses” were not subject to the directives themselves but were still restricted in terms of movement and obligation and to be closely monitored.<sup>206</sup> Significantly, Lohse recognized the potential for difficulties in defining Jewry. Echoing Karl Lügner’s infamous claim, Lohse empowered his Gebietskommissars with the right to determine “who is a Jew” in the spirit of the directives, if the need arose.<sup>207</sup>

While the printed directives were intended primarily for the upper levels of the civil administration, Lohse clearly detailed a number of responsibilities and prerogatives of the Gebietskommissars, reinforcing the importance of the local level in both the proper functioning of the administration in general and in Jewish affairs more specifically. Broadly, Lohse decreed that the civil administration would ensure the registration and identification of Jews, and would institute an extensive series of prohibitions and restrictions to effectively remove Jews from mainstream social, economic and professional life.<sup>208</sup>

Lohse’s guidelines were not without critics. Most important was the reaction of Reinhard Heydrich who objected to “the new Jewish policy” on the

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<sup>204</sup> Ibid, 801.

<sup>205</sup> “The German Reich, Bohemia and Moravia, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, the USSR and “stateless Jews.” Ibid, 800-1.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid, 801.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid, 801.

<sup>208</sup> Specifically, Gebietskommissars were tasked with providing permission for Jews to move.

grounds that not “a word about cooperation or Security Police jurisdiction” was in evidence. The upshot for Gebietskommissars at the local level was the de facto “autonomy of Heydrich’s office to operate without civilian interference.”<sup>209</sup>

Of primary concern was the question of property.<sup>210</sup> Based on the requirement that Jews report their property, all property was to be immediately “confiscated and secured” subject to deadlines set at the General and Gebietskommissariat level. Also, reports were generated at these levels in addition to those originating with “government offices which were not supplied or equipped by the civil administration.” All reports were then to be submitted to the Gebietskommissar.<sup>211</sup> The entire process of property confiscation ended at the local level and, in very practical terms, became part of the portfolio of the Gebietskommissar.

A similar process occurred in terms of the “duty of delivery” imposed on the Jewish population. According to the guidelines, the civil administration (including the Gebietskommissar) enjoyed the right to make special demands for property and assets from both individuals and the community. As a result, any requisitions made by the civil administration that did not impede “scanty subsistence” were not only condoned but, in most cases, demanded.<sup>212</sup> Further,

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<sup>209</sup> Haberer, “German Police,” 23.

<sup>210</sup> Martin Dean, “Die Enteignung “jüdischen Eigentums” im Reichskommissariat Ostland 1941-1944,” *Jahrbuch zur Geschichte und Wirkung des Holocaust* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2000), 201-218.

<sup>211</sup> Reprinted in *Nazi Conspiracy*, v.3, 802-3.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid*, 803. In these terms the value of the directive became very clear with arrival of the administration. Given the administration’s need to provision itself with everything from accommodations to dinner sets, local Jews became the primary providers. According to Lohse’s directive, Jews need only retain “that

Jews could not hope to recover any losses through subsequent employment or labour. Not only was economic activity and employment severely restricted but wages themselves were set at a fixed *per diem* rate of 0.20 RM for each family member, paid monthly in advance.<sup>213</sup>

In this manner, Jews would be stripped of all currency and other financial assets such as securities, stocks, gold and jewellery. Once confiscated, these liquid assets were registered and the records as well as the articles themselves delivered “to the fund of the area Commissar [Gebietskommissar]...to be safeguarded by the latter.”<sup>214</sup> Consequently, from the beginning of the occupation, the Gebietskommissar played a central coordinating and administrative role in the liquidation of Jewish assets and their effective removal from everyday life. Shortly, they would also become central in the liquidation of the Jews themselves.

After receiving Lohse’s directives in August 1941, the Gebietskommissar understood that Jews no longer had a place in what passed for civil society.<sup>215</sup> Accordingly, guidelines to ensure this was “emphatically striven for” were, if need be, provided even if consideration was to be given to “local economic conditions.”<sup>216</sup> In line with the broader understanding of the centrality of food economics and provisioning, Jews were to be “cleaned out of the countryside” and removed from trade, particularly agricultural. No means to effect this were

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portion of their household articles necessary for scanty subsistence (furniture, clothing, linen).” Also see Zellhuber, *Unsere Verwaltung*, 184-85.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid, 804.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid, 803.

<sup>215</sup> The document’s distribution list indicates that it was widely circulated.

<sup>216</sup> *Nazi Conspiracy*, v.3, 804.

specified. Simply, while local and economic conditions might impact (perhaps mitigate) the process, the administrator must have understood that he was expected to vigorously remove all Jews from rural areas, trade and participation in any agricultural dealings by means of his own devising. Apparently, Lohse was more concerned with result than process.<sup>217</sup> Conversely, in terms of ghettoization, the process was clearly spelled out.

The overarching principle in the location of residential concentration was to ensure the removal of Jews from not only economically important areas but also militarily and culturally significant ones.<sup>218</sup> To this end, Lohse provided practical guidelines to shape the ghettoization envisioned by Rosenberg. Rural Jews were to be concentrated in urban areas already supporting a heavy Jewish population. Residents, dubbed “inmates,” would not be allowed to leave. Food and consumer goods would be provided only as much “as the rest of the population can do without” and, lest a surplus arise, “no more than suffices for scanty nourishment.”<sup>219</sup> Ghetto administration and policing was deemed an internal matter for the Jewish population under the supervision of the Stadt-Gebietskommissar and the “external hermetic sealing of the ghettos” was to be ensured where possible by local auxiliary police.<sup>220</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> In some areas, Lohse provided specific instructions on the process. In this area he did not. Kube remarked about this process later. See Haberer, “German Police,” 23-4.

<sup>218</sup> “The Jews are to be forbidden residence in resorts and spas, and in localities that are economically, militarily or spiritually of importance.” *Nazi Conspiracy*, v.3, 804.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid*, 804.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid*. Demonstrating again Lohse’s interest in providing specific directives in some areas and very general in others, he ordered that the Jewish ghetto police

The final measure Lohse stipulated was work guidelines for Jews. All Jews capable of working were required to perform forced labour subject only to the economic interests of indigenous Christian population. The nature of this labour proved comprehensive. Jews were expected to work in labour parties both within and outside the ghetto and, in areas without formal ghettos, would toil individually in whatever workspace available. Not surprisingly, Lohse mandated that remuneration not be based on the actual labour performed but on the familiar principle of scanty sustenance of both the worker and dependents and with consideration to "his present cash holding."<sup>221</sup> Rather than working directly for the civil administration, Jewish labour was to be "farmed out" to private firms and individuals who made the appropriate payment to the Gebietskommissar who, in turn, paid the workers themselves. In this way, the civil administration established not only physical domination over the Jewish population, but economic control as well.

The Reichskommissar ensured his subordinates enjoyed a certain degree of flexibility in the development and implementation of his guidelines. Specifically, Lohse decreed that ordering concentration, ghettoization and exploitation measures uniformly were up to each Generalkommissar. For those unwilling to micro-manage the "proliferation of details" arising in the process of implementation of the measures, the process could be turned over entirely to the Gebietskommissar. Additionally, subsequent details could be issued at the

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"be distinguished by the wearing of the white arm bands, with the yellow Jewish star" and "equipped with rubber truncheons or sticks..." In practice however, many "ghettos" were not sealed or fenced. Sluzk was an excellent example.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid, 804.

Generalkommissariat level or, upon their authorization, at the Gebiet level.<sup>222</sup>

Within this context, the Gebietskommissars played a significant role in the evolutionary radicalization of Jewish policy.

While the persecution of Jews generally demonstrated a local and *ad hoc* quality, premeditated murder was in the air from the earliest days of the invasion. In Glebokie as elsewhere in the captured areas, Soviet prisoners of war were quickly interned. In short order, the nature of this internment became apparent and marked a distinct shift from traditionally accepted treatment of captured enemy soldiers. Clearly, the experience of Soviet prisoners of war demonstrated that the occupiers played by different rules and were willing to undertake radical and murderous means to deal with administrative and logistical problems resulting from rapid military success and conquest.<sup>223</sup>

For the indigenous populations, the treatment of POWs, in most cases, interned locally, proved an important “first impression” of their new overlords.<sup>224</sup> Whatever the truth about Soviet uses for the Berezvetcher Prison outside Glebokie, the Germans quickly realized its value as a detention center where prisoners of war from the surrounding area might be concentrated. In the prison barracks, the remnants of 47,000 Red Army prisoners were interned in large, uncovered pits. Obviously, this installation could not be hidden from the general

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<sup>222</sup> *Nazi Conspiracy*, v.3, 805.

<sup>223</sup> For treatment of Soviet prisoners of war see Christian Streit, *Keine Kameraden: Die Wehrmacht und die sowjetischen Kriegsgefangenen 1941-1945* (Bonn: J.H.W. Dietz Nachf., 1997). Also see Hannes Heer and Klaus Naumann, *Vernichtungskrieg: Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941-1944* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1995). Of particular interest are chapters 3, 4, 5 dealing with Army violence, POWs and Army anti-partisan operations respectively.

<sup>224</sup> For the case in the Ukraine see Berkhoff, *Harvest*, 89-113.

population. Rather posted announcements warned the local population that any effort to provide comfort to the internees was punishable by death. Such warnings accompanied by a consistent willingness to carry out the threat and punishments, effectively isolated the prisoner community from the local population.<sup>225</sup> Throughout the hard winter of 1941-42, the prisoners of war subsisted on a straw and sawdust “bread” supplemented on rare occasions by rotten potatoes.<sup>226</sup> By spring, only those lucky enough to escape the camp managed to survive.<sup>227</sup> Akin to the fate of the mentally ill, Gypsies and Ghettoized Jews, the Nazi solution was final and total.

Belligerency was almost immediately manifested in the vicious treatment of the civilian population. Later Soviet war-crime investigators termed this “stick discipline.”<sup>228</sup> In Glebokie for example, this behaviour generally took the form of beatings, public humiliation and robbery, often masked as quasi-official confiscations and contributions. While such activities were rarely deadly, they took place within an increasingly radical context highlighted by the plight of locally interned Soviet prisoners of war.

Beginning almost immediately after taking his post in September 1941, Gebietskommissar Hachmann worked closely with his police assets in the

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<sup>225</sup> “Special commendation was earned by a truly small proportion of the populace, who are ready to sacrifice in sales for the fate of the imprisoned. People would...throw food, clothing and other things over the fence.” M. and Z. Rajak (ed.), *Memorial Book of Glebokie* (Buenos Aires: Former Residents’ Association in Argentina, 1956, 30.

<sup>226</sup> Rajak, *Memorial Book of Glebokie*, 28-29.

<sup>227</sup> Throughout the internment, regular shootings were apparently conducted on the cover of darkness.

<sup>228</sup> USHMM RG22.002M Reel 26, 7021-90-28.



imprisonment, interrogation and murder of “undesirables.” Perhaps most horrific was the regular transportation of villagers from outlying areas to the local forest in the middle of the night. Accused of “anti-German activities,” they were shot. However arbitrary these murders were in reality, the Gebietskommissars retained a façade of legality by ensuring that the killings were classified as sentences for specific crimes.

The killing of “undesirables” in rural areas began shortly after the arrival of German military forces. Consequently, while the transition from belligerency to widespread violence in urban areas proved more gradual, in the surrounding rural areas the shift often proved more rapid. Simply, precedent compacted the *ad hoc* persecution stage as the incoming civil administration quickly traded their bludgeons for bullets.

## Chapter 4

### “Where War Lived”: Case Studies in Genocide

We used to wonder where war lived, what it was that made it so vile. And now we realize that we know where it lives...inside ourselves. *Albert Camus*

Perhaps the most extreme case of genocide and mass murder was in the killing fields of Byelorussia. The areas under the control of the civil administration incorporated territories both formerly under pre-1939 Polish control and from within the Soviet Union (BSSR) proper.<sup>229</sup> With the 1941 invasion, German occupation authorities presided over a population of 10,528,000, about one million of whom were Jewish.<sup>230</sup> Upon assuming office in Minsk, Wilhelm Kube remarked that the goals of the civil administration in *Weißruthenien* were to bring “progress, culture, land and bread, the path to work, discipline and decency.”<sup>231</sup> In the end, the Germans brought only work and

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<sup>229</sup> These eastern areas included Bialystock, Vilna, Novogrudek and Polessie *voievodstvo* becoming Belostock, Brest, Baranovichi, Grodno, Vileiki, Molodechno and Pinsk *oblasts* after 17 September 1939. See Leonid Smilovitsky, “A Demographic Profile of the Jews in Belorussia from the Pre-war Time to the Post-war Time.” *Journal of Genocide Research*, 2003 5-1: 117.

<sup>230</sup> Jews consisted of two categories: Eastern Belorussia (405,000 by 1941) and Western Belorussia, formerly eastern Poland (350-450,000). To this number can also be added Jewish refugees who had fled Poland in 1939 (65,796 were registered but the actual number was probably closer to 100,000). *Ibid*, 118.

<sup>231</sup> Dallin, *German Rule*, 204.

discipline.<sup>232</sup> By the time of Soviet re-occupation in 1944, about 80% of the Jewish population had been destroyed.<sup>233</sup>

As the front line Army pushed through Byelorussia, a military occupation administration was set up behind it. As planned, the violence that accompanied the invasion did not move on with the combat units. In captured areas, the administration fell to military officials familiar with violence and reinforced by the glorification of aggression.<sup>234</sup> As a result, atrocity and brutalization of both the captured enemy and at least elements of the indigenous population was hardly an unlikely outcome.

This increasingly poisoned atmosphere of premeditated political violence in the newly conquered territories marks an important transition from a stage where the occupiers and, to some extent, segments of the occupied population increasingly overcame religious and cultural norms that ensured civil behaviour. Dangerous precedents were set and attitudes cemented in an environment favouring and rewarding belligerency regardless of the actual threat posed by the supposed provoker. In this way, the civil administration would enter a "wild east" already primed for the next phase: deadly, if not yet genocidal, actions. In less than three years, German civil administrators assisted in effectively ending some

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<sup>232</sup> See Shalom Cholawski, *The Jews in Byelorussia during World War II* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic, 1998) for a general overview. For the case of Pinsk see Tikva Fatal-Knaani, "The Jews of Pinsk, 1939-1943: Through the Prism of New Documentation," *Yad Vashem Studies* 29 (2001), 163-182.

<sup>233</sup> For the various estimates of Jewish deaths as well as aggregate numbers of civilian deaths see Smilovitsky, "Demographic Profile," 119-20.

<sup>234</sup> For an example from another agency see Rossino, *Hitler Strikes Poland*. The infamous Commissar Order issued at the invasion of the USSR also marks a contribution to this continuum.

six hundred years of Jewish life. To this butcher's bill can also be added other groups including Roma, Soviet prisoners of war and the indigenous populations comprising ethnic Poles, Russians, Ukrainians and Byelorussians.

The civil administration and the office of the Gebietskommissar contributed in several critical parts to the broader process of genocide. The practical process of genocide, in which actual murder proved neither the last nor the most difficult step, began with five stages. While the military administration certainly undertook initial cursory preparations, with the arrival of the civil administration the process was most fully initiated. The Gebietskommissars assisted in the genocide by concentrating Jews, establishing ghettos, registering and compiling lists, removing Jews from surrounding populated areas, and selecting and preparing shooting sites.

Micro-chronologies supplied by Gebietskommissariat case studies detail the "proper" functioning of the local civil administration and the path to genocide. Along this path, Gebietskommissars moved through increasingly radical stages ending with repetitive violence. However, while Jews immediately threatened in the wake of Operation Barbarossa, mass murder was neither the central mandate nor even the first order of business of civil administration. Nonetheless, even prior to the transfer of the area from military to civil administration, an atmosphere of violence and fear was evident. Immediately after occupation, the Jewish community experienced a kind of garden variety brutality not uncommon to invasions. German forces moving through robbed and beat local Jews as the

opportunities presented themselves.<sup>235</sup> In some areas, the treatment of Jews took on a far more violent character from the start. For example, the first Jewish action in Hansewicze occurred prior to the arrival of the civil administration.<sup>236</sup> According to later testimony, SS units shot local Jews and buried the corpses in a mass grave outside town.<sup>237</sup>

At another level, the invasion unleashed dormant inter-community fears and animosities, sometimes resulting in violence. Clearly, whatever civil society that had existed under the Soviet regime rapidly fell away. Given the deadly uncertainty of the previous months, the arrival of the civil administration suggested to many Jews that the situation would stabilize and some sense of normalcy return.<sup>238</sup> This, however, proved a forlorn hope.

In Glebokie, rumours began to circulate among the local Gentile community that Jews had assisted the evacuating Soviets with the arrest and murder of 2500 Red Army deserters at the nearby Berezvetcher Prison.<sup>239</sup> This rumour was followed by a wave of looting, as Jewish property was pillaged by local "Blackshirts" independently of any order or supervision by the occupying

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<sup>235</sup> Rajak, *Memorial Book of Glebokie*, 26.

<sup>236</sup> For the specifics of these killing actions see USHMM RG 22.002M Reel 26, 7021-90-32, *Gantsevicheskij rayon*, 1945, 6-7, 9. Both Jews and Soviet POWs were liquidated in the region.

<sup>237</sup> BA-L AR-Z 94d/59 v. 3, 153. "Testimony of Artur Grund."

<sup>238</sup> *Glebokie Memorial Book* also suggests that the polar opposite opinion existed based on rumours of atrocities in other areas. However, the *Glebokie Memorial Book* recognizes that no-one perceived or understood the totality and brutality of the Nazi solution intended them. See Rajak, *Memorial Book of Glebokie*, 38.

<sup>239</sup> Located 2km from Glebokie, the prison was actually a former monastery. According to rumour, 2000 deserters were shot and another 500 "bricked-in, alive." *Ibid*, 26

Germans. Yet this event also revealed that however strained the bonds within the community, they were not yet entirely severed. Despite the concerns of the Jewish population, the majority of the Gentile population did not engage in widespread looting nor did the rumours result in a much feared local pogrom. Significantly, Jewish survivors credited the local council with calming tensions and exhorting local Gentiles not to be “influenced to do evil.” The survivors of Glebokie even claimed that “where the local population did not let themselves be easily inflamed, the Germans were not able to carry out their extermination policy against the Jews easily.”<sup>240</sup>

Apparently, no such sympathies extended to the Gypsies, the first victims of the Gebietskommissar's involvement in genocide. In late 1941, Gebietskommissar Hachmann employed his local police assets to have Gypsies in the rayon captured, transported to Glebokie and “exterminated wholesale.”<sup>241</sup> In December 1941, 100 gypsy men and their families were brought into the city. The group was stripped naked and left in the cold. Particularly vulnerable, the children gradually froze to death while their parents pleaded with their killers to

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<sup>240</sup> Rajak, *Memorial Book of Glebokie*, 27.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid, 44. Despite Strauch's later assertion that Paul Hachmann was “utterly unsuited to the job of Gebietskommissar” and his “conduct towards the Jews...unbelievable,” inspection reports tell a different story. Whatever Strauch meant by “unbelievable” in terms of Jews, his effective role in their mass murder in his district suggests he conformed to broader patterns of Gebietskommissar behaviour. Equally important was the assessment that he maintained a competent, efficient and dedicated staff. Finally, Hachmann himself received high praise in 1942 as an inspection tour found: “Im Gegensatz zu den Verhältnissen in Wilejka gewann man von der inneren Verwaltung den Eindruck, dass in den verschiedenen Sachgebieten eine tadellose Arbeit geleistet wird” and “Abschliessend kann von dem Gebiet Glebokie gesagt werden, dass auf allen Sachgebieten mit guten Erfolgen gearbeitet wird.” NARB, 370/55/1, “*Bericht über die Dienstreise zum Gebietskommissar Glebokie*,” 25.7.1942.

shoot them out of mercy. The adult survivors were then marched to the forest, made to perform traditional songs, shot and dumped in pits. According to Jewish survivor testimony, not only Germans but local policemen and citizens seemed to revel in the de-humanizing ritual.<sup>242</sup> The murder of gypsies and other rural undesirables marked acceleration toward killing on a massive scale. The 1941 murders of gypsies but also of local non-Jews established the two types of violence that the civil administration would repeat, targeting Jews, in the coming year. For local gentiles, killings were generally selective, targeting rural “undesirables,” useless feeders and those deemed a security risk.<sup>243</sup> For gypsies, the killing was total as the administration destroyed every single one they could get their hands on.

For Jews, ghettoization facilitated the transition from belligerency to widespread violence. In Glebokie, formal ghettoization began on 22 October, 1941 when Hachmann personally ordered the relocation of the Jewish population to the open ghetto. Located, ironically, on Marx and Engels Streets the ghetto contained 8000 inhabitants at its peak.<sup>244</sup> In June and November 1942, fifteen killing actions took place in the Glebokie district.<sup>245</sup> The majority of shootings

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<sup>242</sup> Rajak, *Memorial Book of Glebokie*, 38.

<sup>243</sup> Importantly, rural Jews were ordered moved to the Glebokie ghetto. However, some (very small scale) killings did occur in December 1941 and January 1942. Also, Jews in towns in the area were moved to local ghettos. See NARB, 370/55/11.

<sup>244</sup> *Handbuch der Haftstätten für Zivilbevölkerung auf dem besetzten Territorium von Belarus, 1941-1944* (Minsk: National Archives of Belarus, 2001), 96. “The remaining 5000 were shot in August 1942.”

<sup>245</sup> The majority (12) of the shootings were carried out in June by a single unit, EK 9/Trupp Lepel. The three November operations were conducted by KdS Minsk, KGr v. Gottberg and KdS ASt Wilna.

were carried out in June 1942 by Einsatzkommando 9 (EK 9/Trupp Lepel).<sup>246</sup> Within the city, mass shootings began on 3 June 1942 with two further actions quickly following on 20 June 1942, and again in August in the Borok forest about 1.5 km outside the city.<sup>247</sup> By the end of the killing, EK 9 supported by the Gebietskommissar had cut the ghetto population in half.<sup>248</sup> In August 1943, the remaining 5000 inhabitants were murdered.<sup>249</sup>

The “second sweep” of shootings in 1942 marks not only the transition of the civil administration from belligerency to violent performance but also details their continued participation in two types of killing operations generally applicable to all areas under civilian control. Mirroring earlier murders of Roma, in the district’s hinterland, Hachmann and his staff engaged in *total killings*. This highlights the first type of killing operations in which entire communities were destroyed without a specific selection process. In smaller ghettos located in rural towns not only were shootings carried out on the order of the Gebietskommissar but also overseen by his staff personally. The case of Dokschizy (May 29-30, 1942) suggests that the civil administration and the office of the Gebietskommissar played a primary role in both the coordination and execution of killing actions even prior to the widespread campaign of EK 9 in June.<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>246</sup> Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde*, 697-700. Also see Dean, *Collaboration*.

<sup>247</sup> *Handbuch*, 96.

<sup>248</sup> NARB, 370/1/483/16.

<sup>249</sup> *Handbuch*, 96.

<sup>250</sup> NKVD documents reveal that there were in fact three operations in Dokschizy. In March and May 1942, the civil administration was responsible while on June 10 (not May 30) the SD murdered approximately 3000 Jews. USHMM RG 22.002M Reel 25, 7021-92-214, Dokshitskiy rayon, March 1945.



On May 30, the killers arrived by truck from Glebokie. According to Soviet witnesses, this group was composed of forty "German gendarmerie under the leadership of District Gebietskommissar Hebeling."<sup>251</sup> The Gendarmerie first encircled then began to clear the local ghetto containing about 250 Jews. Under orders, the head of the Judenrat, Rabbi Kats [sic], ensured that the Jews were assembled with their belongings and moved in to a local social "club."<sup>252</sup> For half an hour, the Jews waited unmolested. Then, Hebeling arrived and ordered his men to "start working." The victims were forced to undress and led from the club in groups of five in the direction of the railway station where pits had been prepared. Along the way, the Jews were beaten and humiliated.

Initially, the killers intended to bring groups of five to the pits where they would then be shot in large numbers. However, due to the several escape attempts, Jews were brought, four at time, to pits. Forced to sit on the edge of the pit, most were shot.<sup>253</sup> Numerous witnesses definitively identified who

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<sup>251</sup> USHMM RG 22.002M Reel 25, 7021-92-214, Dokshitskiy rayon, March 1945. Soviet *Akty* and witness statements refer to Hebeling as "Ebeling."

<sup>252</sup> The "club" was the "camp for the prisoners of war prepared in advance, and under the command of [Deputy] Gebietskommissar Ebeling." German forces used the familiar pretence of relocation as an explanation for the assembly. USHMM RG 22.002M Reel 25, 7021-92-214, Dokshitskiy rayon, March 1945. Rabbi Kats was identified as "Rabbi Harav Yosef Halevi Katz...a Rabbi in Gluboke for about forty years." Katz was also a member of the Mizrachi Religious Zionist Party, "and actively engaged in communal affairs." He was one of three Rabbis and the only non-Hassidic. See Rajak, *Memorial Book of Glebokie*, 10-11.

<sup>253</sup> Witnesses testified that a number of victims, mostly children, were beaten to death rather than shot. One six year old boy was beaten to death by three Germans after he tried to thwart efforts to push him into the pit by throwing clods of dirt at his killers. In another case, "workers" refused to throw a wounded woman into the pit. The shooters kicked her to death.

headed the “whole operation”: Deputy Gebietskommissar Hebeling. In this case, witnesses stated that “the Jewish population was shot on his order.”<sup>254</sup>

The June 1942 shooting operations in Glebokie city highlight the second type of killing operation, selective shootings. Before dawn on 20 June, an inter-agency taskforce consisting of the Gebietskommissar and staff, local police and SD elements surrounded the ghetto. Whatever interagency disagreement infected the upper levels of the Nazi regime in terms of Jewish policy, it was not reflected in these operations. The murder of the Glebokie Jewry was certainly a joint venture.

Under the guise of distributing work permits, Jews were removed from their homes into the Sports Plaza. Once assembled, Hachmann addressed the victims, assuring them of their safety and informing them that they were assembled to determine those for transportation to other cities for labour and those to remain in Glebokie. Jews selected for transportation were moved to the left, those to stay to the right. In reality, the civil administration and the SD selected “useful Jews” to be spared. The majority did not fall into this category and were sent to the right. Characteristically, the shooting area was located outside the city. The doomed population moved on foot to the site, where they were shot. The civil administration, cardinal in the planning and execution of the operation, then arranged that the site be secured and the pits covered.

By 29 June 1941, German forces were in complete control of Lida. The killing of Jews and other “undesirables” in the area began shortly. On 8 July,

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<sup>254</sup> USHMM RG 22.002M Reel 25, 7021-92-214, Dokshitskiy rayon, March 1945.

1941, some twenty members of Einsatzkommando 9 (Einsatzgruppe B) rounded up between about eighty and 180 Jewish men, mostly members of the “intelligentsia.”<sup>255</sup> Identified by local gentiles, these initial victims were transported about two kilometres outside the city and murdered, their bodies dumped in bomb craters.<sup>256</sup> This killing was followed by a second shooting on 8 July when 120 patients at a local psychiatric hospital were murdered.<sup>257</sup> In August, about 200 members of the Jewish intelligentsia were killed near the village of Stoniewicze in Ivje rayon.<sup>258</sup> Throughout the fall and winter of 1941 and into early spring 1942, additional similar small scale actions were undertaken. Such actions did not always follow a clearly outlined or predetermined plan. For example, in November 1941, a Lithuanian commando conducted a shooting of some 300 Jews. First imprisoned in a movie theatre, the victims were “brutally mistreated” prior to their murder. The origin of the killing order was not determined.<sup>259</sup> The military too was involved in early killings in the area. In fall 1941, 12<sup>th</sup> Company, 3 Battalion, Infantry Regiment 727 shot Jews in the Shchuchin rayon.<sup>260</sup>

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<sup>255</sup> A Soviet post war report claimed that the number killed was actually much higher. Barely legible, the number of Jews killed is at least between 100 and 180. See USHMM RG 22.002M Reel 13, 702–86–42, 2.

<sup>256</sup> BA-L AR-Z 94d59, v.1. This “action was the substance of the concluded legal proceedings against the leader of EK 9, Dr. Filbert and others. This action was also the origin of another case at the Standesamt Dortmund against Schulz-Isenbeck.”

<sup>257</sup> USHMM RG 22.002M Reel 13, 7021–86–42, 2.

<sup>258</sup> This group was killed by an “unknown commando.” BA-L AR-Z 94d59, v.2, 237, 302, v.20, 2785.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid, v.5, 801, v.23, 3145.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid, v.8, 1169, 1176-77, v.10. 1354, 1357, v.14, 1933, v.18, 2484.

Between September 1941 and May 1942, the office of the Gebietskommissar worked closely with police assets in the imprisonment, interrogation and murder of non-Jewish “undesirables.”<sup>261</sup> Throughout this time, regular executions, mostly of Jews and ranging from five to thirty people, were carried out. While the shootings were mostly at the Lida jail, executions of larger groups were conducted at more remote settings outside the city.

The Jewish community of Lida crossed class lines with diverse professional, business and labouring, dubbed “extremely poor,” segments.<sup>262</sup> In addition, German assessment determined that the bulk of “business and industry were predominantly in Jewish hands, as well as practically all the skilled labour.”

Classification of Lida Jewry began immediately after occupation. Identified and registered Jews were set to work en masse clearing the largely destroyed city. As the new administration began to establish itself, Jewish policy was further refined in accordance with the “Interim Guidelines for the Treatment of Jews” issued 18 August 1941 by the OMi.<sup>263</sup> Predictably, “restrictions on their accustomed way of life [were] more severe.”<sup>264</sup> Proscribed from changing

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<sup>261</sup> Ibid, v.18, 2561, v.9, 1304, v.13, 1808, 1822, v. 23, 3144. In this case, *Stabsleiter* Windisch “directed” with a German Gendarmie official assigned to him for the express purpose, the interrogation of persons arrested on the suspicion of being in contact with partisans.”

<sup>262</sup> BA-L AR-Z 94d59, v.17, 2439. “The Jewish population consisted of a layer of intelligentsia (physicians, attorneys, engineers, teachers), as well as businessmen, merchants and particularly skilled artisans, and finally a broad lowest layer of extremely poor Jews.” For personal reflections of Lida see See Alexander Manor (ed.), *Sepher Lida* (Tel Aviv, 1970) and Peter Duffy, *The Bielski Brothers: the True Story of Three Men Who Defied the Nazis, Saved 1200 Jews, and Built a Village in the Forest* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003).

<sup>263</sup> BA-L AR-Z 94d59, v.5, 341.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid, 343.

residence, Jews were also prohibited from walking on the sidewalk or using public transportation.

In line with developments across the General Commissariat, Jews of the Lida area were moved into ghettos on the order of the Gebietskommissar.<sup>265</sup> In these ghettos, both urban and rural Jews were interned. Not surprisingly, terrible conditions proved the norm.<sup>266</sup> Aware of the toll such conditions would have on the population and in line with the goal of exploitation, able-bodied Jews aged 14 to 60 were separated according to gender and “treated differently.”<sup>267</sup>

While the region’s six satellite towns each supported a single ghetto, the larger Jewish population in Lida itself required three. Spread around the city, the Jewish sections were located on the outskirts and (initially) were not “proper,” sealed ghettos.<sup>268</sup> However, the practical reality was that the entire Jewish population of the city was interned in some form of local ghettos.

Akin to developments in Poland, the military administration undertook the initial steps in establishing the Judenrat as a “self-governing body” consisting of component members and a president.<sup>269</sup> In Lida, nine to twelve members

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<sup>265</sup> The administration established Jewish “sections” in Lida, Zoludek, Vasiliski, Shchuchin, Voronovo, Radun and Ivje. BA-L AR-Z 94d59, v. 21, 2845, 2848, 2851, 2884.

<sup>266</sup> In the Lida area, “sometimes 30 people [lived] to a room.” Ibid, 2847.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid, v.5, 394.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid, v. 21, 2845, 2848, 2851, 2884. The largest ghetto in the city was the Postowska ghetto containing about 4000 Jews and located just north of town at Krupowska-Postowska street, west of Vilnius railway line. To the east of the line, in the northeast of the city was the Koscharowa ghetto, enclosing some 1500-2000 Jews. The third ghetto, Piaski, held 1700-2000 and was situated further south on the Grodno road. Prior to the killing sweeps, the Lida ghettos contained between 7200 and 8000 Jews.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid, v.20, 2785, 2793.

composed the Judenrat. Initially, a local teacher, Lichtmann, acted as president. In March 1942, Lichtmann, along with the majority of the Judenrat were murdered.<sup>270</sup> His successor, Altmann, enjoyed a significantly better relationship with the administration than did his predecessor.

The Lida Judenrat was responsible for “self-governance” of the ghettos and maintaining order through the Jewish Order Service. In terms of interaction with the occupation regime, its primary role in Lida was the provision of work schedules for workers requisitioned by both the Gebietskommissar in Lida and mayors of surrounding towns.<sup>271</sup> Interaction with the administration was primarily through the *Judenreferent*, *Stabsleiter* and head of the Politics, Race, and Nationality Division, Leopold Windisch. In this capacity, Windisch acted “on his own authority” on all matters concerning Jews.<sup>272</sup> Not surprisingly the relationship between Windisch and the Judenrat was far from reciprocal. However, while Windisch was characterized as “very fixed” and “tolerating no objections,” he apparently did [get] “along well with Judenrat president Altmann.” Given the fate of his predecessor, Altmann’s willingness to ensure a positive relationship proved entirely understandable. As the primary organiser of the Jewish labour pool, the Judenrat also came into contact with the administration through Rudolf Werner’s Economics and Industry Division.<sup>273</sup> In this regard, the Judenrat acted as a kind of buffer, however ineffective in the long run. To many

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<sup>270</sup> Ibid; v.1, 20.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid, v.20, 2785, 2793; v. 20, 2786 for “self-government tasks” included “in the area of economy, nutrition, sanitation, social welfare, etc.”

<sup>272</sup> Ibid, v.1, 129, v.2, 330, 336, v.5, 783, 789, v.7, 1125, v.17, 2453.

<sup>273</sup> This division was charged with “economy and provenance.” Ibid, v.21, 2885.

of its members, the survival of the community depended on its utilitarian value to Nazi occupiers as workers.<sup>274</sup>

In late 1941, the Gebietskommissar ordered identity papers be issued to the entire population of the area, including Jews. Listing name, age, gender, address and occupation, the papers ensured that the administration possessed a complete list of all Jews easily allowing skilled workers to be identified.<sup>275</sup> This more comprehensive listing followed a widespread poster campaign that encouraged Jews to register at the offices of the mayor, county mayor or at the local police station. While the civil administration produced the documents and local mayors distributed them, ultimately, the Judenrat was tasked with the “practical problems” of generating the list; ensuring that all Jews actually registered.<sup>276</sup>

Concurrent with the issuance of these new papers, the administration also produced additional work permits, special papers conferring the status of indispensable on those employed in skilled trades and distributed by individual workshop foremen.<sup>277</sup> These permits not only established the recipient’s identity as a “useful” Jew but also allowed one to leave the ghettos and, more

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<sup>274</sup> Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde*, 663.

<sup>275</sup> Additionally, a copy went to the mayor(s) and the Judenrat. BA-L AR-Z 94d59, v.18, 2510, v.20, 2787.

<sup>276</sup> “[The mayors]...passed the practically empty forms on to the Judenrat. The papers had the comment “Jew”...and were stamped with the official Gebietskommissariat seal by the mayor. The number of family members was not indicated. This was already established on the list created previously.” Ibid, v.18, 2510.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid. Permits bore the name and workplace of the recipient.

importantly, receive extra or “supplementary” rations.<sup>278</sup> By early 1942, the civil administration of Lida had effectively prepared local Jews for exploitation. This process of separation, concentration and identification, particularly into categories of utility, proved important initial stages on the path toward genocide.<sup>279</sup>

As the civil administration established itself in the area, it played a cardinal and active role in a number of killings. For example, from its earliest days in the area, the administration targeted local Gypsies. During the fall and winter of 1941-42, the auxiliary police shot eighty-six Roma in custody in the Lida jail.<sup>280</sup> This killing occurred after the group had been in custody for some time and their fate discussed by senior administrators.

The sporadic murder of Jews also continued. For example, on 14 February 1942, the Gebietskommissar provided a written order to the Gendarmerie that sixteen Jewish workers who had arrived late to work be shot. The execution was carried out in a field outside the Koscharowa ghetto.<sup>281</sup> Later, in April 1942, both Gebietskommissar Hanweg and his Staff Leader, Windisch, took a personal interest in ordering the detainment of the local nail factory’s Jewish accountant. After independently ordering his arrest, the bookkeeper was forewarned and able to flee, most certainly saving his life.<sup>282</sup> Finally, in late April-

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<sup>278</sup> Ibid, v.17, 2454.

<sup>279</sup> An excellent example is found in Slonim Gebietskommissar Gerhard Erren’s Situation Report of 25.01.42. This letter is reprinted in BA-L AR-Z 94d59, v.1.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid, v.20, 2776, v.21, 2855.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid, v.1, 61, 165; v.2, 242, 297; v. 3, 612; v.4, 778; v.7, 1020, 1026,1131; v.16, 2237; v. 21, 2852; v. 23, 2146.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid, v 5, 806.



early May 1942, the administration ordered the killing of eighty Jewish workers employed by a “warehouse for confiscated goods.” Whether or not all such killings originated with Hanweg is impossible to determine. However, it is certain that the orders came from the civil administration.

While the severe winter temporally prevented widespread shootings across *Weißbruthenien* in 1941, the spring thaw saw the killing campaign begin in earnest. For the Lida region, the murders were conducted over four days in early May 1942. Before dawn on 8 May 1942, an inter-agency death squad consisting of both local police and SD elements surrounded the three Jewish areas of Lida.<sup>283</sup> The previous day, in preparation for the operation, the civil administration had prepared an updated list of all Jews and their residences with the assistance of Judenrat officials. Under the guise of an identity check, Jews were removed from their homes into the streets, assembling into “scantily dressed” columns. Those unwilling or unable to muster were shot. The columns massed at three different selection areas on the outskirts of town.

Members of both the civil administration and the SD began the selection of “useful Jews” to be spared. Staff officers of the civil administration traveled between collection points throughout the morning to oversee the process. “Indispensable workers,” working youths and “skilled artisans” were shunted to the left. The majority did not fall into this category and were sent to the right. In

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<sup>283</sup> The indictment against Windisch clearly spelled out the role of the civil administration in the massacre. While the shooting were carried out “formally” under the “KdS external post Baranovichi”...at least in Lida, Zoludek, Vasiliski, Voronovo and Ivje, the action received the “responsible cooperation of the Gebietskommissariat Lida.” See *Ibid*, v.1, 17, v.4, 659 a and b,696; v.7, 1037; v.9, 1310; v.11, 1577; v.16, 2314; v.19, 2674.

this manner, no less than 5670 Jews were slated for destruction.<sup>284</sup> En masse, victims were walked a short distance outside the city to the killing site. Under the eyes of numerous agencies, they were shot, primarily “by Lithuanian and Latvian execution commandoes, some of whose members were visibly under the influence of alcohol.”<sup>285</sup> As they had in Glebokie, the civil administration secured the site and covered the pits.

While this shooting appears a model operation, during the selection process, a peculiar divergence emerged. At two selection points, Gebietskommissar Hanweg and his deputy Windisch clashed over of the selection of individuals for execution. In the first case, Hanweg’s intervention saved the life of a Jewish house decorator whom Windisch had sent to the right.<sup>286</sup> Later, at another selection point, Windisch publicly “reproached” Hanweg for sparing too many Jews by sending them to the left.<sup>287</sup> Perhaps more significantly, later Jewish testimony asserted that Windisch was not alone in his

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<sup>284</sup> Ibid, v.1, 4-22. According to the indictment against Windisch, the death toll for the May 8 shooting operation was “at least 5670 Jews.” Further, in April 1943 Gebietskommissar Hanweg attended a Conference of Gebietskommissars in Minsk. He reported that “in the district of Lida a remainder of 4415 Jews are left.” When he arrived “the district...had a population of 20,000 Jews. They were done away with, but for 4500 of them, in one time, a five day action in May of the previous year.” Ibid, Documents v.1, 51. On September 18, 1943, police forces cleared the ghetto, moved the population to the train station and transported them to Majdanek. They were told they were being sent to Lublin to work. BA R6/281, “Conference of Gebietskommissars in Minsk,” 56-70.

<sup>285</sup> BA-L AR-Z 94d59, v.1, 4-22.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid, v.16, 2215. In at least one case, Windisch did relent to the appeal of a victim. See Ibid, v.10, 1392, v.21, 2847 and v.17, 2459.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid, v.20, 2779. Later Jewish testimony asserted that Hanweg was reproached by not only Windisch but that “he received a severe reprimand from those in charge of the SS and SD and was formally and politely requested not to interfere or hinder the action.” See Manor, *Sepher Lida*, XII.

criticism claiming that Hanweg also “received a severe reprimand from those in charge of the SS and SD and was formally and politely requested not to interfere or hinder the action.”<sup>288</sup>

Not surprisingly, the relationship between Hanweg and his deputy soured in the wake of the May shooting operation. In what appears more the result of professional and procedural differences, in late summer 1942, Windisch appealed for his superior’s removal. Turning to Generalkommissar Wilhelm Kube, Windisch charged Hanweg, whom he characterized as a “failure,” with being entirely “too soft and too lax.”<sup>289</sup> Based on these charges, a meeting was convened in fall 1942 composed of Kube’s representative Rein, Hauptkommissar Fenz (Baranowitsche), Windisch and Hanweg. In this forum, Windisch repeatedly criticized Hanweg but, ultimately, was squelched by Fenz. However, the matter reached beyond *WeiBruthenien* as Kube himself reported Windisch’s “stink” to the personal Referat of the *OMi* in Berlin. Beyond the public dressing down received by Windisch, the matter was simply dropped.

Whatever Hanweg’s incompetence, it was not significant enough to warrant either his removal or censure after the May shooting operation. Ultimately, however, Hanweg was replaced. In early 1944 he was removed from his position and posted to a Wehrmacht unit in France; not for his “soft and lax” demeanour nor even as a result of the failed attempt to protect *his* Jews. Rather

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<sup>288</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*, 6

Hanweg was removed because his long-standing and flagrant extra-martial affair with his secretary offended the moral sensibilities of his superiors.<sup>290</sup>

Gerhard Erren, head of the civil administration in Slonim was the mold from which the characterization of Gebietskommissar as murderous “butcher” might well have been cast.<sup>291</sup> As Christian Gerlach has noted, Erren’s case clearly demonstrated the “active role that the Gebietskommissars played in the murder of the Jews....”<sup>292</sup> In Slonim, during the “second sweep,” some 14,000 Jews were murdered, leading Erren to report that by mid-summer, “the...country was Jew-free and in the city Slonim a residue of approximately 500 ghettoized craftsmen and skilled workers [were] available.”<sup>293</sup>

On 29 June, 1942 Erren’s civil administration orchestrated the largest mass shooting in the area.<sup>294</sup> *Judenaktionen* in surrounding districts had not gone unnoticed by the Jews of Slonim. Consequently, not only did the loss of the

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<sup>290</sup> In spring 1944, Hanweg was relieved of his command, presumably because of his open affair with his secretary, Liselotte Meier. He returned to active military service in France. According to witness testimony Hanweg went missing in action in Metz in late 1944. His last letter was dated August 1944, from Nancy. BA-L AR-Z 94d59, v. 4, 763; v.5, 864,871; v.9,1303; v.16, 2292.

<sup>291</sup> Hilberg noted of Erren: “The Gebietskommissar of Slonim, Erren, used to call a meeting after every ghetto-clearing operation. The meeting was an occasion for a celebration, and employees of the Kommissariat who had distinguished themselves were praised. Erren, who was perhaps more eager than most of his colleagues, acquired the title ‘Bloody Gebietskommissar’.” See Hilberg, *The Destruction*, 147. Also see Nachum Alpert, *The Destruction of Slonim Jewry: the story of the Jews of Slonim during the Holocaust* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1989).

<sup>292</sup> Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde*, 700.

<sup>293</sup> Quoted in *Ibid*, 700.

<sup>294</sup> By the end of June, however, these Jews too were liquidated with the final mopping-up of “hidden Jews” in the city of Slonim completed by 15 July. By the end of December, 1942 the last remaining 500 Jews of the area surrounding the city of Slonim were shot.

element of surprise lengthen the required time to carry out the various *Aktionen* but also enabled some measure of resistance in the form of attempts at hiding or fleeing the area. As a result, the civil administration coordinated a number of agencies in a cooperative and combined effort to realize the destruction of the Slonim Jewry. Where earlier operations in western Weißruthenien were carried out primarily under the auspices of the Security Police (KdS) detachment in Baranowitsche, operations in Slonim were a joint venture featuring elements of the Minsk Security Police (KdS)<sup>295</sup>, a company of an SS-Police Regiment and the usual assistance of the Wehrmacht and local police units (Gendarmerie and Schutzmannschaften).<sup>296</sup> To this number was also added civilian officials of the Gebietskommissariat.

In the early morning, Jews in the surrounded ghetto were ordered to assemble. Indispensable workers were then separated. Those selected for destruction, the majority, were transported to the prepared shooting site located in the hills outside the city. Here, indigenous volunteers, under the watchful eye of their SS handlers, massacred the Jews of Slonim.<sup>297</sup> In western Weißruthenien, Erren's *Gebiet* was the first to be completely *Judenfrei*.

Prior to the appointed day, Erren decreed that all male members of his staff would participate, in some capacity, in the shooting operation. Having instructed his employees to turn up, rifle in hand, on the morning of the 29<sup>th</sup>,

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<sup>295</sup> A platoon of Waffen-SS "under Strauch personally."

<sup>296</sup> BA-L AR-Z 228/59, 295, 298-300. Also see Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde*, 701.

<sup>297</sup> *Ibid*, 297.

Erren personally inspected and spoke to his men.<sup>298</sup> As the Jews were rounded up and transported to the killing site, he made his administration indispensable, providing trucks, drivers, additional security and ghetto guides to ensure that the wheels of destruction were well-greased.<sup>299</sup> That evening, Erren held court. According to witnesses, he assigned praise or blame to each of his staff, according to their actions. After the discussion, levity returned and "one drank and one celebrated."<sup>300</sup>

In Hansewicze, the head of the civil administration in the area was the thirty-four-year-old former SD man, Willy Müller. The Jews in this Gebiet were concentrated in the southern areas of Lenin and Lohyshin. As late as the end of 1941, there were no Jews in the city of Hansewicze nor did the area even contain an SD Post. This changed in 1942. At the instigation of the Gebietskommissar about 200-300 Jewish craftsmen and specialists (*Arbeitskräfte und Fachkräfte*) were moved to the city from southern *Kreise* into eight to ten houses in the northwest of the city.<sup>301</sup> While segregated physically, this area was an open ghetto remaining unguarded and unenclosed. Interestingly, work Jews also remained unguarded going to work. Issued work permits by the Gebietskommissariat, the Jews were employed primarily in the local shoe

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<sup>298</sup> Ibid, 300.

<sup>299</sup> Members of the Gebietskommissariat also ensured that any Jews trying to flee were shot. This they attended to personally. See Ibid, 301.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid, 301.

<sup>301</sup> These Jews were exclusively men. BA-L AR-Z 94d59, v. 3, 1153. Müller claimed about 100 Jews were moved and resided in five to six houses.

factory, tannery and various construction sites.<sup>302</sup> While other Jews were slaughtered wholesale across the OET, Willy Müller actively repatriated Jews to the city to work for the civil administration. Ominously, in mid-year the SD arrived and set up shop in the main town of Hansewicze.<sup>303</sup>

In late summer to early fall 1943, word of the executions in Lenin reached the Hansewicze's "work Jews." Despite the trust shown them in the maintenance of an open ghetto, most began to fear for their lives, panicked and fled under the cover of darkness, with only a small group remaining.<sup>304</sup> Not all the escapees were successful nor were local agencies passive. Both the SD and Müller's police assets hunted escapees and returned those captured to the city.<sup>305</sup> Also, as the difficulty of eluding recapture became evident, some returned voluntarily. Not surprisingly, reprisals were harsh, carried out by gallows erected at the top of the street in the Jewish quarter.

Müller offered an extraordinary story to West German investigators concerning the punishment for the 1943 ghetto break. He stated that in summer 1943, as was his custom, he walked home at noon from his office. On the day of the reprisal killings, he claimed that while passing the ghetto, he saw a large crowd standing around a newly erected gallows complete with twenty to thirty Jewish corpses.

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<sup>302</sup> Ibid, v. 3,1165. Müller claimed the ghetto consisted of "five to six houses." The "work Jews" had two bosses: Gottlieb von Kullwitz (*Bauarbeiten*) and Max Schwarzensteiner (*Handwerksbetrieben*). For Kullwitz see Ibid, v. 3,1197.

<sup>303</sup> On further disposition of German forces see Lida, Ibid, v. 3, 1163.

<sup>304</sup> Müller and Renndorfer both cited the Lenin killings as the cause of the breakout. Ibid, v. 3,1155, 1165, 1541.

<sup>305</sup> Ibid, v.3,1542.

The perpetrator of the hanging, Müller asserted, was the SD. However, his language remained tentative and suggestive rather than definitive. He claimed to recognize some of the SD personnel, but could not remember if they were Germans or their local cronies. Only by their uniforms, he claimed, did he make them out as SD. The most substantial evidence he offered was his assessment that only the SD could accomplish such a task nor could he imagine what other agency should undertake such an action.<sup>306</sup>

However, Willy Müller's testimony omitted important details and procedural particulars in the "ghetto-break" affair. Given the role of the civil administration in overseeing the ghetto, even at the most basic level, Müller simply could not be entirely unaware of the events that would necessarily follow the escapes. Naturally, the SD leader Alfred Renndorfer reported the break-out to Minsk. Not surprisingly, he received instruction that such occurrences were to be avoided in future. A harsh lesson was obviously in order. Rather than the usual shootings, a more public killing was in order. A gallows would be constructed near the Jewish housing and hangings conducted as a public and macabre spectacle. According to Renndorfer, the construction of the gallows and execution of the recaptured Jews by hanging was not his unilateral decision or action. Rather, Renndorfer, Müller and *Polizeikommandant* Max Steinert had convened on the problem. All had understood that deterrence was in order and it

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<sup>306</sup> Ibid, v.3, 1166. Müller stated: "Auf die Frage, weshalb ich zu der Annahme komme, dass SD-Leute an dieser Aktion beteiligt waren, erkläre ich, dass nur diese Einheit diese Aktion durchführen konnte, weil ich mir nicht denken kann, welche andere Einheit eine solche Aktion hätte durchführen sollen."



was either Müller personally or through his proxy, *Leiter für Politik und Propaganda* Hermann Opitz, who selected the victims for hanging. These victims were of course, the most obvious, Jews unable to work and the ringleaders of the escape.<sup>307</sup> Müller understood that despite their offenses, he did not wish the punishment to entirely cripple the labour capacity of his work Jews. Equally he understood that the escape could not go unpunished and it is not difficult to imagine his disappointment at having his leniency, in maintaining an open ghetto, betrayed with Jewish “treachery.”

The location of the hangings in the ghetto area is unsurprising. However, even the site of the killing was the result of inter-agency cooperation. According to Renndorfer, he, Opitz and probably Müller himself collectively determined the site of the hangings.<sup>308</sup> On the order of Renndorfer, gallows were erected near the Jewish quarter and the hangings personally overseen by the SD leader. However, while accepting his cardinal role in the hangings, Renndorfer also recalled asking and receiving the support of the civil administration, through Opitz and Müller, in constructing the gallows. The hangings were conducted in batches of four to five victims at a time after Renndorfer gave the order to commence. The executioners were other Jews who were tasked with pushing each victim off the gallows. In this manner, twenty to thirty Jews were hanged.<sup>309</sup>

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<sup>307</sup> Ibid, 1542, 1544.

<sup>308</sup> Ibid. Renndorfer stated: “...ich habe mich mit Opitz oder vielleicht auch mit dem Gebietskommissar Müller darüber unterhalten habe, wo die Stelle für die Ausführung der Exekution sei.”

<sup>309</sup> Ibid, 1154. Renndorfer asserted: “Ich weiss, dass die Juden diese Erhängungen selbst durchführen mussten. Ich weiss allerdings nicht, ob sich nun die Juden in der Weise beteiligen mussten, dass einer den anderen

The hastily constructed gallows were not fool-proof. In several cases, the noose snapped and the victim dropped to the ground. Knocked unconscious by the fall, they were shot dead where they lay. The hangings were widely attended by both Jews and Germans. SD men, Latvian auxiliaries, local gendarmerie and members of the civil administration, including Opitz and Gebietskommissar Willy Müller were all in attendance.<sup>310</sup>

Perhaps the most remarkable chapter of this brutal episode happened behind the scenes in a telephone exchange between Renndorfer and his superior in Minsk, the notorious *SS-Obersturmbannführer* Eduard Strauch. Strauch at first instructed him that “all the Jews of Hansewicze be liquidated.”<sup>311</sup> Renndorfer’s response was remarkable.<sup>312</sup> He objected to Strauch’s instruction on the grounds that “the Gebietskommissariat attached great importance to the workshops in Hansewicze, in which the Jews worked.” While Strauch did not relent completely to his subordinate’s protestation, neither did he dismiss him out of hand.<sup>313</sup> Rather he suggested a public hanging to achieve the maximum deterrence. Importantly, Strauch did not *order* Renndorfer to carry out a complete liquidation nor did he react negatively to his subordinate’s concern for

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erhängte oder ob einzelne Juden bestimmt worden waren die anderen Juden erhängen mussten. Ich weiss auch nicht, was mit den letzten oder dem letzten Juden geschehen ist, nachdem die anderen erhängt worden war.”

<sup>310</sup> Ibid, 1543.

<sup>311</sup> Ibid.

<sup>312</sup> Renndorfer claimed to have had a “past history” with Strauch. According to him, in the wake of their unspecified confrontation, Strauch had told him he was being sent to Hansewicze to “die a hero’s death.” Ibid, 1545. Logically, the falling out would have occurred prior to the establishment of KdS station in the Gebiet.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid, 1576.

the wishes of the local Gebietskommissar. Rather Renndorfer's intercession on behalf of the civil administration suggests both men favoured accommodation over confrontation.

Equally, Strauch deemed the work Jews to be marginal threat. At least tacitly, he also expressed confidence in the local civil administration and the SD's ability to keep the situation under control despite the previous security lapse. While Strauch did set the limits of the impending response to the escape, the reprisal was adapted to fit local particularities and carried out in consideration of the interests of the Gebietskommissar. His own involvement and that of his staff in the hangings confirms that Müller was in agreement with the punishment.<sup>314</sup> Further, at some level, he must have understood that hangings were going to take place regardless of his need for work Jews.<sup>315</sup> Thus, rather than making a futile stand, Müller involved his agency in the process. Central to this was also his ability, through participation, to retain these Jews most valuable to his local enterprises.<sup>316</sup>

Even after receiving Strauch's compromise, Renndorfer still thought it prudent to discuss the matter with Müller and his staff. Whatever objections he may have had, Müller agreed to the measure and even managed to determine which Jews would be killed, thereby preserving the "cream" of his labour force.

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<sup>314</sup> Ibid, 1544. Renndorfer stated: "Wie ich bereits oben angegeben habe, war mit dieser Massnahme der Gebietskommissar auch einverstanden."

<sup>315</sup> Renndorfer stated that Strauch told him: "... diejenigen sollen erhängt werden, auf die GK nicht versessen sei." Ibid, 1576.

<sup>316</sup> The deep contrast with Carl's experience in Sluzk is obvious. Interestingly, this took place within a few months of the notable war between Strauch and Wilhelm Kube in Minsk.

Certainly, the relationship between the civil administration and the SD in Hansewicze was more than cordial.

This remarkable event suggests that a Gebietskommissar could perceive which way the wind was blowing, could compromise and could accommodate. It also confirms important limitations on both the theoretical and practical power of the individual Gebietskommissar. However, equally important is the reality that at the local level, interagency cooperation was both possible and practiced. In terms of wider context, it is significant that this event occurred shortly after the confrontation between Strauch and Kube in Minsk.<sup>317</sup> Whatever Renndorfer might have thought of Kube and the higher echelons of the civil administration, he seemingly did not share his boss' distrust in the ability of the Gebietskommissar and favoured an inclusive approach at the local level. Here, at the sharp end of the action, the inter-agency disconnect so much in evidence in Minsk was not a reality. Rather, despite the venomous tit-for-tat exchanges between their superiors, Renndorfer and Müller continued a cooperative and mutually beneficial relationship in Hansewicze.

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<sup>317</sup> In July 1943, Generalkommissar Wilhelm Kube and SS-*Obersturmbannführer* Eduard Strauch engaged in a high level uncivil war. Essentially Kube accused Strauch of barbarity in the murder of seventy of his Jews. Kube was enraged that his authority had been undermined by the zealous Strauch as the Jews were killed without his approval. Strauch struck back with a scathing report to SS-*Obergruppenführer* Erich von dem Bach Zalewski. Citing Kube's failings, he questioned his overall commitment to the implementation of Nazi Jewish policy and recommended his dismissal. In his report he not only detailed Kube's short comings but also those of his administration in general. His report also named Gebietskommissars Janetzke and Hachmann. Unfortunately analysis of Strauch's motives in penning the report and the difficulties engendered by his broad tarring of the civil administration remains lacking.

In early 1943, prior to the hangings, Renndorfer went to Minsk to personally report his concerns about a Jewish partisan unit operating in Hansewicze. Comprised of escaped ghetto Jews from the southern areas of the district, this band was closely connected with local Soviet partisan groups. Despite the fact, as Renndorfer learned, that the Jewish partisans were only lightly armed, he understood that they originated from the same areas as the work Jews ghettoized in Hansewicze.<sup>318</sup> The danger was obvious. In collaboration with Soviet units and despite the lack of weapons, the band increasingly endangered the security of the area.

In response, Strauch ordered the elimination of the area's Jews. The order however, did not seem to include, for the timebeing, the work Jews in Hansewicze itself. According to Renndorfer, Strauch mentioned that he had received instructions from the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* (Reich Security Main Office: RSHA) that all of the Gebiet's ghettos be liquidated. The order in which they were to be liquidated was left open.

The last wave of ghetto liquidations began in spring or early summer 1943, when Renndorfer led a Jewish action in Lenin in compliance with Strauch's order. In the execution of this action, the close collaboration between the SD and the Gebietskommissar continued. Prior to the arrival of the shooters, preparations had already been made in Lenin by the civil administration.

As was customary, the killers arrived in the early morning, including Renndorfer and Steinert. The detail moved immediately to the local

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<sup>318</sup> BA-L AR-Z 94d59, v. 3,1544.

*Gendarmerieposten* which had been informed by the *Gendarmeriegebietsführer* of the planned action.<sup>319</sup> The various tasks assigned and necessary forces in readiness, Renndorfer then enjoyed his first cup of coffee of the day before the proceedings began.

When the killers arrived at the ghetto, the Jews were already standing in the street. Obviously, this show of force indicated something was terribly wrong. Frightened, Jews standing in the streets protested and moaned and cried (*jammerten*). According to Renndorfer, this was the only time that the victims openly protested their impending fate. Under the watchful eye of German officials, native auxiliary policeman from Lenin moved through the ghetto, evicting those not already in the street. SD men stood ready to move through the ghetto in force to maintain order.

Once assembled the Jews were then transported en masse to the killing site. Renndorfer's men drove the Jews to the killing site under the guard of men from the local *Gendarmerie* post. The execution site was, characteristically, located away from the town and was composed of a number of old World War I trenches that had been deepened by the civil administration (Opitz) with the help of the *Gendarmerie* a few days earlier.

Their fate now obvious, the Jews undressed and in a variation from the usual shooting archetype, "were led individually to the ditches and killed with neck shots" delivered by pistols.<sup>320</sup> Over the span of a single morning, 180-300

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<sup>319</sup> Ibid, 1545.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid, 1547. "Renndorfer also offered a similar but slightly different scenario: "Es war so gewesen, dass sich jeweils der Angehörige des

men, women and children went to their deaths.<sup>321</sup> As many male Jews able to work had already been transported to Hansewicze, about seventy-five percent of the victims in Lenin were women and children and the portion of working-age men very small.<sup>322</sup> Small children were removed from their mother's arms to be shot separately.<sup>323</sup>

The lion's share of the shooting was carried out by the SD and their Latvian helpers.<sup>324</sup> However, the entire affair, apart from the killing stage, had been organized by the local gendarmerie and Müller's administration. All that was required of Renndorfer's men was to pull the trigger. Even in this task, they received assistance from the local administration.

The killing was attended personally by Renndorfer and (likely) Steinert, Opitz and the *Gendarmeriepostenführer*.<sup>325</sup> Others included Gendarmerie and Schutzmänner from Lenin. At the Lenin killing, the line between "bystander" and "perpetrator" was simply eradicated, as everyone who stood at the pit shot at least one victim. Renndorfer freely admitted his own participation in the shootings. His admission raises problems with understanding motive. Were

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Exekutionskommandos einen Juden von dem Platz, wo die heraustransportierten Juden auf die Exekution warteten, holte und ihn an den Gräben erschoss."

<sup>321</sup> Renndorfer claimed: "Eine Panik unter den Juden ist bei dieser Exekution nicht entstanden. Die Juden sind verhaeltnismaessig ruhig und gefasst in den Tod gegangen." Ibid, 1546.

<sup>322</sup> This perhaps accounted for ( a) why Lenin was liquidated first (b) why later escapes did not happen in Hansewicze.

<sup>323</sup> Renndorfer did not speculate on how many children initially survived their gunshots and were still alive in the pit. He did however acknowledge this possibility.

<sup>324</sup> This detachment consisted of 25-28 men. BA-L AR-Z 94d59, v. 3, 1559.

<sup>325</sup> Ibid, 1546-48. At least two members of the civil administration were there, including Opitz for certain. Steinert was killed by partisans (shot from the saddle), only a few weeks later in summer 1943. Ibid, 2138.

most really “willing executioners” or coerced into committing heinous acts under duress? In 1962, Renndorfer claimed that Strauch had personally instructed him to ensure that *everyone* at the execution site shoot at least one victim.<sup>326</sup> While neither Strauch nor Renndorfer had the authority to *order* them to, members of the Gebietskommissar’s staff (including Opitz) followed the SD chief’s lead and took part in the killings.

In the wake of the liquidation, Opitz did not return immediately to Hansewicze. Rather he remained in Lenin to secure the possessions of the murdered Jews and ensure its transportation back to Hansewicze.<sup>327</sup> Apparently, Müller’s second also kept for himself some of the dead Jews’ clothing. This theft he justified as necessary due to the shortage of such items and material brought on by the war.<sup>328</sup>

The Hansewicze “sweep” in mid-1943 encompassed several more actions. About two weeks after the Lenin killing, Pohost-Zahoradzki was “cleared” followed by actions in Telechany and Lohiszyn. In a now familiar form,

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<sup>326</sup> Renndorfer asserted: “Strauch hatte mir nämlich den Befehl gegeben darauf zu achten, dass jeder, der am Exekutionort verweilt, auch selber mindesten einen exekutieren müsse. An diesen Befehl habe ich mich gehalten.” Those on the security detail were apparently excluded. Ibid, 1548-49. Renndorfer concluded: “Bei dieser Aktion in Lenin musste daher jeder Angehöriger meiner Dienststelle zumindest eine Einzelexekution vornehmen. Ich selbst habe ebenfalls geschossen. Opitz die ebenfalls am Exekutionsplatz waren, haben gleichfalls mindesten je einen Juden bzw. Juden erschossen. Bemerkem möchte ich, dass der erwähnte Befehl Strauchs, dass jeder einmal schiessen müsse, sich nicht auf die Absperrungsposten bezog.”

<sup>327</sup> Ibid, 1549.

<sup>328</sup> Ibid, 1575.



these operations were carried out by a small number of German SD and their Latvian helpers with the assistance of Müller's police in the various posts.<sup>329</sup>

There is no doubt that Müller administered a blood-soaked Gebiet. However, from the everyday violence of occupation, the final liquidation of all Jews in Hansewicze was justified as a necessary response to the partisan threat, whether Jewish or Soviet. Specifically, the small Jewish partisan presence seemingly vindicated the belief in the portrayal of Jew as threat, whether passive or active. Renndorfer claimed that Strauch personally ordered he "liquidate all Jews in the area of Hansewicze" and that the actions were to be carried out by local SD assets.<sup>330</sup>

Renndorfer acknowledged, even as he returned from Minsk with the order, that the children he would kill could not possibly be partisans. However, he remembered that whatever the justification, Strauch had also impressed upon him the order's role in the Final Solution of the Jewish question. Except for the remaining Jews "belonging" to Müller in Hansewicze, the days of partial ghetto liquidations had passed. In the guise of a partisan war, the area's Jews would be destroyed. By 1943, clearly "*Das bewegende Motiv war jedoch die Endlösung der Judenfrage.*"<sup>331</sup> Here, in mid-1943, Renndorfer claimed to finally understand

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<sup>329</sup> The tasks of his Gendarmerie and Schutzmannschaft remained primarily transport and security [*Absperrung*] of the victims. Ibid, 1549-51. Soviet perceptions of the occupation and actions are detailed in RG 22.002M Reel 26, 7021-90-30, 31, 32, 33.

<sup>330</sup> BA-L AR-Z 94d59, v. 3,1573-4. Interrogators asked: "Couldn't the executions in Lenin and PZ be limited to only a portion of the Ghetto inhabitants?"

<sup>331</sup> Ibid, v.3,1574.

the enormity of the project. The assault to “liquidate all Jews in *Weißbruthenien*” was underway.

The liquidation of all Hansewicze’s ghettos marked an intersection of centrally mandated ideological prerogatives and local conditions. The destruction of Byelorussian Jewry was underlined by motives which were complementary rather than mutually exclusive. Undoubtedly, Strauch feared the deteriorating security situation and entered the Jewish support for the partisans into the equation. Consequently, he expanded the RSHA’s ghetto liquidation order to include all Jews in the region.<sup>332</sup> At this level, ideological and security motives intertwined and supported one another. As in so many cases, ‘intention and feasibility’ coalesced with deadly result.

Given the context in the testimonies of Müller and others were taken, all possessed significant reasons to downplay their own involvement through lies of commission and omission.<sup>333</sup> However, the sources providing clear evidence of Müller’s direct involvement are also not without problems. The two sources which implicate him expressly, the testimony of former *SS-Hauptsturmführer* and leader of *KdS-Aussenstelle Hansewicze* Alfred Renndorfer and the Soviet NKVD Extraordinary State Commission reports, are not completely reliable. However,

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<sup>332</sup> Ibid, 1545.

<sup>333</sup> For example, Müller misrepresented the position of Opitz calling him an inspector when in reality he was in charge of the Gebiet’s Policy and Propaganda department (*Referate*). However in his testimony Müller later confirmed Opitz’s real position stating: “...*Opitz als Leiter des Referates I.*” Ibid, 1165. The head of *Referate I*, in this case Hermann Opitz, was generally also the *Stabsleiter* and the official directly in charge of Jewish affairs. Ibid, 1198. Further, Müller neglected to mention his own service in the SD in the 1930s and his efforts to transfer to the SS fulltime. Interestingly, he featured his post-war experiences in the Soviet penal system and resulting ill health prominently. Ibid, 1151,1159.

circumstantial evidence suggests that a more accurate account of the events would blur the line between Müller as by-stander and Müller as perpetrator.

First, the Soviet findings are damning of Müller. Rather than affirming the “bystander” persona he created in his witness statements, Müller is portrayed as perpetrator and organizer.<sup>334</sup> Immediate reports and testimony identified him and his agent Hermann Opitz as the “direct heads of the annihilation of the Soviet citizens.”<sup>335</sup> While specific details are largely omitted, there is no question in the Soviet document that atrocities in the region originated from the desk of the Gebietskommissar.

Second, Karl Renndorfer’s lengthy testimony paints a very different picture of the fall 1943 “ghetto-break” and reprisals. Clearly, Renndorfer’s motives in implicating Müller must be questioned. However, what resonates clearly is that while ‘fingering’ Müller, he never denies his own direct involvement in atrocities.<sup>336</sup> Rather, in this account, the SD and the civil administration enjoyed a positive, reciprocal and cooperative relationship. Certainly, this appears consistent with Müller’s background in the SD and established personality rather than the account he himself provided.

While a definitive reconstruction of Müller’s involvement remains elusive, he certainly was more than a mere bystander. Müller initiated the transfer of

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<sup>334</sup> USHMM RG 22.002M Reel 26, 7021-90-32, Gantsevicheskii rayon, 1945, 1,

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<sup>335</sup> These reports were compiled almost as soon as the area was reoccupied. In the case of Gantsevicheskii rayon, NKVD reports and interrogations date from as early as 11 November 1944.

<sup>336</sup> Renndorfer remarked: “I would like to stress however that the responsibility for this execution was mine.” BA-L AR-Z 94d59, v.3, 1543.

Jews to Hansewicze, his administration oversaw the ghetto and his staff supervised the slave labour. He was aware of killings in other areas, had ordered executions in the past and had actively deployed his police assets in outlying rayons with Jewish populations.<sup>337</sup> In terms of the killings in the wake of the “ghetto break”, Müller was almost certainly forewarned and involved, at some level. At minimum, such an action required that the ghetto be sealed and guards posted. This security, essential in carrying out the hangings, was initiated by the Gebietskommissar.<sup>338</sup>

Finally, Renndorfer understood that the wording of the official instruction to liquidate the ghettos held a deeper meaning. He stated that Strauch deemed it necessary to remind him that failure to carry out the order “would be a refusal to obey orders.” Thus, Renndorfer explained, he merely “followed orders.” Further, he claimed that Strauch had it in for him. Following an earlier argument with Strauch, he did not want his political reliability to come into question. Renndorfer feared Strauch’s motive for deploying him in Hansewicze in the first place, declaring: “Strauch sent me to Hansewicze with the notice, there I could die a hero’s death.” Ultimately, not only did Renndorfer just portray himself a cog in the machine but also as a man under duress, fearing for his life. In this inversion, the perpetrator became the victim. While Renndorfer did not meet a

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<sup>337</sup> See USHMM RG 22.002M Reel 26, 7021-90-33, Leninskiy rayon, 1944 and USHMM RG 22.002M Reel 26, 7021-90-30, Telehanskiy rayon, 1945.

<sup>338</sup> BA-L AR-Z 94d59, v. 3,1385. “Testimony of Alice Fränkel.” Fränkel was a stenographer in the local civil administration.

“hero’s death” in Hansewicze, he was wounded in late fall 1943 just a few weeks after the area was made *Judenfrei*.<sup>339</sup>

Renndorfer readily admitted his murderous activities in the east. Yet, on several levels, he worked to establish wider contexts of fear, stress and magnified hierarchies of authority that raise the question of his responsibility and liability. If he is to be believed, Alfred Renndorfer was an unwilling executioner. He did what the day demanded because he was ordered to and because the machinery of destruction in which he was trapped would not allow him to do otherwise. What impact his confession had for the man himself is perhaps a question best posed by theologians. However, for the writing of history, the impact of such tactics has been enormous. In simplest terms, his account asks the question: “Under the circumstances, could anyone have done otherwise?”

Perhaps the most well-known case of dissent to genocide was that of Gebietskommissar Heinrich Carl of Sluzk, Byelorussia. In September 1941, Carl visited Generalkommissar Kube personally in Minsk. At this meeting, he attempted to negotiate the application of Jewish policy. Carl objected to the concentration of the Jews, arguing that local conditions in Sluzk made concentration and guarding impossible. He later recalled that he told Kube he wanted the Jews to remain free. When Jewish concentration became impossible to avoid, he implemented “resettlement” only slowly and partially. Local Jews

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<sup>339</sup> Ibid, v.3, 1163.

came and went as they pleased, subject to a dusk curfew. However, whatever his efforts, the Jews of Sluzk were doomed.<sup>340</sup>

On 30 October 1941, Carl wrote a scathing letter, marked "secret," to Kube in Minsk based on their 27 October telephone conversation.<sup>341</sup> At about 8am that morning the adjutant of Reserve Police Battalion 11 entered Sluzk and informed Carl that his unit had been delegated to liquidate the area's Jewish population. The Gebietskommissar then arranged a conference with the commander of the Battalion, First Lt. Brodeck who arrived about thirty minutes later with the remainder of his unit.<sup>342</sup>

At the subsequent impromptu conference, Carl explained his concerns about the impending action. First, as the civil administration had not been informed in advance, no preparations had been made. In fact, all the Jews had been sent to work and any effort to remove them "would lead to terrible confusion."<sup>343</sup> Carl then reminded Brodeck that "it would have been his duty to inform [him] a day ahead of time" and suggested the action be postponed by one day.<sup>344</sup> Brodeck immediately rejected the request on the grounds that his demanding schedule allocated only two days to the actions in Sluzk.<sup>345</sup>

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<sup>340</sup> BA-L AR-Z 262/59, 4-5.

<sup>341</sup> Carl also contacted Kube again, months after the killings, to enquire about the effect of his report. Ibid, 8.

<sup>342</sup> A fuller account of events were stated in BA-L AR-z 262/59. "Testimony of Heinrich Carl," 15.12.1959. For the identity of the commander, see *Nazi Conspiracy*, 783, 786.

<sup>343</sup> Ibid, 786.

<sup>344</sup> BA-L AR-Z 262/59, 5. In 1959, Carl recalled that his desire for a delay was two-fold. First, he hoped to select some Jews to survive ("to protect the Jews from destruction"). Second, he hoped his "foot-dragging" delay of a single day

Carl reacted “violently” to Brodeck’s refusal. He then raised his second objection; the economic viability of Sluzk depended on Jews. Accordingly, “indispensable” Jews deemed tradesmen as well as their families had not yet been “resettled” and “were not simply expendable.”<sup>346</sup> Indeed, even some expendable Jews had remained outside their quarter in the town. In an effort to retain his labour force, Carl offered to move everyone to the Jewish quarter where administrative officers would segregate registered tradesmen and their families. As Brodeck failed to raise any objections, Carl assumed his plan acceptable and “had therefore the firm belief” that it would be put into practice.<sup>347</sup>

In fact, Brodeck simply ignored Carl. Several hours after the conference, the factories and shops were cleared of Jews. Many were taken from their workplace, loaded onto trucks, taken to killing sites and murdered. Some were simply shot in the street. While his motivation may have been to protect his labour force, Carl also worked in the Jewish quarter, segregating “expendable” from “indispensable.” Sometime in the early afternoon, Carl moved to stop the killing and salvage some measure of “economic life.”<sup>348</sup> As Brodeck had already moved on toward Baranowitsche, Carl was forced to negotiate with his executive officer. The deputy commander had clear orders: “clear the whole town of Jews

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would allow him to contact Kube. Carl sent a telex to Kube asking for assistance. Remarkably, Kube agreed to do whatever he could.

<sup>345</sup> *Nazi Conspiracy*, 786.

<sup>346</sup> *Ibid.* Further, Carl noted that “White Ruthenian tradesmen are today so non-existent, that therefore all vital plants had to be shut down all at once, if all Jews would be liquidated.”

<sup>347</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>348</sup> BA-L AR-Z 262/59, 5-7. It should also be noted that some Jews were sheltered in the Gebietskommariats offices. Also, in the aftermath of the killing, Carl ensured that bodies left in the streets were collected and buried.

without exception in the manner as they had done in other towns.” When Carl asserted the need to consider the economic impact of the killing, the German policeman appeared “greatly surprised” and remarked on the primacy of political considerations above all others.<sup>349</sup> Interestingly, where Carl had initially failed to dissuade Brodeck, he enjoyed considerably more success with his deputy. After some “energetic intervention,” Carl forced an end to the killing spree by late afternoon.

Carl claimed that his prediction of economic chaos was immediately confirmed, arguing, that by midday, local factories could no longer function in the absence of their Jewish workers.<sup>350</sup> Having informed Kube of his economically- minded concerns, Carl raised several objections to the means, procedure and consequences of the killing. The Gebietskommissar remarked on the sheer brutality, near “sadism” of the operation. In the town, the Jews were publicly beaten, robbed and shot. The random shooting was so intense that Carl remarked that his “own police...had often to leave the streets...to avoid being shot themselves.”<sup>351</sup> Further, the activities at the killing site outside Sluzk seemed to further offend the Gebietskommissar who expressed his shock and horror at wounded Jews digging their way out of the covered pits. Carl characterized a killing operation that quickly spun out of control. Indeed, the

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<sup>349</sup> *Nazi Conspiracy*, 787. “...economic reasons had never played a role anywhere.”

<sup>350</sup> Carl used the example of the tannery as the worst case: Of 26 ‘experts’, 15 were shot and 11 fled and escaped. Naturally, the tannery “barely continues to operate.” In another case, four of five wheelwrights in a shop were killed leaving the shop to continue with a single wheelwright.

<sup>351</sup> *Ibid*, 787.



scene “looked like a revolution” rather than “an action against the Jews.” In these terms, the Gebietskommissar raised concerns about the maintenance of law and order, detailing widespread looting, extortion and vandalism. Finally, Carl feared the impact that the arbitrary and brutal behaviour of the police (and its “Lithuanian partisans”) would have on the local (“White Ruthenian”) Christian population. In the orgy of violence, many non-Jews were also rounded up, robbed and beaten. Further, many residents seemed shocked and “dumbfounded” at the treatment of the Jews. Carl feared that the Police Battalion’s actions had shaken a people who previously “had full confidence in us” and destroyed any achievements the civil administration had enjoyed.

While the killing operation in Sluzk clearly demonstrated some of the limits to the Gebietskommissar’s authority, Carl was not entirely powerless. For example, he claimed to have forcibly ejected “German police officials as well as the Lithuanian partisans from the shops” at gunpoint.<sup>352</sup> Further, Carl employed his own police assets for this task, stating that they did not assist the killers as was the case elsewhere. Lastly, Carl exercised his authority in terms of policing and arrested two “Lithuanian partisans” for looting. In concluding his report, the Gebietskommissar remarked that he could not continue the Jewish action

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<sup>352</sup> Carl and his police did intervene in the late afternoon. According to his testimony, this required his armed presence and willingness to physically separate perpetrator and victim. Whether this was to defend against looting or to protect working Jews is not stated. However, when Carl mentioned looting (788) he made only specific reference to homes rather than businesses being pillaged. Further, Carl wrote that he and his staff had “been in it all day long in order to save what could yet be saved.” Ibid and BA-L AR-Z 262/59, 8-10.

intended to restore civil order and “revive the economic life despite the difficulties.”<sup>353</sup>

Carl’s protest and the events of the Sluzk operation raise two further considerations. First, the Gebietskommissar remarked that his demand (to the deputy commander) that the action be stopped was based on the disregard of his instructions.<sup>354</sup> His willingness to formulate his demands in such terms suggests he believed that he actually had the authority to give instructions to the battalion’s police commander. While Brodeck certainly failed to recognize this authority, his deputy was less certain. Indeed, despite the need for energetic intervention, Carl did manage to dissuade the adjutant from continuing the operation and exercise some measure of authority.

The events of the Sluzk operation prove decidedly raw, disorganized and inefficient suggesting a kind of “alternate model” of a killing action undertaken without the active assistance of the civil administration. In Sluzk, the administration did not “grease the wheels,” at best proving unsupportive and at worst, obstructionist. If Sluzk provides a glimpse of what operations might have been like without the cooperation of the civil administration, their importance as both active perpetrators and facilitators seems more readily understandable.

As we have seen, mass murder in the civil-administered areas took a number of forms. Some, like the operations in Slonim and Lenin, were total, a complete “cleansing” of the Jewish population. Others like Lida, Glebokie,

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<sup>353</sup> Carl closed his letter with the appeal: “In the future, keep this police battalion away from me by all means.” *Nazi Conspiracy*, 789.

<sup>354</sup> *Ibid*, 786.

Hansewicze and Sluzk were less complete, partial operations in which the population was culled rather than liquidated immediately.

In the case of selective and total killings, a four-phase process is evident that is broadly applicable across all areas under civilian control: namely, the close coordination of the civil administration with other agencies in the planning and preparation for the shootings. This included preparing both the victims and the killing sites, generally carried out locally without the assistance of other agencies. Next, the Gebietskommissar, his staff and his police assets were central in the rounding up of victims and guarding the ghetto. Here the civil administration played a crucial role in not only getting the victims to the selection point but also preventing panic and widespread disorder. Furthermore, the Gebietskommissar himself often actively participated in the selection of victims. While not a feature of the total shootings, the exercise of this ability in numerous cases suggests that the Gebietskommissar wielded significant power and could, within limits, spare Jews deemed useful. And finally, the civil administration coordinated with other agencies in the actual killings. At a minimum, the Gebietskommissariat personnel, including the gendarmerie, assisted in the transportation of Jews to the killing sites and securing the area. At the extreme, as in the case of most total killings, the civil administration itself, with its police, carried out the shootings without requiring the assistance of outside agencies. Finally, the administration was responsible for the collection of Jewish assets and hunting any Jews who had managed to evade the killing.

The civil administration participated actively in the planning and perpetration of genocidal shooting operations. In some cases, as we have seen, the Gebietskommissar even provided the shooters. It is important to note that the Gebietskommissar did not assume his post as a criminal killer. His transformation to genocidal perpetrator, like Nazi genocide itself, was the result of a process. Ideologically indoctrinated prior to service in the occupied USSR, civil officials quickly were propelled towards widespread belligerency.<sup>355</sup> Faced with the conditions, expectations and demands of administering vast regions in the east, this belligerency often took the form of “stick discipline”, the harsh treatment of the indigenous population. By early 1942, in the context of an overall push for genocide from Berlin, the civil administration demonstrated autonomy and initiative in its implementation of the policy, thereby entering the third and final phase on their path to genocide. This violent performance is clearly reflected in archetypical readiness to commit murder. While local variances and grey zones existed, by 1942, this archetype is broadly applicable to all Gebietskommissars in Byelorussia.

From the early stages of the occupation, Gebietskommissars did not have an entirely free hand. As early 15 August 1942, civil officials were made aware that orders for mass murder came from the very highest levels of the regime and that Heydrich’s “hope for successful cooperation” between agencies was more

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<sup>355</sup> A 1944 post-evacuation report from the Generalkommissar of Kiev stated that the Gebietskommissars were instructed in training: “Ihr geht in den Osten als Herrenmenschen. Ihr müsst ganz groß repräsentieren! Ihr seid König, Euch steht alles zur Verfügung!” BA R6/15/146-178 “*Erfahrungsbericht über 2 1/2 – jährige Tätigkeit im Generalbezirk Kiew*,” 31.5.1944.

than a wishful suggestion.<sup>356</sup> Further, “uncooperative responses” to mass murder offered little chance of success in the long run and certainly made painfully obvious the practical limitations on Gebietskommissar authority. Effectively painted into a corner, even those that might object, their “notions of territorial authority” offended, were quickly apprised of the murderous realities of the occupation and the power of Heydrich’s agency.<sup>357</sup>

Thus, a definitive line demarcating acceptable from unacceptable translation of policy certainly existed.<sup>358</sup> Yet at another level, as seen in Lida and Sluzk, acceptable behaviour was more elastic than previous scholarship has allowed.<sup>359</sup> Within limits, sharp criticism was indeed possible.<sup>360</sup> Further, Carl’s and Hanweg’s cases raise the prospect that these men had little to fear even when they did not “fall into line.” For Hanweg, neither his “soft” personality nor his very public attempt to protect his Jews, however conditional and ill-fated, led to his removal or punitive actions against him. As for Carl, his letters of protest did nothing to either redress his grievances or undercut his authority.

Yet whatever their initial responses, Gebietskommissars generally proved able to adapt and find a place in the order of things. Certainly, the significance and influence of the SS-police complex in the process of genocide

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<sup>356</sup> Haberer, “German Police,” 23, fn 57.

<sup>357</sup> Ibid, 22.

<sup>358</sup> Browning, “German Killers,” 140-42. This was a similar reality elsewhere as well. In Lida for example, a Jewish survivor later re-called, “even the attempts of the Gebietskommissar were of no avail,” his “authority...[was] broken and [the fate of Lida’s Jews was] handed over” to their executioners Manor, *Sepher Lida*, XII.

<sup>359</sup> This assessment was further strengthened by the case of Gebietskommissar Carl (Sluzk) and his protests to Kube after the shooting 30.10.1941.

<sup>360</sup> Browning, “German Killers,” 138-141.

must not be downplayed. However, the actual behaviour of Gebietskommissars in the process of mass murder suggests that a significant broadening of killers to encompass a “lethal combination of Sipo/SD and civil-police administrative agencies” is needed.<sup>361</sup> In short, able to imitate and in some cases initiate, the civil administration was not marginalized or swept aside but proved central to the extermination process.

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<sup>361</sup> Haberer, “German Police,” 391-2.

## Chapter 5

### “The Demands of the Day”: Gebietskommissar as Perpetrator

“Was aber ist deine Pflicht? Die Forderung des Tages.”  
Johann Wolfgang von Goethe<sup>362</sup>

As we have seen, Gebietskommissars were intimately involved in murder. In important cases, they acted not only as accomplices but initiators and as the very linchpin of mass murder.<sup>363</sup> The central question is: what drove Gebietskommissars to cooperate, facilitate and ultimately, in some cases, personally commit crimes of genocide? An attempt to answer this question requires an examination of Gebietskommissar motivations on various levels.

At the most basic level, proving a crime requires the demonstration of means, motive, and opportunity. For the Gebietskommissar, culpability can be established on at least two levels: (a) in regard to representing the regional civil administration involved in crimes and (b) personally permitting, endorsing and committing various crimes.<sup>364</sup> On these two levels, a range of behaviour is evident, particularly in regard to (b). At both levels, administratively and actively, the *actus reas* seems clear enough. But only by establishing *mens rea* and therefore motive, can the civil administrator be understood as personally liable and culpable. Guilt therefore remains a complex and varied issue.

Gebietskommissars were not guilty by association but rather because they held

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<sup>362</sup> “But what is your duty? What the day demands.” *Sprüche in Prosa III*, 151.

<sup>363</sup> An important representative example is the “Testimony of Artur Wilke,” BA ZS AR-2218/60 v.16, 2224.

<sup>364</sup> Such crimes include facilitating murder, murder and attendant “cover-up” crimes.

and maintained positions inherently encompassing command responsibility. In short, the buck stopped at their desks.

While larger *Aktions* generally were executed by other agencies such as the *KdS*, the local civil administration proved an important participant in the organizational preparation and execution of mass killings as shown in the previous chapter. Certainly, *Gebietskommissars* represented an administration that within the framework of the “Final Solution” generally conformed and even lent active assistance to the grisly work of mass murder.

Individual commission of crimes, beyond those directly related to or demanded by the office of *Gebietskommissar*, prove less consistent. With these crimes, they went above and beyond their official tasks, modifying behaviour to conform to what was perhaps expected or to meet some other, more personal motive. On this level, a range of behaviour is discernable. While some were, at least initially, hesitant, others displayed a remarkable degree of brutality and became eager killers. However, while not usually engaged directly in the killing during larger operations, many got their hands dirty in individual, isolated cases.

However, administrative participation is hardly less culpable than active participation. Whether or not a *Gebietskommissar* personally engaged in killing is often difficult to establish. In specific cases, some did, as they and their subordinates engaged in extracurricular cruelties and murder.<sup>365</sup> Yet what remains clear is that, at minimum, they were generally “on site” and active in the commission of crimes in the line of duty, as it were.

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<sup>365</sup> This phenomenon was certainly evidenced in Lida, Wilejka, Slonim and Glebokie.



Their first task was representing the interests of the Reich.<sup>366</sup> Of course, such a broad responsibility would be realized in more concrete or ideally, manageable forms. In terms of Germany's "Jewish problem," Gebietskommissars regularly and consistently used the means at their disposal to assist and, in some cases, manage, the destruction of Jews in their jurisdiction. The district civil administration made consistent and highly effective efforts to be valuable, even in tasks with which they were not officially charged. Their relative autonomy in the "wild east," to use Ben Shepherd's expression, certainly made their efforts easier to realize.<sup>367</sup> The primary means by which this was achieved was the utilization of police assets and the experience and role in ghetto administration.<sup>368</sup> In carrying out their responsibilities the Gebietskommissars could carve out an important place for themselves in the "machinery of destruction." Their concrete responsibilities for these portfolios meant that they had acquired important experience and familiarity in "Jewish affairs" on which the SD could rely, particularly by 1942 when the direction of Jewish policy became abundantly clear. While not indispensable, the local civil administration certainly had means to facilitate murder, ensuring that the Gebietskommissar was often not only an accessory but in many cases a key operator.

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<sup>366</sup> *Braune Mappe*, 3716-18.

<sup>367</sup> Ben Shepherd, *War in the Wild East: The German Army and Soviet Partisans* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004).

<sup>368</sup> These areas were certainly parts of the responsibilities given to the local civil administration. BA-L AR-Z 228/59, 87-88.

In several instances, anticipatory obedience and a voluntary spirit to perform according to Nazi dictates led Gebietskommissars and their staffs to engage in activities that were outside their jurisdictions. Thus, there was a hidden transcript within the constant negotiating of the Gebietskommissar for a “seat at the table.” In Glebokie, Hachmann had Roma shot out of hand; in Lida, Hanweg’s *Stabsleiter* Windisch consistently tormented and murdered individual Jews; in Slonim, Gerhard Erren ensured his staff “got in on the action” of cleansing his domain of Jews; and in Hansewicze district, in the town of Lenin, civil officials stood at the pit’s edge shooting women and children in the head.

The line between concrete responsibilities and acceptable supplementary behaviour seems vague indeed. By exploiting necessities on the ground and carefully making use of personal networks, space existed for a Gebietskommissar to prove his ideological commitment and reinforce the value of his office by linking it to the officially sanctioned Nazi killing campaign.<sup>369</sup> At the local level, Gebietskommissar initiative and a willingness to cooperate could engender close collaboration and a relatively positive interagency working relationship.<sup>370</sup>

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<sup>369</sup> This dynamic certainly mirrors what Hans Mommsen identified as “cumulative radicalization.” Further, it is also similar to “the working towards the Führer” process asserted by Ian Kershaw whereby “initiatives formulated at different levels, and by different agencies of the regime attempted to accommodate the ideological drives, the “ideas” of National Socialism, located in the person of the *Führer*, thus gradually became translated from utopian “vision” into realizable policy objectives.” See Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, 1889-1936: Hubris* (London : Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 1998), 542.

<sup>370</sup> BA R94/8, Gebietskommissar Brest Situation Report,” 24.6.1943 and BA R94/8 “Gebietskommissar Brest Monthly Report,” 16.10.1943 and “Gebietskommissar Brest. Situation Report,” 23.12.1943. These examples of

A capable Gebietskommissar could ensure both continued relevance and an important role in Jewish policy right to the end. In their jurisdictions, they are not swept aside by other agencies. Rather than being detached, they were central to the realization of the core Nazi reality: a world free of Jews. Within this context, an ambitious and wily Gebietskommissar could effectively juggle ideological imperatives and the needs of his own local administration. While limits certainly existed, power must be understood in its application rather than simply being what was stated officially. Willy Müller, for example, understood that some of his work Jews would die in summer 1943, but through his personal relationship with the local SD chief, he was able to select who was hanged. Similarly, in Lida, Hermann Hanweg's personal involvement in the "right-left" selection of Jews was certainly influenced by his own personal needs and tastes. Therefore, while in hindsight it is clear all Jews would die eventually, some Gebietskommissars did effectively wield considerable influence and power to actually preserve "their Jews." As we know, in Lida, Hanweg's assistant, Leopold Windisch claimed that his boss allowed his own needs to cloud his judgement in determining who would die. He charged Hanweg with softness and possessing a rather lax attitude toward "his Jews." For his part, Windisch revealed himself to be a sadistic thug and brute in addition to his ideological commitment.

In terms of Jewish policy, a Gebietskommissar could take advantage of the ill-defined policies and decentralized power through his own initiative and

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very candid situation reports showed both the positive cooperation that took place and also, in some cases, the growing pressures on inter-agency relations. Also see Browning, "German Killers,"<sup>142</sup>.

improvisation. In this environment, effective power and the ability to make things happen was, at the local level, highly diffused rather than the sole property of a single agency. This reality was clearly evident in liquidation operations. While the overarching context was set in Berlin and interpreted primarily through the RSHA, at the regional level responsibility and power was more shared, with *ad hoc* solutions more appropriate and interagency coordination and cooperation more necessary. Here the Gebietskommissar was a key player.<sup>371</sup>

But why and how did a Gebietskommissar become a perpetrator? What shaped his responses to authority, in this case the necessity to plan and participate in carrying out mass murder? To more fully understand the Gebietskommissar as perpetrator, consideration of both the individual's past and the specific nature of eastern deployment prove critical elements. External or situational influences can be understood as elastic, both constraining and enabling individual conduct. Such influences have long been portrayed as primary in understanding behaviour, particularly in deviant forms. Certainly, the immediate context of the occupation is essential to more fully comprehending Gebietskommissar behaviour and motives. Whatever their interests and belief systems, eastern deployment and the realities of rule provided both the demand and opportunity to kill. Just as Timothy Mulligan noted that the ideological imperatives ensured the particular contours of the occupation, so also did the immediate context of life on the fringe form more links in the murder chain. It remains unlikely that Heinrich Carl or Hermann Hanweg or even Gerhard Erren,

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<sup>371</sup> This stands in contrast to Steinberg, "Third Reich Reflected," 621.

the “Bloody Kommissar,” would have been mass murderers without the local events, conditions and opportunities in the east.

People kill but the larger question to address this is: why these people? To understand why these people engaged in atrocities without either much prompting or protest, the interplay between personality and historical context or contemporary realities is equally relevant. In general, Gebietskommissars were not “ordinary Germans.” But this does not exclude the fact that, in many ways, they were subject to the same motives and behavioural traits common to all humans. This common experience can be understood as having three core components: ethnocentrism, xenophobia, and the desire for social dominance as expressed in aggression and violence.<sup>372</sup>

Regional origin is an important factor in understanding the foundations of ethnocentrism. Gebietskommissars tended to hail from border regions. Pre-war experience, regional origin and the disputed nature of the frontier could not only engender, but reinforce the “us-them” aspect of national identity and group membership. Between the wars, Germany’s borderland was frayed, fusing historically and within the regional and national consciousness with the post-1918 “lost lands.” On this frontier, clear ethno-national divisions existed, heightened by the experience of war and defeat. In this context, clear lines between communities, imagined or not, promoted and intensified tendencies toward ethnocentrism.<sup>373</sup>

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<sup>372</sup> Waller *Becoming Evil*, 157.

<sup>373</sup> See Modris Eksteins, *Walking Since Daybreak : A Story Of Eastern Europe, World War II, And The Heart Of Our Century* (Boston, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin

Regional origin, life experience and professional association also reinforce innate xenophobic tendencies. Similarly, such tendencies were certainly exacerbated by the experiences of national defeat, paramilitary service, socio-economic turmoil and the rise of the Nazi alternative. Seen in this way, ideological solidarity with the tenets of Nazism could act to reinforce additional factors such as group solidarity, careerism and previous involvement in violent actions. The *Weltanschauungskrieg* in the east heightened already existing elements of xenophobia and ethnocentrism required for war-making, introducing a genocidal imperative. Not only was “us” and “them” determined and reinforced by experience, but also actively evoked through the militarized and ideologically charged atmosphere of the occupied territories. The Gebietskommissars knew who was “in” and who was “out.”<sup>374</sup>

In the extremely ideologized conditions of the east, these sensibilities were more amenable to the genocidal radicalization of Jewish policy. In this culturally alien atmosphere, Gebietskommissars were exposed to large numbers of “real Jews.” Many of these were unassimilated and conformed to Nazi caricatures and negative stereotypes that also encompassed indigenous Slavs and gypsies. Not only were German faces in short supply but so too were those others who could be considered safe or familiar. Far from familiar or safe, the east was alien and dangerous, both physically and in racial-ideological terms. For Gebietskommissars then, two central pressures, racial ideology and an alien

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Co., 1999), 59-95 and *Rites Of Spring : The Great War And The Birth Of The Modern Age* (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 1989), 208-38, 300-31.

<sup>374</sup> USHMM RG 31.002M Reel 11, “*Völker und Volksgruppen der Sowjetunion*,” 20.9.1941.

war-ravished environment influenced behaviour. In short, ideas and experience determined categories of insider and outsider. This lowered whatever barriers to violent behaviour that may have existed.

Collective biography also provides important insights into the development of rank and status. As noted, "Gebietskommissar X" tended to begin his life humbly.<sup>375</sup> Further, education was largely career focused and offered little prospect of significant upward social mobility. The opportunities that did exist generally depended on two factors, martial prowess (or at least engagement) and a social context of turmoil and perceived deprivation. Military service, combat experience and ideological extremism acted as cardinal means by which a transformation from nobody to somebody could be engendered. These factors confirmed familiarity with violent performance and provided a means to achieve vertical social mobility and dominance. Aggression as a tool and expression of social dominance began early in life and was intimately tied to the transformation from outsider to insider.

Adherence to Nazi tenets that, among other things, praised and rewarded the human predisposition to aggressive responses provided a natural next stage in the evolution of the regional commissars. Further, Nazism held sacred the importance of the leader as expressed in the *Führerprinzip*. This ideology then certainly propagated and reinforced the value of a strong authority tempered by (para)military life, combat and party service.<sup>376</sup>

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<sup>375</sup> Supra, Chapter 3.

<sup>376</sup> In early 1943, RKU's Erich Koch reminded his men "In der organisation der Dienststellen der Zivilverwaltung ist das Führerprinzip besonders klar ausgeprägt."

Ideological indoctrination within the party affirmed past experiences and life choices and codified the ill-defined ideology of para-fascism.<sup>377</sup> Additionally, formal ideological training, particularly attendance at the *Ordensburg* schools, marked an important rung in the ladder of ascension through the party ranks. In these schools, "Gebietskommissar X" became more fully indoctrinated with Nazi utopian ultranationalist ideology. In the summer of 1941, they were told to rule, if not told to kill.

While ideological commitment is not necessarily principal in understanding murderous behaviour, it has to be seen as a key factor to genocidal involvement.<sup>378</sup> Nazi ideology was an important facilitator, a totalitarian embrace. Within the precepts of Nazism, significant social and cultural inhibitions, particularly in terms of violent performance and dominance and race war, could be overcome. Moreover, its racial-nationalist contours provided a safety net whereby sense could not only be made of the world in general, but also the particular and peculiar world of the occupied east and the tasks at hand there.

There are important limitations to the extent of ideological commitment as a factor for genocidal involvement; it certainly cannot stand as a mono-causal explanation. As a complementary cause in determining motive and action, rational self-interest provides an explanation in which the ideological care of a command paired with the less utopian notion of self-interest.

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While Koch does suggest that this is particularly important for staff of the RK and GenK, the notion of a trickle down seems implicit. BA R6/228, "*Zentralblatt des RKU* Nr. 7," 6.2.1943.

<sup>377</sup> Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 120-28.

<sup>378</sup> Waller, *Becoming Evil*, 184.



Rational self-interest also ensures a vital degree of agency be credited to historical actors. By featuring self-interest as a factor in understanding the Gebietskommissars, vital aspects of choice and decision-making enter the equation and help explain important realities of their behaviour and perpetration of mass murder. No Gebietskommissars resigned rather than kill. In general, disagreements tended to be over perceived violations of authority and jurisdiction, rather than the morality of mass shootings.<sup>379</sup> In general, the demands of the day meant that the Gebietskommissars would protect their turf. They protested the means and procedures of *Aktions* rather than the murderous actions themselves.

Importantly, personal pursuit of status, rank and dominance was facilitated by the experiential and socio-economic realities evident in the lives of future Gebietskommissars. Affiliation with the NSDAP benefited the individual and confirmed the desirability of membership as a key component of achieving, maintaining and expanding personal power and status. Conversely, this reinforced natural tendencies toward aggressiveness in relation to outsider groups. In a contested environment, such as the occupied east, aggression was more easily expressed in violence. Faced with escalated scales of violence, Gebietskommissars maintained their social status *vis a vis* the insider group by making themselves indispensable in servicing the “machinery of destruction.” Simultaneously, violence also promised to maintain and expand their dominance

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<sup>379</sup> The two most compelling cases are Sluzk and Brest-Litovsk.

in relation to outsiders. In terms of both garden variety brutality and mass murder, the Gebietskommissars “killed two birds with one stone.”<sup>380</sup>

Striving for social dominance is certainly a fluid, negotiated and vulnerable experience. Clearly, there exists the potential to express dominance through aggressive responses. This predisposition towards aggression as a means to both secure and maintain status is also evident in the collective biography of Gebietskommissars. The Gebietskommissar’s position as the “sole representative of the Reich” in his fiefdom set the pecking order from early on. While other agencies certainly were present throughout the occupation, the Gebietskommissar sat a long way from Riga, Minsk or Kiev and even further from Berlin. He had been instructed to see himself and act as a “king of the east.”<sup>381</sup> At his disposal were not only the mechanisms of socio-economic dominance *vis a vis* the indigenous population, but also the tools of coercion in the form of police assets. Indeed, whatever the limits of his power and therefore social dominance, on most days he was supreme.

The role and centrality of Gebietskommissars in local killings shows them to be autonomous actors capable of specific “subjective calculations” promoting

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<sup>380</sup> It must be noted that while “stick discipline” was certainly a hallmark of the regime, there was a realization among some at the local level of its limitations and dangers. While the application of violence was re-thought by some, the tendency was to consider who the target was rather than the overall limitations of the actions themselves. In short, some local officials began to realize and report that violence did not solve all problems and could actually do more harm than good, in regards to certain groups such as farmers and indigenous workers. See *Infra*, Chapter 6.

<sup>381</sup> See earlier discussion on selection and training, *Supra*, Chapter 3.

benefit in relation to perceived cost and acting accordingly.<sup>382</sup> Rational self-interest promoted the pursuit of positive outcomes and was not incompatible with ideological commitment. While the positive outcomes of mass murder for adherents to the goals of Nazi racial policy were, by 1942, fairly obvious, for the individual Gebietskommissar as perpetrator, rational self-interest added two valuable elements: professional and personal self-interest. By pairing these with ideological commitment, a fuller explanation of both why they engaged in mass murder is possible.

Eastern deployment in 1941 certainly marked the pinnacle of their power. Upon deployment they could take what they wanted and largely do what they wanted.<sup>383</sup> They also had the power of life and death. Additionally, eastern deployment meant Gebietskommissars were at the centre of the action. The war in the Soviet Union was the “real war” and Gebietskommissars were not only at the heart of it but charged with an important role: constructing the Nazi new world order. For these men of humble origin and status, could any more important position of authority have been imaginable, could any task, any demand have been too onerous? Not only did deployment mark a professional high-water mark but it also cemented the reality that, as Henry Friedlander noted in relation to Nazi doctors, they were quite significant.<sup>384</sup> In this way a blurring of

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<sup>382</sup> Waller, *Becoming Evil*, 190-91.

<sup>383</sup> BA-L AR-Z 94d/59, v.5, 708-907 contained numerous witness statements regarding this ability. Also see NA RG 238/PS-2174 and Lower, *Nazi Empire-Building*, 110.

<sup>384</sup> Henry Friedlander, “The T4 Killers” in Michael Berenbaum and Abraham Peck (eds.), *The Holocaust And History : The Known, the Unknown, the Disputed*

professional and personal self-interest is evident. As long-time political soldiers and cogs in the party machinery, their position as functionary was central to defining their identity.<sup>385</sup> As Andreas Zellhuber noted, the position of Gebietskommissar marked both a professional and personal fulfilment and the prospect of both promotion and financial gain. As a “career-break” or a reward for service, eastern deployment represented professional ascent.<sup>386</sup>

However, given the relative scarcity of the documentation, understanding personal self-interest as a motivating factor for Gebietskommissar is difficult. But some important clues suggesting its relevance are evident. At the local level, regional commissars played big roles. Three examples are indicative of the egotistical aspects in their personality and behaviour.<sup>387</sup> Heinrich Carl aggressively intervened to end the wild killing spree in Sluzk and even protested in writing to his superior in Minsk, Wilhelm Kube.<sup>388</sup> While in this case, the limits of Gebietskommissar authority were certainly exposed, Carl’s forceful personality and belief in his authority are striking. Whatever the message the killers were sending, Carl did not take it kindly.

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*and the Reexamined* (Bloomington, Ind. : Indiana University Press, 1998), 246 and Gerhard Weinberg, “The Allies and the Holocaust” in *Ibid*, 488-89.

<sup>385</sup> George Browder, *Hitler’s Enforcers: The Gestapo And The SS Security Service in the Nazi Revolution* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1996), 174-77.

<sup>386</sup> Zellhuber, *Unsere Verwaltung*, 185-6.

<sup>387</sup> Waller, *Becoming Evil*, 193.

<sup>388</sup> NARB 370/1/487, “Kube Correspondence,” 21.3.1943. Also see *Nazi Conspiracy*, 787.

In a different vein, Gerhard Erren viewed himself as an ideologically reliable, aggressive and efficient problem-solver.<sup>389</sup> He valued “high standards” and “peak performance” from his subordinates and saw to it personally that the “whole lifestyle” of his office “embodied German culture and the prestige appropriate to it.” As for the indigenous population, Erren sought to teach them the “manners which command the respect...towards the master race.” Survivor testimony further confirms Erren’s nature both as a Nazi fundamentalist and a thoroughly unlikable person.<sup>390</sup> In terms of Jewish policy, he displayed a deadly combination of ideological correctness, professional ability and ruthless personal pride in the tasks. Hermann Hanweg also seemed not only confident but willing to revel in the grandeur of his position. He ruled Lida largely as he wished and even survived the efforts of his subordinate, Deputy Gebietskommissar Leopold Windisch, to have him ousted for his not being Nazi enough.<sup>391</sup> Hanweg was an adulterer who openly flaunted his extra-marital relationship despite his wife’s presence. Further he cultivated a particularly paternalistic relationship with local Jews, so much so that after the war he received credit in the Lida Memorial Book (*Sepher Lida*) as the “godfather of the Jews.”<sup>392</sup> Yet, during the May 1942 shooting operation, and particularly during the infamous selection process, he

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<sup>389</sup> See BA-L AR-Z 228/59, 301. In terms of killings, Erren claimed that with the creation of a ghetto impossible, he “began preparations for a large scale operation.” “Useless eaters” were at the top of the hit list. In terms of other duties, Erren appears less capable. NARB 370/1/487, “Kube Correspondence,” 21.3.1943. Yet despite the negative assessment, Erren fared well in the closing days of the war, even entering the Waffen SS. See Erren profile in Appendix 1.

<sup>390</sup> See Alpert, *The Destruction*.

<sup>391</sup> Detailed extensively in BA-L 94d/59.

<sup>392</sup> See Manor, *Sepher Lida*.

played a central coordinating role, not only inserting himself in the process but also attempting to make his agency indispensable.

Gebietskommissar behaviour represented in these three cases shows that personality played an important role in how a particular area was ruled. It suggests that they invested both their attention and energy in the task and also ruled in accordance with individual egotistical needs and demands. However they ruled, it tended to be more “hands on” than not. In short, in their roles on the grand stage of Nazi theatre in the east, they thought highly of themselves indeed.

Concepts of superiority were both magnified and threatened in the east. On the one hand, threats to life and limb were an everyday reality of deployment. While for much of 1941-1942, the partisan war had relatively little impact on daily life in the Gebiet, Nazi propaganda and racial ideology continued to blur the distinction between military and civilian as enemy. On the other hand, Gebietskommissars found themselves in a precarious position in which inter-agency conflict at higher levels could, potentially, work against them on the periphery.<sup>393</sup> While they did tend to “rule as they pleased”, clearly limits and potential dangers lurked within the system itself. Seen in this way, the east magnified threats and the potential for loss and negative outcomes, whether personal or professional. Consequently, when faced with the demands of the day, Gebietskommissars proved equal to the task, able to insert themselves at

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<sup>393</sup> In practice this was the exception (i.e. Carl) rather than the rule.

the very centre of a *Judenaktion*, either in support like Erren or in opposition, like Carl.

In terms of killing operations, Gebietskommissars, as the representatives of the civil administration, refused to be ignored. Carl's intervention and subsequent protests to Minsk centered on jurisdictional considerations. He would not allow his agency to be irrelevant. Erren, for his part, involved his entire administration in the process of the killing operation and Werner, in Baranowitsche, ordered the killings of Jews personally.<sup>394</sup> In all of these cases, from jurisdictional squabbling to active participation and anticipatory obedience, Gebietskommissars made important efforts to make themselves and their agencies relevant and indispensable in tasks that by 1942 had clearly become an integral component of occupation policy. Individual and institutional ego does not engender violence alone. Yet when threatened, the transition to brutality and repetitive violence becomes likeier. From the outset, Gebietskommissars faced professional and personal threats from both the environment and nature of the occupation. Their actions can therefore be seen as simultaneously reactive and proactive efforts to maintain, reinforce and perhaps expand their authority *vis a vis* the indigenous population and within the Nazi polyocracy. At some tasks, Gebietskommissars fared poorly while in others, particularly murder and genocide, they proved remarkably adept.<sup>395</sup>

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<sup>394</sup> For Rudolf Werner [Gebietskommissar], see Haberer, "German Police," 21-

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<sup>395</sup> *Supra*, Chapters 6-7

The nature and function of the occupational administration is also relevant. Nazism magnified hierarchies of authority, while it also provided access to power, dominance and personal fulfillment.<sup>396</sup> Yet Nazism in turn made important demands on Gebietskommissars. Some of these demands proved too much, while others, particularly the evolutionary radicalization of race policy met with more success and ingenuity. Ideological imperatives ensured a particular flavour to occupation.<sup>397</sup> Mass murder and genocide routinized violence. The demands of the hour required the willingness to kill. More often than not the civil administration responded, as did so many other agencies, “voluntarily, spontaneously and enthusiastically.”<sup>398</sup> With rare exceptions, in the pressure cooker of the east, Gebietskommissars fulfilled their duty with terrible efficiency, with truncheon, noose and rifle.<sup>399</sup>

By 1942, clearly Gebietskommissars were well primed to be killers. The final link in the murder chain, the process of escalating commitment was participation in the large-scale Jewish liquidation operations and ghetto clearings. Whatever the local specifics and idiosyncrasies of each particular operation or the ragbag nature of what had previously passed for Jewish policy, these large-scale actions implicating the civil administration tended to be as brutal as they were analogous.

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<sup>396</sup> See Haberer, “German Police,” 396-98.

<sup>397</sup> See Mulligan, *Politics* for the character of the occupation as incompatible with positive race-population policy. This is also noted in Dallin, *German Rule*.

<sup>398</sup> See Gerhard Paul, *Die Täter der Shoah: fanatische Nationalsozialisten oder ganz normale Deutsche?* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2002), 65.

<sup>399</sup> Zellhuber noted the importance of the Great War experience. Not only could the shame of defeat only be removed by victory in the east, but the Army’s back closely guarded. *Unsere Verwaltung*, 185.



Ideology, history and ethnicity do not kill people. Yet, to an important extent, these factors do matter in understanding perpetrator motivation and decision-making. People and ideology matter. On the one hand, Gebietskommissars were fully immersed in the violent culture of radical paramilitarism and Nazism.<sup>400</sup> On the other hand, beginning in 1941, they found themselves within the context of a *Weltanschauungskrieg* that built on and magnified both their natural and experiential proclivities towards aggression. Gebietskommissars existed in an environment that not so much changed as heightened both latent and learned characteristics.<sup>401</sup>

However evolutionary the radicalization of Jewish policy was, whatever the contours of that murderous problem-solving, Gebietskommissars were eventually tasked with assisting in the genocide of Soviet Jewry.<sup>402</sup> In the end, the demands of the day meant the liquidation of all Jews regardless of whether they were “productive Jews” or useless-eaters. The practiced “muscle memory” of long-time Party functionaries and radical paramilitaries could certainly prove influential. By 1942, whatever their previous anticipatory obedience, Gebietskommissars faced the demand to kill and the opportunity to comply or not. Whatever their personal motive, in every case, whether the results were

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<sup>400</sup> Michael Mann, “Were the Perpetrators of Genocide “Ordinary Men” or “Real Nazis”? Results from Fifteen Hundred Biographics,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 2000 14(3): 351.

<sup>401</sup> Waller, *Becoming Evil*, 228.

<sup>402</sup> Dieter Pohl noted a high degree of “improvisation and chaos” in regards to genocide in East Galicia. Dieter Pohl, *Nationalsozialistische Judenverfolgung in Ostgalizien 1941-1944: Organisation und Durchführung eines staatlichen Massenverbrechens*, (Munich: Oldenbourg Verlag, 1996), 405.

positive or negative for their effective rule, Gebietskommissars complied. When asked “*Was aber ist deine Pflicht?*”, Gebietskommissars responded: “*Die Forderung des Tages.*”

Gebietskommissars were not ordinary men.<sup>403</sup> They were long-term Nazis with practice and ability in the application of political violence. Still, despite their backgrounds in the trenches, *Freikorps* and Party machinery, despite their long-term allegiance and affiliation with the Nazi world view, they did not arrive in the east as mass killers. In 1941, they arrived at their posts knowing that a new reality was in the making and that they would be expected to rule with an iron fist. Yet none could have known the terrible enormity of the radical racial restructuring in the east. Surely, they understood that there would be no place in the new world order for the gypsy, Jew, communist or the mentally ill. But the scope and certainly their role in realizing final solutions to these problems could not have been or ever been guessed. Like many agencies engaged in genocide, the civil administration and the Gebietskommissars were not created or intended for that purpose. But in the undertaking of mass murder, Gebietskommissars and their personnel fashioned and maintained concrete responsibilities. In Weißruthenien, they proved central to the entire undertaking. Time and again, the local civil administration aided and assisted, in some cases even without formal request, agencies specifically charged with the cleansing of Germany's new *Lebensraum*. Consequently, such concrete responsibilities demonstrate their important place within the process of mass murder.

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<sup>403</sup> Mann, “Were the Perpetrators,” 339.

As noted, the Gebietskommissar did not arrive at their posts as mass murderers. It is not surprising therefore that some would hesitate to act, still trying to comprehend that the Nazi project had reached a genocidal stage.<sup>404</sup> Perhaps the most common form of foot-dragging was partial compliance. Orders were carried out reluctantly, complied with technically, if not in spirit. Closely related was the stratagem of prudent selection. In several cases, Gebietskommissars attempted, with varying degrees of success, to exclude some victims. In Sluzk, Carl attempted to retain his Jewish office personnel. While certainly framing his appeals in pragmatic terms, he none-the-less risked raising the ire of his superiors in Minsk. In this case, mixed motives were certainly more evident.<sup>405</sup>

In other cases, “uncooperative responses” do not seem to have been altruistically motivated despite the sometimes good relations enjoyed with the Judenrat and local Jews prior to killings.<sup>406</sup> In Lida for example, Hanweg craftily maintained the persona of “ghetto-godfather”, deceiving local Jews. Even on the appointed “killing day” actively participated in the selection, saving some and dooming others. Thus, we see a variation on leadership style rather than any

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<sup>404</sup> An example of this process is noted in BA R94/6, “SSPF Brest Situation Report,” 15.4.1942.

<sup>405</sup> BA 162/4267, 51-61. “Statement of Heinrich Carl.”

<sup>406</sup> Haberer suggests that such responses to mass murder “were natural enough. It not only offended the Gebietskommissars’ notion of territorial authority (and perhaps basic instinct of decency), but also contradicted official civil administrative policy and directives...” See Haberer, “German Police,” 22.

principled objection or resistance to the killing project itself. In Hansewicze, Willy Müller engaged in 'selective selection' even as late as summer 1943.<sup>407</sup>

The most extreme end of the spectrum is protest. Perhaps the most dramatic instance was the infamous Kube-Strauch affair over the killing of German Jews in Minsk. At the local level however, the immediate and official protests of Heinrich Carl in Sluzk stand out. Yet, as stated, Carl's protests were focused on process and power rather than the actual necessity of the killing itself. Perhaps he showed only a limited degree of insight and lacked the kind of ability possessed by others who better recognized that effective power came from compliance and cooperation. However, it must be acknowledged that Carl did indeed protest, and regardless of the outcome, his authority was real and his wishes and opinion mattered. Yet, in the end whatever their hesitations and evasive tactics, all Gebietskommissars complied to various degrees with the Final Solution.

The ranges of response to mass murder confirm that Gebietskommissars could negotiate orders. They possessed sufficient powers in their areas of jurisdiction to generally act as they wished, modify expectations and create a place for themselves in projects undertaken by other agencies. As all power is relative and dependent on the ability to apply it, the Gebietskommissar's capacity to navigate a hidden transcript confirms the polyocratic nature of power whereby authority diffused from the centre to the periphery.

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<sup>407</sup> BA-L AR-Z 94d59, v. 3.

Given the Nazified, violent and radical backgrounds of the Gebietskommissars, it is unsurprising that eager killers were present in their ranks. With rare exceptions, these individuals, whatever their initial hesitations, quickly embraced violent performance and inserted themselves and their administrations into the broader killing process. Eager killers engaged in violent performance beyond the ordinary run of the mill brutality common to the occupation and attributed ideological significance to their actions. For them, the eastern mission demanded the most radical solutions. Their actions also suggest the existence of motives that were not entirely self-serving or base. While eager killers were not necessarily ideological killers, motives that perversely saw murder as virtue and necessity are in evidence. Perhaps the most representative and prolific were Gerhard Erren, Paul Hachmann and Wilhelm Traub.<sup>408</sup> Erren's later sponsored enrolment in the SS and Hachmann's glowing inspection report strongly suggests that a certain level of professional pride.<sup>409</sup>

While Gebietskommissars certainly were radical problem-solvers, they did not just stumble into mass murder. True, not all understood eliminationist anti-Semitism as the cardinal principle of Nazism nor was there universal agreement on the place or fate of Jews. Yet, there was an ideological consensus that Jews

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<sup>408</sup> Importantly, a strong SS link is evident. Traub came to the east an SS man while Erren was later rewarded with membership personally by von Gottberg. See Appendix 1.

<sup>409</sup> This can be contrasted this with Strauch. Also Lower tends to agree with Leyser's assessment: "Gebietskommissars...were disgracing the German uniform, and some had to be sent back to Germany." Lower, *Nazi Empire-Building*, 42.

were at the bottom of the racially-defined food chain. While component motivations might have varied in terms of influence on individuals, most Gebietskommissars in *Weißruhenien* engaged in violent performance and all cooperated at some level with the mass murder of Byelorussian Jewry. As mentioned already, not a single Gebietskommissar in the region resigned his post. Not one offered more than temporary, conditional, unenthusiastic and woolly efforts to save victims of Nazi racism.

### Part III

#### “Kingdom of the Blind”: Management of the Unmanageable

“If you can do a half-assed job of anything, you're a one-eyed man in a kingdom of the blind.”  
*Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.*

In January 1939, Hitler infamously prophesized that the result of another world war would “not be the Bolshevizing of the earth, and thus the victory of Jewry, but the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe.”<sup>410</sup> At the local level, Gebietskommissars and their administrations played important roles in efforts to realize this vision. Clearly, the overarching theme of eastern deployment was the radical racial demographic revolution central to the Nazi worldview. Of course, race policy was more than anti-Semitism, rather an imagining of a multi-runged racial ladder in which the needs of the superior, represented most fully by the Reich, required fulfilment necessarily at the expense of the inferior. In short, Jewish policy was not the sum of the Gebietskommissars’ actions and activities. Genocide was neither their primary nor over riding mandate in the east. While certainly not extracurricular, mass murder proved only a part of their activities. Ironically it was the task that they did best.

The question remains as to what the Gebietskommissars did, what they should have been doing and how they did it after their areas became “*Judenfrei*.” For most, with the noted exceptions of small, remaining pockets of “work Jews,” the conundrum of the “Jewish Question” had largely been solved by the “Second Sweep” and even more definitively by 1943. Even as he engaged himself and

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<sup>410</sup> Adolf Hitler, Reichstag Speech, 30 January 1939.

his administration in the macabre work of mass murder, the Gebietskommissar had many irons in the fire, many tasks and many demands to meet.

As the widespread killing operations wound down, efforts at transforming the occupied space, fully imagined in ideological-racial terms, continued. Gebietskommissars sat at the centre of efforts to meet the needs of the Reich and ensure the continued and increasingly contested occupation of the USSR ran smoothly. In this context, the place and proximity of the Gebietskommissar to the sharp end meant that he was deemed indispensable as paramount agent on the ground for implementing policies and demands from above in the most immediate and direct sense of administrative work.<sup>411</sup> It should be recognized that, with the large scale killings out of the way by autumn 1942, Gebietskommissars still retained their fiefdoms for nearly another two years.

In the broadest of terms, the activities and actions of the Gebietskommissar beyond the Jewish question can be understood as encompassing two core themes: Supplying the Reich (spoliation-exploitation) and restructuring-rebuilding the east. Even at this very general, theoretical level, the eastern mission conformed to the broad brush-strokes of Nazi race and space ideology. Yet, in the Gebiete, racist-ideological intentions often took on a far more practical focus.

Hitler ordered the utilization of the occupied east in service of the German war economy. To this end, the Four Year Plan (*Vierjahresplan*) was central in

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<sup>411</sup> BA R6/230, "*Die Verwaltung in den besetzten Ostgebieten Erfahrungen und Vorschläge*," 24.4.1944, 18. "Der Gebietskommissar kann garnicht vermisst werden, weil er der Träger der unmittelbaren Arbeit ist." The same file also contains "*Gedanken zum Aufbau der Selbstverwaltung im RKU*," Berlin, 22.6.1942, that is the colonial context-representation of the east.



developing and directing the course of economic exploitation. To carry-out the order and oversee its implementation, the *Wirtschaftsführungsstab Ost* (WiFüStabOst) was established under State Secretary Körner as an “umbrella organization” of the Four Year Plan.<sup>412</sup> Given the importance of the economic aspects of the occupation, other agencies, including the *Wirtschaftsstab Ost* (WiStabOst) under the *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* (OKW) and the increasingly dominant SS, operated throughout the occupied areas.<sup>413</sup> Finally, agencies such as *Organization Todt* (OT), *Reichsbahn*, *Reichspost*, the *Zentralhandelsgesellschaft Ost* (ZHO) and some private firms were also active at the local level. While registered with the civil administration, they were not, technically, subordinate to a *Gebietskommissar*.<sup>414</sup> Certainly the responsibilities of the various agencies were often “foggy” and their jurisdictions sometimes ill-defined. Further, agencies at times worked “across” each other, if not directly against, compounding the demands and difficulties that faced the civil administration.

While a certain degree of overlap and redundancy was inevitable, Rosenberg initially stressed the importance of cooperation between the civil administration and the other authorities, primarily the Four Year Plan.<sup>415</sup> Göring and Rosenberg were, however, often at odds, particularly over the nature and application of economic policies. In general, each held a significantly different

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<sup>412</sup> Kay, *Exploitation, Resettlement, Mass Murder*, 18.

<sup>413</sup> Theo Schulte, *The German Army and Nazi Policies in Occupied Russia*, (Oxford: Berg, 1989), 62-5.

<sup>414</sup> Lower, *Nazi Empire Building*, 104; Berkhoff, *Harvest*, 40-1; Appendix II.

<sup>415</sup> Zellhuber, *Unsere Verwaltung*, 285.

outlook on the economic uses of the east. Where Rosenberg produced the *Braune Mappe*, Göring's *Grünen Mappe* laid out his own intentions for the territory.<sup>416</sup> Each agency codified a very different understanding of the process and means for the fullest "utilization" of captured areas. In the end, while negotiations attempted reconciliation, conflict rather than cooperation was largely the norm at the higher levels.

In February 1942, yet another authority arrived at the local level. The appointment of Fritz Sauckel as plenipotentiary of labour procurement (*Generalbevollmächtigte für den Arbeitseinsatz*: GBA) meant that Gebietskommissars were expected to manage both a relationship with another agency and also the negative consequences of its policies and practices. Sauckel's goal was to extract the maximum number of foreign workers for employment in the Reich. Consequently, as Zellhuber noted, the GBA "in a number of respects collided with the political objectives of the RmfdbO and other vital interests of the National Socialist state."<sup>417</sup>

Working through the Labour Departments and Labour Offices at the various levels of the civil administration, the GBA imposed strict quotas. For example, in October 1942, 250,000 workers were required from OMi area while in March 1943, 5,000 workers a day were expected. By 14 April 1943, Sauckel reported to Hitler that "in one year...3,638,056 new foreign workers have been

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<sup>416</sup> For a fuller discussion of the *Grünen Mappe*, see *Ibid*, 287-8.

<sup>417</sup> Zellhuber, *Unsere Verwaltung*, 293.

added to the German war economy.” Six weeks later, an “846,511 additional foreign laborers and prisoners of war were incorporated.”<sup>418</sup>

Initially, Rosenberg stressed cooperation between the civil administration and the GBA. Not only did he believe Sauckel a close comrade but, in fact, had even considered him for the post of Reichskommissar of the Ukraine. However, GBA demands and practices, from recruiting volunteers to brutal “round-ups” beginning in mid-1942, undercut Rosenberg’s intentions.<sup>419</sup> At the local level, the civil administration soon found quotas disproportionately large, threatening their own needs.<sup>420</sup> Additionally, increasingly coercive means of “recruitment” only exacerbated the partisan threat. For Gebietskommissars, GBA policies proved a dual threat. On one hand was the danger of administrative redundancies and an increased workload while on the other was the threat of a loss of influence.<sup>421</sup> In the end, irreconcilable differences and conflicting aims were never fully rectified. Thus, if the goal of maximum exploitation of the east was a straight-forward, coordination, specific policies and practical application was not.

The plethora of Nazi agencies such as the Wehrmacht’s *Wirtschaftsstab*, Göring’s *Wirtschaftsführungsstab* and Sauckel’s labour procurement office and their often conflicting objectives is clearly evident in the Gebietskommissars’ struggle to cope with the demands made on them in the exploitation of labour

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<sup>418</sup> Reprinted in *Nazi Conspiracy*, Vol. 1, Chapter 10: “The Special Responsibility of Sauckel”, 909.

<sup>419</sup> An excellent discussion of GBA policies and methods is found in Berkhoff, *Harvest*, 253-64.

<sup>420</sup> For example, compulsory recruitment and deportation would send 100,000 Ukrainians to the Reich by June 1942. Dean, *Collaboration*, 112.

<sup>421</sup> Zellhuber demonstrated these dual dangers in regards to the RKO. *Unsere Verwaltung*, 297.

and agriculture. Indeed, investigating food economics and labour procurement on the local level offers insights to a better understanding of the nature of the German “colonial experience” and the Gebietskommissars’ “management of the unmanageable.” Although much has been made of the tug of war at the higher levels, these conflicts assume a different complexion when examining the place of food economics and labour policy in the districts where the priorities and focus of the Gebietskommissars tell a different story.

Between late 1941 and early 1944, occupation officials in Brest-Litovsk produced a flow of reports to their particular superiors detailing the goals, methods and travails of implementing their particular slice of Nazi policy. The following two chapters are based on a case-study of Brest Gebiet (Brest-Litovsk) due to the rich source material regarding the region. However, the findings are reflective of both conditions and problems throughout OMi occupied areas.<sup>422</sup>

Brest Gebiet and Brest-Litovsk Stadt were included in the RKU and maintained both a Gebietskommissar (Curt Rolle) and a Stadtkommissar (Franz Burat) until the two offices were merged in early autumn 1942.<sup>423</sup> Located on the western fringe of the occupied territories, the district and city were part of Generalkommissariat Wolhynien-Podolien. In total, Brest Gebiet was 2,600 km<sup>2</sup> with a population of about 200, 000 while the population of the city was some 54,

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<sup>422</sup> Until 1943 Brest-Litovsk, as well as Kobryn and Pinsk were part of the RKU.

<sup>423</sup> Curt Rolle held the rank of *SA-Standartenführer* and was 38 years old in 1941. Little else is known as his BDC file contained no further data. Franz Burat was 42 years old when deployed to the east. A party man since 1931, he was formerly employed as mayor in East Prussia. Burat was the former Stadtkommissar in Brest and replaced Curt Rolle as Gebietskommissar in September 1942 as the two offices were merged. Browning, “German Killers”, 129.

200. Demographically, the area contained Ethnic Germans, Poles, Ukrainians, Byelorussians, Russians, Jews and Gypsies.

In terms of food economics and labour, as well as partisans, the reports of the Gebietskommissar (and Stadtkommissar), the Gendarmerie District Leader and the District Agriculturalist paint a compelling portrait of everyday life in the region, offering an often surprisingly candid look at the goals, achievements, short comings, pressures and adaptations of the incumbents. The following chapters reproduce in microcosm the “real realities” of food exploitation, the pressures and *cul de sac* of the historical situation facing the Gebietskommissar.

In chapter six, the application and impact of taxation and food policies at the local level are addressed. Given their centrality to the “eastern mission,” Gebietskommissars possessed a relatively clear understanding of these economic demands upon arrival. In the RKU, each one received a thorough briefing from Reichskommissar Koch laying out his expectations. For Gebietskommissars, “the first priority in regards to economic matters [was]: to bring in the harvest and carry out the tilling in autumn. Every Gebietskommissar is personally responsible to me in regards to the fulfillment of the above. The utmost must be done to implement it.”<sup>424</sup> Clearly, this policy was not to be constrained by any consideration of its impact on the indigenous population or the practical difficulties of agriculture planning, procurement and distribution in a war-ravaged environment.

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<sup>424</sup> USHMM RG 31.002M 3206/1/69, 5.9.1941.

The reality of the occupation was indeed a rather straightforward one: the problem was not that there was not enough food, but rather who would get it. The interests of the Reich and the local Nazi apparatus always came first. Seen in this way, the seeming contradiction of a dire food situation and excellent harvest reported in the same situation report can be reconciled.<sup>425</sup> While quantity (and in some case quality) fluctuated, the baseline formula remained unchanged if not unchallenged. A harvest, a sowing season, a crop were good or bad only in terms of meeting quotas and extracting the last full measure from the east. How the indigenous population fared was another question entirely, one holding little interest for the high echelons of the administration but one that Gebietskommissars and their staffs were forced to consider.

The application and interpretation of labour policy, discussed in Chapter seven, marked another fundamental challenge for Gebietskommissars. Compulsory service through a Labour exchange, regulated wages, and an alienated population were the order of the day. To this volatile mix, German authorities added deportation and forced labour in the Reich. As early as late 1941, the civil administration faced increasingly acute shortages. Consequently, not only did the civil administration often struggle to meet quotas but the policy itself fundamentally undercut their relationship with the indigenous population.<sup>426</sup> Yet, as we shall see, effort and adaption at the local level was present, even if the desired results were not.

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<sup>425</sup> An excellent example can be found in BA R94/8, "District Agriculturalist Monthly Report," 9.6.1943.

<sup>426</sup> Josef Stalin sarcastically noted that civil administration provided the best form of propaganda. See Chiari, *Alltag*, 62.

Try as he might, the multiple strains and demands of the environment undercut the efforts of a Gebietskommissar to meet goals and challenges. Further, when discussing efficiency and ability, the contested nature of occupation must remain clearly in focus. Civil administrators, like all historical actors, interacted in a disputed context in which they too were acted on by the situation and by those around them. Further, far from being an orderly *Lebensraum*, the East was a complex and fluid situation necessitating negotiation and compromise.

## Chapter 6

### “Every Single Thing Demands Decision”: Taxes and Food Economics

The Führer alone is the present and future German reality and its law. Learn to know ever more deeply: from now on every single thing demands decision, and every action responsibility. *Martin Heidegger*

Once up and running, the civil administration was expected to be financed directly from a central fund raised through taxes levied within the Reichskommissariats themselves. All the taxes were to be collected locally and flow into the central fund. Actual collection and transfer was to be supervised by the Gebietskommissar.<sup>427</sup> By late December 1941, the tax collection system in Brest-Litovsk was progressing well, apart from the Sabinka region.<sup>428</sup> Staffed by specialists, the Gebietskommissar noted that not only did tax departments “perform their work satisfactorily” but also that the taxes coming in were indeed flowing upstream to the Generalkommissariat.<sup>429</sup> Yet such successes cannot be entirely credited to the ability of the Gebietskommissar. The tax collection system was the old tax system familiar to the indigenous population. In this way, the new regime co-opted both the former district system and also institutions

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<sup>427</sup> USHMM RG 31.002M 3206/1/69, 5.9.1941. In terms of kinds of taxes, the Army introduced several: “a poll tax, dog tax, a scale of fees and a tax on Jews.” See CIDK, 1275/3/662, “Report by FK 675, Abt. VII (Mil. Admin) to SD,” 11.8.1941.

<sup>428</sup> BA R94/7, “Situation Report of Gebietskommissar Brest: Creation of the *Schutzmannschaft*,” 24.12.1941.

<sup>429</sup> *Ibid.*



such as tax collection.<sup>430</sup> Where these did not exist they were created, with considerably less success.

Despite getting off to a generally good start in fall 1941, the situation did not long remain positive. In Brest-Litovsk, Gebietskommissar Curt Rolle noted that the problems in the region of Sabinka were due to the need to establish a tax department and tax collecting apparatus from scratch which meant that, by late 1941, "the work is going very slowly."<sup>431</sup> Further, this diffusion of responsibility meant that the work of the indigenous administration could be unreliable. In late summer 1942, Rolle reported that despite his personal intervention, explanations, instruction and admonishments, the regional administrations had consistently failed to complete requisite income and expenditure reports.<sup>432</sup> Very early on, ambitious Gebietskommissars understood that to be effective "we cannot just sit in the District Commissar's office, we have to go out to ensure the law is observed and issue personal orders."<sup>433</sup> Both the nature and the goals of the occupation therefore seemed to demand that a successful Gebietskommissar be more involved than not. By early 1942, the enormity of the task of financial and budgetary planning was obvious. In late January, Rolle reported that "it will be a year before it will be possible to draw up the final budget plans. We will have to

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<sup>430</sup> BA R94/6, "Stadtkommissar Brest Report," 27.8.1942. The primary taxes would be land tax and income tax.

<sup>431</sup> BA R94/7, "Situation Report of Gebietskommissar Brest: Creation of the *Schutzmannschaft*," 24.12.1941.

<sup>432</sup> BA R94/7, "Gebietskommissar Brest Monthly Report," 22.8.1942. This trend continued into 1943 when it was reported that: "the inspection of several regional financial sectors has found that very imprecise figures are given and despite constant explanations and orders, the work is very poor. Sometimes there is not trained staff." BA R94/8, "Gebietskommissar Brest Situation Report," 24.6.1943.

<sup>433</sup> BA R94/7, "Gebietskommissar Brest Report," 24.1.1942.

manage things here for a year before we obtain a rough idea of the requirements.”<sup>434</sup>

Further, Rolle remarked on the core dilemma facing Gebietskommissars when he stated: “...it is vitally important that the Gebietskommissar is not overwhelmed with red tape.” Faced with a shortage of German personnel in his office, regional administrations were not flush with bureaucrats, having to make do with one official doing the work of “three or four in the more senior department.”<sup>435</sup>

While the system of taxation and methods of collection were familiar, the actual taxes themselves were not. Despite assurances of the initial Wehrmacht administration in summer 1941 that the population would not be required to pay any taxes, the military administration did impose them, even introducing new ones such as “a poll tax, dog tax, a scale of fees and a tax on Jews.”<sup>436</sup> The Gebietskommissar’s administration did nothing to lighten the load. The population, already “not very happy about having to pay taxes,” were faced with an administration that was “continuously imposing new taxes.”<sup>437</sup> Despite the destruction caused by the war and limited crop yield in 1941, the appeals of indigenous regional chiefs that land taxes be adjusted downward were not

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<sup>434</sup> BA R94/7, “Gebietskommissar Brest Report,” 24.1.1942.

<sup>435</sup> Ibid.

<sup>436</sup> CIDK, 1275/3/662, “Report by FK 675, Abt. VII (Mil. Admin) to SD,” 14.8.1941. Unfortunately, the dog tax only yielded a “trifle” which apparently was far more than successful than the “cat tax” which proved simply “unworkable.”

<sup>437</sup> BA R94/7, “Gebietskommissar Brest Monthly Report,” 22.8.1942.

heeded. Seeing that “so far the land tax has been paid without any great problems,” it was not reduced.<sup>438</sup>

In accounting for the “extremely low” level of tax income in late summer 1942, the interplay between taxation, propaganda and the partisan war was not lost on Gebietskommissar Rolle. Noting that collections were “an increasing source of annoyance to the people,” he suggested that only the “usual” taxes be collected or his regime risked placing “propaganda in the hands of the partisans.”<sup>439</sup> Evidently, his recommendations went unheeded as taxation continued, yet “sources of income from the regional administrations [were] even smaller” by year-end.<sup>440</sup>

By mid-1943, the tax system was all but in shambles. Due to large scale budget deficits, each district in the Brest-Litovsk Gebiet was required to make a monthly payment of 17,500 RM. The town itself was an economic catastrophe, operating with a 12,000 RM deficit every month by summer 1943.<sup>441</sup> This financial haemorrhaging resulted from not only the “special tasks for which the town [was] responsible” but also the growing success of Soviet partisan bands. The presence of partisans in rural areas alone made tax collection difficult but, by July 1943, “several places...in the region [were] run by bandits.” Not surprisingly populations in such areas failed to pay their taxes.<sup>442</sup> In August, Rolle conceded

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<sup>438</sup> BA R94/7, “Gebietskommissar Brest Monthly Report,” 24.4.1942. Whatever the pressures placed on the indigenous population, Brest-Litovsk 590,000 RM in taxes were raised in 1941.

<sup>439</sup> BA R94/7, “Gebietskommissar Brest Monthly Report,” 22.8.1942.

<sup>440</sup> BA R94/7, “Gebietskommissar Brest Situation Report,” 31.12.1942.

<sup>441</sup> BA R94/8, “Gebietskommissar Brest Situation Report,” 24.6.1943.

<sup>442</sup> Ibid.

that “as tills are plundered by bandits virtually everyday, it [was] difficult to keep account of the tax receipts in the country areas.”<sup>443</sup>

In Brest-Litovsk, the Nazi regime continued to offer the population two certainties: death and taxes. In the important role of financial exploitation through taxation, the Gebietskommissar faced an increasingly difficult task which presented, in microcosm, an example of the more general failure of the regional civilian administration to effectively carry out their assigned tasks and duties. Taxation was clearly an unpopular policy, like many other Nazi measures. Not only was the increasing tax burden seen as unfair but also, given the prevailing security and provisioning problems facing the population, would not appear to return any tangible benefits. Further, the tax policy was systemically difficult to enforce. As Gebietskommissar Rolle clearly noted, the administrative apparatus in certain regions had to be built from the ground up. Additionally, his office was forced to make use of an indigenous administration that did not meet the demands made on them. Both the unpopularity of policy and the administrative difficulties in its execution were further complicated by the increasingly contested and violent nature of the occupation. The growing partisan war ensured that not only were practical aspects of taxation aggressively challenged but also that the population had other options.<sup>444</sup> In July 1942, it was reported that partisans had

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<sup>443</sup> BA R94/8, “Gebietskommissar Brest Situation Report,” 21.8.1943. This reality he contrasted with the relatively smooth tax collection in areas “where the bandits have no influence.”

<sup>444</sup> In an interesting case of indigenous resistance, Gebietskommissar Burat reported that when the “Ukrainian-German newspaper announced officially that the rouble notes would be withdrawn and a new currency would be issued...we achieved the opposite of what was intended by the secret order. When the

begun to steal the taxes from village mayors even before it could be passed on to the civil administration.<sup>445</sup> Increasingly, as Rolle noted, taxation policy was a propaganda disaster. Additionally, the binary nature of partisan war meant that as Soviet influence spread, the Gebietskommissar's influence waned thereby reducing even the potential for meeting tax goals. Gebietskommissars were painted into a corner from which they could not escape. Whatever their ability, or lack thereof, they were expected to carry out unpopular tasks while simultaneously confronted by an increasingly deteriorating and untenable situation. Taxation policy, akin to food and labour policies reveal critical incompatibilities within Nazi occupation policies and lays bare the Gebietskommissars' failure to either enforce or practically reconcile them.

More important to the local administration than extracting taxes from the indigenous population was the need to meet food quotas. After all, food was a far more practical means by which occupied areas would meet the interests of the Reich. Again, the incoming civil administration continued where the military administration left off. In terms of food and agricultural exploitation, the Gebietskommissar's department collaborated closely with the District Agriculturist ["my District Agriculturist"] and the indigenous administration, headed by a *Rayonchef*.<sup>446</sup> Through this organisational arrangement, food was planted,

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people learnt of the introduction of the new currency, they paid as much tax as possible." See BA R94/7, "Gebietskommissar Situation Report," 20.7.1942.

<sup>445</sup> BA R94/7, "Gebietskommissar Situation Report," 20.7.1942; BA R94/8, "Gebietskommissar Monthly Report," 9.6.1943.

<sup>446</sup> CIDK, 1275/3/662, "Report by FK 675, Abt. VII (Mil. Admin) to SD," 1.8.1941 clearly spelled out are the obligations of the District Chief. See pt.7 concerning food procurement.

harvested, stored and distributed according to a quota imposed from high levels. Quotas and planting-harvest projections tended to be “one size fits all”, imposing levels that did not reflect the realities of a particular area or district but rather the expectations of the regime.<sup>447</sup>

The civil administration also repeated the widespread practice of mirroring what had gone before. As they had done in some many instances, from dividing up the occupied areas to taxation, significant changes to the economic and agricultural systems already in place were resisted.<sup>448</sup> In terms of agriculture, the state farm retained an immense importance and the efforts of the Gebietskommissariat officials tended toward working within an already existing framework. Further, agricultural changes were not to the system itself but rather to the process, directed towards achieving greater output and more efficiency under the watchful eye of German agriculturalists.

Not surprisingly, the massive damage and displacement caused by Operation Barbarossa, wreaked havoc on the initial food situation under the military administration. In early August 1941, the military reported “the food situation is bad” forcing immediate bread rationing at 200g a day. Whatever food was possible to procure in the countryside was moved to the city, reducing the rural population to a subsistence level.<sup>449</sup> In the city, the Army oversaw the re-opening of “40-50 food shops” to service the population with what little food could

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<sup>447</sup> Numerous reports detail the problems of imposing such expectations given the security, demographic and agricultural particularities of each area. For the most part, the quotas tended to be less flexible than not.

<sup>448</sup> It should be noted that the Army followed a similar policy. See CIDK, 1275/3/662, “Report by FK 675, Abt. VII (Mil. Admin) to SD,” 11.8.1941.

<sup>449</sup> Ibid.

be stocked.<sup>450</sup> Empty store shelves would be the hallmark of the occupation for the duration. Still, despite this inauspicious start, within a few days the situation began to improve, by August 14, bread rations had increased to 400g and more shops opened due to the work of the Army's Economic Office. So improved was the situation that "a certain quota" was even granted to local Jews.<sup>451</sup> So positive was the recovery that an Army report gushed that "the markets are well attended, one can hardly talk of poverty any longer."<sup>452</sup> Unfortunately for the indigenous population, late August 1941 would prove the high water mark.

By November 1941, the transfer from military to civilian administration was complete. From the outset, the previous ration levels were a thing of the past. Retaining the ration card system established by their predecessor, the *Gebietskommissar's* or *Stadtkommissar's* office, as in this case, initially set levels at 250g of bread daily and 200g of meat and fat, per person, per week. Jews were to receive 200g of bread.<sup>453</sup> Those employed by German agencies would receive a supplementary soup ration supplied by the civil administration.<sup>454</sup> By late November, *Gebietslandwirt* (District Agriculturalist) Werner Dressler deemed this meagre level unsustainable, forcing the immediate reduction in rations from 250g to 200g of bread with meat and fat dropping from 200g to 100g "due to the

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<sup>450</sup> Ibid, "Report by FK 675, Abt. VII (Mil. Admin) to SD," 1.8.1941.

<sup>451</sup> Ibid, "Report by FK 675, Abt. VII (Mil. Admin) to SD," 14.8.1941.

<sup>452</sup> Ibid, "Report by FK 675, Abt. VII (Mil. Admin) to SD," 31.8.1941.

<sup>453</sup> BA R94/6, "Situation Report of Stadtkommissar," 21.11.41.

<sup>454</sup> Given the racial ordering of the east, ethnic Germans tended to fare better in terms of food allocation. However, they did at times "pester" and complain to the *Gebietskommissar* about both what they were getting and how much they received. For the initial recognition of their "special" status in terms of food see BA-MA Freiburg RH 23/228, "Commander of Rear Army Area Centre. Section VII, Administration Instruction No.11, 27.11.1941," 10.12.1941.

problem with food supply.”<sup>455</sup> With the onset of winter, the civilians saw their bread staple reduced twenty percent and their meat protein and fat chopped by fifty percent. Thus by year’s end, the population faced two competing pressures: a lack of food and a low income making the black market as increasingly expensive as it was indispensable. From the occupier’s view, the volatility of the situation had yet to sink in. In late November, Brest Stadtkommissar Franz Burat even stated that food supplies were satisfactory as a result of the local’s foresight to “stock up.”<sup>456</sup>

Given the timetable of the 1941 invasion and subsequent administrative restructuring of the captured territory, it was expected that only in 1942 could food production and exports get into full swing. In 1942, “Guidelines for Spring Planting” were produced and circulated for implementation. According to this plan, projections for planting and crops foresaw significant rises in food production. The difficulties inherent in exploiting the RKU to feed the Reich were not entirely discounted; the projections themselves seemed to largely ignore them. Whatever the potential pitfalls to RKU agricultural exploitation, the guidelines clearly expected a bumper crop anticipating, for example, a 250% increase in corn production.<sup>457</sup> At the local level, such projections must have seemed highly theoretical and removed from the realities and pressures of everyday life. As early as December 1941, the Gebietskommissar of Brest-

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<sup>455</sup> For appointment of Dressler as District Agriculturalist (located in Domachevo) see BA R94/7, “Situation Report of Gebietskommissar Brest,” 10.12.1941.

<sup>456</sup> BA R94/6, “Situation Report of Stadtkommissar,” 26.11.1941.

<sup>457</sup> See “Guidelines for Spring Planting” in USHMM RG 31.002M 3206/1/12/24.



Litovsk reported to Generalkommissar Klemm that already the demands of provisioning were proving difficult to meet. Army demands for increased cattle (up to 3000 a month) could not be met “without causing damage” while the provisioning of potatoes and bread (to the Army) remained “feasible” only at the cost of cutting civilian rationing.<sup>458</sup> So important was troop provisioning that Rolle even hoped to keep a local brewery open to supply the Army with beer despite his concern that only three months worth of barley remained. Beer-making in the face of reduced rations certainly reveals the priorities of the local regime.

Yet continuous interest in the mood and, to a limited extent, the welfare of the indigenous population is also in evidence. To help ensure continued continued passivity, Stadtkommissar Burat doled out a free lunch in late December 1941, and reported that: “so far, no ill-feeling as a result of the reduction of the food rations has been identified.”<sup>459</sup>

However, despite the supposed lack of “ill-feeling” noted by the Stadtkommissar, Gebietskommissar Rolle clearly understood the link between security assets on hand and the continued success of provisioning and spoliation. On Christmas Eve 1941, he cautioned his superiors against a plan to remove military forces from his Food and Agricultural Department stating: “Removing them would result in the immediate standstill of the Food and

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<sup>458</sup> BA R94/7, “Situation Report of Gebietskommissar Brest,” 10.12.1941. This report confirms Rolle’s adoption of the Distinct Agriculturalist’s recommendation for ration cutting. Also see BA R94/7, “Situation Report of Stadtkommissar Brest,” 26.11.1941. This also confirms that the Gebietskommissar himself “set [the] ration...for the civilian population.”

<sup>459</sup> BA R94/6, “Situation Report of Stadtkommissar Brest,” 23.12.1941.

Agricultural Department.”<sup>460</sup> However accurate and prophetic his year-end report would prove, Rolle’s overall assessment of his food economics situation remained positive. As predicted, he reported, the harvest was a good one, to the extent that ghettoized Jews were given some potatoes and bread in an effort to prevent epidemics.<sup>461</sup> Yet the clear purpose of the Food and Agricultural Department remained sharply in focus as the report projected that while “the supply of food for the troops and the German employees in the district is guaranteed,” the supply of food for the local people is only partially guaranteed.”<sup>462</sup> As early as the end of 1941, the contours of the relationship between the civil administration and food economics had largely been established. The interplay between extraction, provisioning and security would increasingly come to dominate not only official reporting but also the day to day work and life of the Gebietskommissar.

In early 1942, the civil administration had yet to oversee a full planting season. As planting projections came from the centre to the periphery, the situation on the ground remained “satisfactory” but clearly tenuous. For the civilian population, the winter of 1941-1942 was survived not by Nazi generosity

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<sup>460</sup> BA R94/7, “Situation Report of Gebietskommissar Brest,” 24.12.1941. It is noteworthy that in the same report, Rolle informed his superiors of the creation of the *Schutzmannschaft*. Evidently, he felt that military forces were more appropriate than police for the use with the Food and Agricultural Department.

<sup>461</sup> By way of example, Rolle reported that 100,000 kg of rye had been harvested in a “large community.” *Ibid.*

<sup>462</sup> *Ibid.*

but rather by living off stockpiled food.<sup>463</sup> At the same time, the Army Supply Office continued to make larger demands, particularly for cattle. However, the Gebietskommissar remained confident in his thrift and forethought, boasting of the 2000 tonnes of potatoes stored away for “the Wehrmacht and some for the civil administration.”<sup>464</sup> Yet the overall situation was far from ideal. Clearly briefed by the Food and Agricultural Department, the Gebietskommissar provided a frank assessment of the challenges faced in the district. Not only were cattle stocks “very poor due to the management of the Bolsheviks” but the fifty-six state farms in the region were in poor condition requiring “great effort” to develop in the upcoming year. Finally, nature too seemed to conspire against the occupiers as the fall frost had prevented about forty percent of the fields in the region from being sown.

By February 1942, the food situation of January had clearly deteriorated, evidenced by the dwindling supplies of the indigenous population. While the various German agencies continued to be well supplied, within about half a year of assuming their posts, the Gebietskommissar faced a pattern of subsistence and starvation, a hallmark for the remainder of the occupation.<sup>465</sup> Beginning in

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<sup>463</sup> The Stadtkommissar in Brest reported in January 1942 that the “majority of the population managed to obtain potatoes before the onset of winter.” BA R94/6, “Situation Report of Gebietskommissar Brest,” 12.1.1942.

<sup>464</sup> BA R94/7, “Monthly Report of Gebietskommissar Brest,” 24.1.1942.

<sup>465</sup> Throughout the occupation, both the police and the civil administration reported that, at minimum, “adequate” provisions were on hand. BA R94/6, “Situation Report from SSPF Brest,” 15.3.1942 and BA R94/6, “Situation Report from SSPF Brest,” 12.6.1942 provide representative examples. It should also be noted that these provisions were not always fully extended to the families of the indigenous police nor were they always particularly plentiful. “Extras” such as

1942, the discourse of reporting also shifted, generally in relation to the everyday realities of survival and starvation confronting the Gebietskommissar. Over the next twelve to eighteen months not only were the efforts, goals and limitations of food economics in the districts exposed, but so too was the focus of the Gebietskommissar: (1) food and the local population; and (2) food for the Germans both inside and outside Reich.

Reports sent to superiors detailing the situation on the ground tended to be as candid as they were personal. In terms of provisioning, the Gebietskommissar talked in first person, stating: "I cannot feed the local people with the twenty percent meal wage. The Jews have not had any bread for three months. The Aryans have been put on half rations." Surprisingly, Rolle laid the blame not on the "usual suspects" but rather on "the efforts of the predecessor of my District Agriculturalist, who took every last thing from the farmers."<sup>466</sup> His remedy clearly showed his detachment from the ideological imperatives underpinning the occupation and the expectations of policy makers in Berlin. Yet his ideas were neither extraordinary nor particularly original. As winter slowly turned, Rolle still understood that indigenous farmers could "work voluntarily for us and...with us" and therefore "we cannot let them starve." The alternative to his plan seemed obvious: "the risk that in the coming year they [the peasants] will use all their skills and arts to deceive us."<sup>467</sup>

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tobacco could also be in short supply. BA R94/6, "Situation Report from SSPF Brest," 12.6.1942 .

<sup>466</sup> BA R94/7, "Monthly Report of Gebietskommissar Brest," 24.2.1942.

<sup>467</sup> Ibid.

The tone of the reports and its language provides important insights into the possibilities and limitations for the Gebietskommissar. In terms of food economics, broad policies mandated by the centre were, at the local level, more practically and specifically applied. Akin to Carl's experience with mass murder, Rolle believed that his ideas were valuable or at least relevant and that he possessed long-standing ("I *still* maintain") and first-hand experience that his superiors might be interested in hearing. While the reports do show a Gebietskommissar who understood that decisions were at levels above his head, as it were, he did continue to involve himself intimately in the application of policy and to offer both his suggestions and candid criticisms. Further, the reports often portray a pattern of local initiative, followed by a report to that fact. In this way, superiors could be presented with a *fait accompli* resulting from the leadership style of the Gebietskommissar and/or the substantial local pressures. In using the collective "we" to express his views on policy and direction, he clearly saw himself and his office as part of the process. Finally, while exculpatory motives should not be dismissed, neither should the blunt nature of reporting.<sup>468</sup> While expectations in the occupied east proved increasingly more Sisyphean than utopian, the local occupation administration's frustration became increasingly obvious and shrill. Clearly, even at the lowest level of the Nazi hierarchy, some space existed to offer a dissenting perspective.

By mid-spring 1942, a limited amount of food had made its way into the market, yet the rations remained small, insufficient to meet the needs or, to

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<sup>468</sup> Note that other agencies such as the SSPF and the District Agriculturalist were often equally candid.

“solve the problem of hunger in the population.”<sup>469</sup> Increasingly, the local population turned to the black market. However, its high prices meant that the better off proved the more regular customers.<sup>470</sup> The black market filled an important need, yet its very existence would certainly have sent the wrong message to the indigenous population about both the nature and the current state of the occupation regime.<sup>471</sup> As early as spring 1942, local Nazi authorities began to show concern that not only was their command of the “food war” slipping but also of the propaganda war. Despite the ration card system, rations themselves were irregular. Some locals had even started to claim they were better off “under the Bolsheviks” while Wilhelm Rohde, the Brest *SS-und Polizeistandortführer* (SSPStOF) noted an increase in the local crime rate.<sup>472</sup> By mid 1942, local agencies spoke now of a “hunger problem” and offered both an assessment and critique of the current occupation trajectory by co-opting a Nazified ideological framework. In an extraordinary situation report from mid-June 1942, the Gebietskommissar’s SSPStOF reported: “Even the most uncultivated of people lose all interest in work if nothing is done to solve the problem of hunger.” He continued: “Have people forgotten that in the German

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<sup>469</sup> BA R94/6, “Situation Report from SSPF Brest,” 15.4.1942.

<sup>470</sup> Ibid; BA R94/6, “Situation Report of Stadtkommissar,” 22.5.1942.

<sup>471</sup> Police reports maintain that the main problem was not the scarcity of food on the black market but the price.

<sup>472</sup> BA R94/6, “Situation Report from SSPF Brest,” 12.6.1942. Note that this interpretation was not universal within the civil administration. The Stadtkommissar, certainly further removed “from the action” than the SSPst, continued to link crime to the “low ethnicity” of the indigenous population. However, the Gebietskommissar was certainly made aware of the interpretation by the early months of 1942, as the police were reporting that food deprivation and the general poor state of affairs might also have some place in the equation. BA R94/6, “Stadtkommissar Brest,” 12.1.1942.

Reich communism was not vanquished solely by Nazi philosophy, the main factor was the resolution of the hunger problem.”<sup>473</sup> The dangerous results of missing this reality were presented as threefold: partisan growth, lost work and increased crime.<sup>474</sup> The importance of these reports lie not only in what was said (and why) but how and when. Clearly, local occupation agencies felt compelled to offer their comments and solutions into situations and problems with which they had both first-hand experience and an important investment. In short, they were doing more than following orders but also engaging in a two-way discourse between the centre and periphery. Whatever the value placed on their insights, if any, it is important to note a kind of interagency awareness at the local level. Given the close and generally positive collaboration between the various agencies in the districts, it is not surprising that the critiques, insights, warnings and frustrations voiced by the various organisations were similar in both tone and regularity.

Yet in the face of obvious deprivations and attendant dangers, the Gebietskommissar’s office continued to hold hope of achieving positive outcomes in the near future. At the end of April, the Gebietskommissar reported that half of the available land had already been ploughed and that there were “high

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<sup>473</sup> BA R94/6, “Situation Report from SSPF Brest,” 12.6.1942 .

<sup>474</sup> Rohde reported: “In my opinion these conditions are intolerable and will finally result in people openly joining the partisan camps.” He also asserted that “It [was] quite understandable that work is suffering in these conditions” and that “A man...tends to use all the prohibited means possible to obtain goods for his family, which is unfortunately increasingly the case. When crimes...are committed, unfortunately too little attention is paid to the motive behind them.” Ibid.

expectations” for cultivating even more.<sup>475</sup> However, this cultivation would not stem the tide of starvation, as harvest was still months away. As problems with the food supply continued in May 1942, the civil administration re-opened soup kitchens and ordered that, given the ongoing potatoes shortage, every bit of available land not already given over to crops should be planted with vegetables.<sup>476</sup>

In July 1942, Rolle would learn (if he did not know already), that there was “virtually no bread for the people.” For a local administration not even a year old, the problems seemed as comprehensive as they were insurmountable. Codified in a checklist, Rohde claimed that the indigenous population suffered under circumstances due to:

1. wholly deficient wages
2. wholly inadequate provision of food and clothing of all types
3. enormous increases in all prices
4. difficulty in getting to work because of the confiscation of bicycles
5. inconsiderate removal of workers for the German Reich
6. withdrawal of rouble notes and hence impoverishment of further groups of the population
7. many other drastic measures.<sup>477</sup>

With continued lack of adequate food supplies for the indigenous population, the Gebietskommissar’s police made clear the definitive link between the growing partisan threat and food economics. Increasingly, the relationship between the civil administration and the indigenous population was not a positive one.

Equally, local populations were well aware of the methods and means of the occupiers. In one sense they can be seen as “subjects” in which the

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<sup>475</sup> BA R94/7, “Situation Report from SSPF Brest,” 24.4.1942.

<sup>476</sup> BA R94/6, “Situation Report of Stadtkommissar,” 22.5.1942.

<sup>477</sup> Importantly, the upshot was that “the locals accept everything calmly.” BA R94/6, “SSPF Brest: Situation Report,” 15.7.1942.



Gebietskommissar and his officials took some interest. Local populations knew about partisans, knew about war events, and certainly knew the fate of Jews and other racial enemies.<sup>478</sup> As objects of the on-going Nazi-Soviet propaganda war, the indigenous population were certainly more than passive victims. As we have seen, passivity was a valued state for the local civil administration, prompting *ad hoc* policy alterations and concessions such as soup kitchens and vegetable patches. Certainly, the relationship was a complex one marked by levels of cooperation and co-existence.<sup>479</sup>

Importantly, locals tended to exhibit a rather refined (and practiced) ability to gauge which way the wind was blowing. Shared space and, to a limited degree, experience of occupation realities could engender a situation far different from the expectations of either Moscow or Berlin. In this context, the outsider was not always the German but could indeed be the partisan.<sup>480</sup> While it is certain that

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<sup>478</sup> The local population tended to worry not about the fate of the Jews but rather who would be the next target on the German hit list. For intercommunity fears, suspicions and rumours see BA R94/6, "Report of the Stadtkommissar Brest," 20.7.1942 and BA R94/6, "Report of the Stadtkommissar Brest," 12.7.1942.

<sup>479</sup> For an extreme example see BA R94/6, "SSPF Brest: Situation Report," 15.7.1942 which related an incident in which "the Jewish Order Service seized a Bolshevik who had escaped from prison and delivered him back to prison for the SD."

<sup>480</sup> BA R94/7, "Gebietskommissar Brest Monthly Report," 22.8.1942. "Generally the mood of the population is against the partisans and I am now receiving messages regarding their whereabouts..." The partisan as enemy of the locals was also reflected in numerous other reports. Importantly, in the 22.8.1942 report, Rolle praised the "the work of dedicated mounted anti-partisan squads of *Schuma* and Wehrmacht" as "excellent." Also BA R94/7, Gebietskommissar Report," 24.1.1942 and "Situation Report of Gebietskommissar Brest: Creation of the *Schutzmannschaft*," 24.12.1941. However, it should be noted that skills of some indigenous police were called into question. In late 1942, Gebietskommissar Burat who was neither unsympathetic to his men nor entirely faint of praise reported that: "The police skills of the local policeman

partisans did enjoy some successes in recruiting and certainly operating locally, it should also be noted that they could be seen themselves as outsiders and that neither a general dissatisfaction nor the scale of Nazi anti-Jewish barbarities necessarily pushed locals into the arms of the partisans.<sup>481</sup> The reality on the ground was certainly not a German effort at winning hearts and minds. Rather the civil administration appeared hopeful that a balance was possible whereby some of their mandated tasks might be achieved and some of the negative consequences mitigated in order to get by.<sup>482</sup>

At the local level, three factors were cardinal in the practical failure of the relationship between the occupiers and the occupied: food, labour and events at the front.<sup>483</sup> While the Gebietskommissar had little impact on the last, the others were certainly within his control while still remaining subject to expectations and demands from on-high. By mid-summer 1942, frustrations over local work were

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(*Schutzmannschaften*) are zero." See BA R94/7, "Gebietskommissar Situation Report," 31.12.1942.

<sup>481</sup> Reports also suggest that actions such as worker roundups and the indiscriminate violence of anti-partisan actions were more to blame. "The earlier measures used to combat the partisans were generally rejected by the locals as too many innocent people were involved." BA R94/6, "SSPF Brest: Situation Report," 15.7.1942. Conversely, the partisans themselves were not entirely "local-friendly", as they were known to also burn villages and shoot "recalcitrant inhabitants." See BA R94/7, "Gebietskommissar Agricultural Department, Report of District Agriculturalist Brest," 22.10.1942.

<sup>482</sup> Of course, this tactic was not universal for Gebietskommissars. Rather it served as an important addition to the characterization of civil administrator as incompetent and mindlessly sadistic. Cases such as Gerhard Erren's behaviour as the "Bloody Commissar" are highly representative of this perspective. For Hilberg's reference to Erren see Hilberg, *Destruction*, 147.

<sup>483</sup> This should be distinguished from the more ideological barriers noted in Mulligan whereby the question of German "what if" and "should have" models is largely rendered moot. For a representative example of food see BA R94/7, "Gebietskommissar Situation Report," 20.7.1942.

clear. So too were the causes and remedies. For the civil administration, the realities of local rule created a kind of no-win situation. With his ear closer to the ground, so to speak, the Gebietskommissar could clearly see the impact of policies that had been made over his head by superior departments. For him, reality was that his fiefdom was increasingly less an idyllic colonial space and more a hornet's nest of resistance and violence. For alert minds, these pressures and demands translated into a losing effort on the ground where the situation was so critical that "we are driving the people who are still working hard for us into the arms of the bandits."<sup>484</sup> Levels of candid criticism could, in fact, be extraordinary. Even if the effect of criticism remained in question, the sharpness of tone and indeed the existence of it at all imply that a Gebietskommissar could be motivated by more than greed and insightful enough to see both problem and solution.

Challenging the notion of the Gebietskommissars as powerless cogs in the Nazi machinery, in July 1942, Rolle wrote to his boss. The biting and sarcastic tone of his report bears repeating:

Even German farmers would resent it if their ancient rights were taken away from them. The Tsar did not take away their rights to use the forest meadows, neither did the Poles, even the Bolsheviki did not touch the matter. And now we Germans issue these orders during a war. It is no wonder that we cannot get on with the people. In my opinion, we must first win the war so our position in the country is secure and then we will be able to issue orders, but first we have to apply ourselves to winning the war, and for this we need the local people. I have spoken with the *Obergruppenführer*, the General

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<sup>484</sup> BA R94/7, "Gebietskommissar Situation Report," 20.7.1942. It should be noted that the "we" indicates the Gebietskommissar perceived himself as part of the process (the collective 'we') and understood that much damage had already been done ("still working")

Commissar, personally and told him that a strip of wood must be cut back on both sides of the road to enable the cars to travel through the district. Now, I learn from Senior Forester Feldbauch that he has received an order from above that a 150m of forest must be left at the sides of the roads (to prevent snowdrifts). I propose that we also dig out holes in the ground at regular intervals to make it easier for the bandits to attack.<sup>485</sup>

Clearly, he was not prevented from speaking his mind, regardless of whether or not anyone was listening. Just as Carl had spoken out concerning anti-Jewish operations in Sluzk, Rolle critiqued the effect of broader policies being applied to his district:

We need complete calm to be established here, not orders which perhaps make sense in Germany, but should not be applied here in the Ukraine, above all not in my district. I have nothing further to say on this."<sup>486</sup> The solution, from his perspective was as simple as obvious: "In my opinion, we must first win the war so our position in the country is secure and then we will be able to issue orders, but first we have to apply ourselves to winning the war, and for this we need the local people."<sup>487</sup>

While this opinion was not universal, it does raise important considerations regarding local occupation.

The nature of the food problem for the local population was not one of either quality, nor indeed, supply. The problem for the Gebietskommissar was in squaring the demands to extract the last full measure from his district and the demands, on the ground, to keep things running. In short, however capable the Gebietskommissar, he was also increasingly hemmed in. To extract food and

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<sup>485</sup> BA R94/7, "Gebietskommissar Situation Report," 20.7.1942.

<sup>486</sup> BA R94/7, "Gebietskommissar Situation Report," 20.7.1942. Despite his claim that he has nothing more to say on the topic, the report details in depth the various measures which he feels are responsible for the situation.

<sup>487</sup> Ibid.

resources for the Reich, a cooperative population was required yet increasingly impossible to ensure. The 1942 harvest clearly shows the dilemma. The actual harvest itself was not a bad one.<sup>488</sup> While, overall, considering quality and quantity, it was described as “mediocre,” individual crops such as grain, corn and potatoes were generally described as good.<sup>489</sup>

The problem then was due to the expectations and the demands of the regime itself. The grain harvest accurately demonstrates not only these expectations and demands but also just how unsustainable and surreal the situation had become. According to the Gebietskommissar, the grain yield in his district averaged a “good” 600kg per hectare in an area that was never able to produce surpluses due to soil quality. Of the 600kg, half (300kg) was automatically earmarked to meet quota demands while another 33% (200kg) was given over for seed. Only the remaining 100kg was designated “for the people.”<sup>490</sup> The Gebietskommissar bluntly stated the impact on the population: “even the peasants won’t have enough food in winter or spring.”<sup>491</sup> To the burden of this dire situation, the Gebietskommissar also faced more mundane problems such as adequate storage facilities and sufficient means of transporting

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<sup>488</sup> BA R94/7, “Gebietskommissar Situation Report,” 9.10.1942.

<sup>489</sup> Overall harvest results are collected in BA R6/243, “Stadtkommissar. Notes on Gebietskommissars Meeting in Luzk,” 4.9.1942. Chief Agriculturalist Dr. Oefferts also indicted that supply situation for the local population “will remain difficult” for the foreseeable future. Also BA R94/7, “Gebietskommissar Monthly Report,” 22.8.1942; BA R94/76 “SSPF Brest Monthly Report, 15.9.1942; BA R94/7, “SSPF Brest Monthly Report,” 6.10.1942.

<sup>490</sup> BA R94/7, “Gebietskommissar Monthly Report,” 2 2.8.1942.

<sup>491</sup> His suggestion was that the quota be linked to yield. By 1943 however, the security situation had largely rendered moot such modifications and considerations.

food from the field to storage facilities and from there to the Reich.<sup>492</sup>

At the local level, such untenable realities could further be compounded by the larger breakdowns of occupation and the operation of other agencies. In the face of starvation and a clearly deteriorating security situation, Gebietskommissar Rolle openly criticized the practice of the Army Rations Office to feed horses with wheat and rye. His venomous indictment of this policy clearly shows the level of both his frustration and the security he felt in expressing, candidly, his opinion as he stated: "When I heard this I thought, either I am mad or they are. In Germany, there is a great shortage of bread cereals; here there is no bread at all for the local people and the Wehrmacht are feeding their horses with rye and wheat. It is forbidden to give rye bread to the agricultural workers. I do not know the reason for this, but I have to say that it is a disgrace."<sup>493</sup>

The impact of food extraction and the proposed changes to the system tended to be both well known and remarkably similar among the various agencies under the umbrella of the civil administration. The Gebietskommissar, The Stadtkommissar, police officials and the District Agriculturist not only lived in close proximity but, according to their reports, tended to identify similar problems and solutions reflecting both a similarity of experience and a tendency to see the problems as the result of factors outside their control. Significantly, blame and frustration tended to be passed hierarchically upwards rather than horizontally

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<sup>492</sup> See BA R94/7, "Gebietskommissar Situation Report," 9.10.1942 and BA R94/7, "Gebietskommissar–Agricultural Department Report," 24.11.1942.

<sup>493</sup> BA R94/7, "Gebietskommissar Monthly Report," 22.8.1942.

among agencies at the local level.<sup>494</sup>

By the beginning of the much anticipated 1942 harvest, local agencies began to realize that despite their warnings, they were beginning to reap what was sown. In late July, the Gebietskommissar repeated his appeal for increased security claiming “that unless the bandit threat is removed from my area, I cannot guarantee that the harvest will be collected...as the bandits [partisans] are trying to shut down all agricultural operations.”<sup>495</sup> In September 1942, the Gendarmerie District Leader echoed his boss, reporting, for the first time, that partisans (“bandits”) “have started to burn property and destroy crops” requiring that “with the agreement of the District Agriculturalist...we immediately deployed ten men to protect these harvested crops on the most important state properties with the task of using all means to prevent the properties and harvested crops from being burned.”<sup>496</sup> In terms of food economics and “banditry”, with the September 1942 crop burnings and attendant ambushes, the Rubicon of the partisan war had been crossed despite the “better relationship of trust...between the locals and the German officers” that the Gendarmerie District Leader perceived two months

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<sup>494</sup> That is not to say that there was no friction. In the case of Brest, tensions did arise between the civil administration (police) and both the SD and the Wehrmacht on occasion. An example can be found in BA R94/6, “Stadtkommissar Brest Report,” 27.8.1942 and BA R94/7, “Labour Office Brest Monthly Report,” 27.10.1942. However this friction tended to be regarding specific (or short term) particularities. Overall, reports regularly noted the generally good inter-agency cooperation and collaboration.

<sup>495</sup> BA R94/7, “Gebietskommissar Situation Report,” 20.7.1942.

<sup>496</sup> BA R94/7, “Gend. District Leader Brest: Situation Report,” 5.9.1942. Note that this incident was indeed not the first as the Gebietskommissar himself had reported in July that “the hay which was supposed to be brought from Lukowo to Brest-Litovsk has been destroyed by the bandits.” BA R94/7, “Gebietskommissar Situation Report,” 20.7.1942.

earlier.<sup>497</sup> The impact of the pressures of imposed food quotas and local partisan actions were devastating. Not only were rations failing but so too was morale and therefore security.<sup>498</sup>

Chronic food shortages encompassed an ebb and flow whereby the availability of types of food shifted while the overall shortage remained constant. Where in June-July, the population suffered a bread shortage, in early August the "locals received virtually no food except for bread rations."<sup>499</sup> By the end of the month, the situation had again deteriorated "to such an extent that not even bread rations could be issued in the last two weeks."<sup>500</sup> However, in October, bread rations were again distributed regularly.<sup>501</sup> The aggregate result of the situation was disastrous. Lack of food prompted migrations to the countryside as food shortages tended to be "not so catastrophic" in the rural districts.<sup>502</sup>

Consequently, the pool of available (and potential) workers continued to shrink, engendering further decline in a labour situation already infected with

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<sup>497</sup> BA R94/7, "Gebietskommissar Situation Report," 20.7.1942

<sup>497</sup> BA R94/6, "SSPF Brest: Situation Report," 15.7.1942.

<sup>498</sup> BA R94/7, "Gebietskommissar Situation Report," 20.7.1942. "Food is very poor and this poor situation is not good for the morale of the people. For example, I have found out that in Brest bread is only given to Germans." Not surprisingly, the situation for local Jews was even direr. In July, the Stadtkommissar reported that Jews sent to dig peat were so poorly fed that they would soon die of starvation. BA R94/6, "Report of the Stadtkommissar Brest," 20.7.1942.

<sup>499</sup> BA R94/6, "SSPF Brest: Situation Report," 15.7.1942; "SSPF Brest: Situation Report," 15.8.1942.

<sup>500</sup> BA R94/6, "Stadtkommissar Brest: Situation Report," 27.8.1942.

<sup>501</sup> BA R94/7, "Gebietskommissar Brest: Situation Report," 9.10.1942.

<sup>502</sup> BA R94/6, "Stadtkommissar Brest: Situation Report," 27.8.1942; "SSPF Brest: Situation Report," 15.8.1942.



chronic absenteeism and desertion.<sup>503</sup> To this shortage and migration was also added the additional danger of a deteriorating security condition. RohdeF noted that the impact of migration and starvation led directly to security breakdowns such as an incident in which “a truck loaded with agriculture products [was] stopped and seized “ by civilians. Further, he clearly understood the link between shortages and the partisan war asserting: “We cannot exclude the possibility that some of them join or try to join partisan bands.”<sup>504</sup>

While the link between rations and morale was clear, the civil administration also understood that the partisan situation might still be managed, if not eradicated before it was too late, as by late summer 1942 the partisan problem was not yet out of control. Given their proximity to the partisan war, the civil administration realized that sheer survival tended to trump ideological persuasion and other factors in pushing locals into the arms of Soviet guerrillas.<sup>505</sup> Despite hardships, the civil administration understood that active support for the partisans tended to depend on the proximity of a particular unit.

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<sup>503</sup> BA R94/6, “SSPF Brest: Situation Report,” 15.8.1942. “Workers have increasingly left their posts [to move to the country] because they are receiving virtually nothing for the ration cards.” For “reduced ability to work” see BA R94/6, “Stadtkommissar Brest: Situation Report,” 27.8.1942: The report stated that over the last two weeks, only 40% of planned rations could be distributed due to grain shortage. Consequently, the population exhibited both a reduced ability to work and “depressed mood.” For a similar example from mid-1943, BA R94/8, “Gebietskommissar Monthly Report,” 24.7.1943.

<sup>504</sup> BA R94/6, “SSPF Brest: Situation Report,” 15.8.1942. It should also be noted that the partisans were not above “requisitioning” food from locals already poorly provisioned, adding yet another layer to their misery. BA R94/6, “SSPF Brest: Situation Report,” 6.10.1942.

<sup>505</sup> See Alexander Hill, *The War Behind the Eastern Front: The Soviet Partisan Movement in North-West Russia 1941–44* (New York: Frank Cass, 2005) for an excellent recent study of the Partisan war. Also see Berkhoff, *Harvest*, 275-304.

As long as a particular area had “not yet been reached,” the overriding concern of the population was not partisan war but finding enough food to get through the day. In regards to isolating the partisans from the population, the remedy then was as clear as it was impossible: “The be all and end all for peace among the people is food.”<sup>506</sup>

Food production and requisitioning was certainly closely monitored and assisted by the civil administration. Meeting pre-set quotas were the most pressing concern. Through the Food and Agriculture Department and in collaboration with German agriculturalists in the rural districts, crops were sown, harvested, collected, stored and shipped.<sup>507</sup> Given the increased security pressures with the 1942 harvest, threshing, seizure and storage, particularly on State Farms, was carried out immediately, often requiring the participation of the Gebietskommissar’s police assets to provide security.<sup>508</sup> This arrangement meant that if the civil administration were able to ensure security forces oversaw the harvest in a particular area, collection and delivery of the hated quotas generally could proceed effectively. Thus, harvest and cultivation was “all thanks not only to the activity of the farmers...but also the active cooperation of the

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<sup>506</sup> BA R94/6, “Stadtkommissar Brest: Situation Report,” 27.8.1942.

<sup>507</sup> For civil administration storage and monitoring see BA R94/7, “Gebietskommissar Agricultural Department, Report of District Agriculturalist Brest,” 22.10.1942.

<sup>508</sup> A representative example of this process in the 1942 corn harvest is contained in BA R94/7, “SSPF Brest: Situation Report,” 6.10.1942. The overall results were not always negative. If police were deployed to a particular area “disruptions by bandits...have been kept down and suppressed with help of the police now deployed in region.” BA R94/7, “Gebietskommissar Brest: Situation Report,” 9.10.1942.

*Gendarmerie.*<sup>509</sup>

The flipside of this situation meant that the Gendarmerie was increasingly stretched thin allowing fewer resources to be dedicated to an aggressive engagement in the partisan war.<sup>510</sup> As a result, facing pressures to both “bring in the harvest” while simultaneously being expected to assist in anti-partisan efforts, the Gebietskommissar again faced a seemingly impossible dilemma. In the case of Brest, Burat assigned the highest priority to “harvesting, tilling and sowing.”<sup>511</sup> Yet even in this most important function, in the ideologically charged and surreal world of the occupation, mass murder trumped all. In October, at the height of the harvest and midst of a partisan war, the Gebietskommissar’s police assets were deployed to assist in the liquidation of 20,000 of the district’s Jews. Despite the projected negative outcomes of the killing on local economic activity and the further stretching of already sparse resources, this action showed clearly where the regime’s ultimate priorities lay.<sup>512</sup>

While the overall situation was a dire one, this refocusing of assets

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<sup>509</sup> BA R94/7, “Gend. District Leader Brest: Situation Report for November 1942,” 5.12.1942.

<sup>510</sup> Certainly this did not mean a complete cessation of “patrols and searches for bandits” but rather prioritized the securing of grain shipments and storage guarding.

<sup>511</sup> BA R94/7, “Gebietskommissar Brest: Situation Report,” 9.10.1942.

<sup>512</sup> BA R94/7, “Gebietskommissar Agricultural Department, Report of District Agriculturalist Brest,” 22.10.1942. This report reflected on the negative impact (in terms of agriculture) resulting from the large scale Jewish liquidation in the district in October 1942. Also BA R94/7, “Gend. District Leader Brest: Situation Report,” 8.11.1942 describing police “deployment during actions against the Jews in the town and administrative district of Brest-Litovsk from 15.10.1942 on. Up to now, 20,000 Jews have been shot.” Also see BA R94/7, “Gebietskommissar Brest: Situation Report,” 9.10.1942. In this report, the Gebietskommissar also reflected on the liquidation of Jews in Domachevo.

towards security was not entirely without merit or result. As the 1942 harvest ended, agriculturalists noted that “bandit activity [had] only been observed sporadically...as a result of the successful police operations.”<sup>513</sup> Indeed, despite mediocre yields in some crops, a larger area was sown which, Rolle concluded, was “probably because they [peasants] have gained some confidence in German leadership.”<sup>514</sup>

However, according to the District Agriculturalist, the problem was not sowing but rather effectively bringing in the harvest. In general, increased police deployments proved the only effective means to ensure reluctant “peasants [were] more willing to deliver the quota.”<sup>515</sup> Further, the machinery of the civil administration and police themselves seemed to handicap security efforts. Despite the centrality of securing the harvest, despite the Gebietskommissar’s prioritization, the Food and Agriculture Department lamented that “the policemen available to me (*Schutzpolizei-Dienstabteilung* and *Gendarmerie*) are, as I constantly report, so overloaded with administrative work that there are very few officers available for the actual police work.”<sup>516</sup> The reality of the 1942 harvest

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<sup>513</sup> BA R94/7, “Gebietskommissar Agricultural Department, Report of District Agriculturalist Brest,” 24.11.1942. In the same report the District agriculturalist noted that “when there was bandit activity, Jews were involved. Unfortunately, as I have already reported, the farmhouse on the Atteschisna state farm has been burnt down by the Jews.” Clearly for the District Agriculturalist, the threat of insidious Jewish saboteurs did not end with the mass killings the month before.

<sup>514</sup> BA R94/7, “Gebietskommissar Brest: Situation Report,” 9.10.1942.

<sup>515</sup> BA R94/7, “Gebietskommissar Agricultural Department, Report of District Agriculturalist Brest,” 22.10.1942. The Agriculturalist reported that police actions were so successful that he felt “order will be restored...in the next few weeks.”

<sup>516</sup> BA R94/8, “Gebietskommissar, Dept. II,” 19.2.1943. The report continued: “For example, in the town of Brest-Litovsk, 22 of 44 members of the Protection Police are occupied with administration. This is an impossible situation. There

was that the Gebietskommissars faced a kind of race to bring in the harvest in which they were clearly on the defensive, trapped in what had become “an impossible situation.”<sup>517</sup> By 1943, even these measures would prove ineffective as the situation in the rural areas rapidly spiralled out of control. The pressure for the Gebietskommissar then was to get to a particular field before the partisans. When this proved impossible, “sometimes the whole grain harvest, sometimes a substantial part of it has been destroyed by bandits by fire.”<sup>518</sup>

In August 1942, the Rohde voiced concerns felt by the entire civil administration. He informed his superior that “in my opinion, something must be done quickly to feed the locals if they are to be used for work. Otherwise, one of these days it will happen that we will no longer be able to defend ourselves against the bandits.”<sup>519</sup> By early 1943, his prophetic pronouncement was increasingly the order of the day as local farmers faced a tight squeeze from both sides in the conflict. Not only were there crop quotas to be met but the peasants also faced large cattle quotas from the civil administration and often “quotas”

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are not enough policemen to carry out the police tasks and it would be helpful if police administrative apparatus could be greatly reduced.”

<sup>517</sup> While Gebietskommissar Rolle hoped for an improvement through police operations, he also conceded that “it has not been possible to counter this terrible state of affairs effectively.” He predicted that “the whole amount of grain destroyed will exceed about 200 tons.” It is also noteworthy that police deployments could also go disastrously wrong such as in October 1942 when “unfortunately an entire village with the whole of the harvest was also burned down by police action. The loss here likewise amounts to 50-60 tons.” BA R94/7, “Gebietskommissar Situation Report,” 9.10.1942; BA R94/8, “Gebietskommissar, Dept. II,” 1 9.2.1943.

<sup>518</sup> BA R94/7, “Gebietskommissar Brest: Situation Report,” 9.10.1942.

<sup>519</sup> BA R94/6, “SSPF Brest: Situation Report,” 15.8.1942.

imposed by the partisans.<sup>520</sup> In the countryside, the administration noted that “things are very bad as the last cows have been taken from the peasants” meaning that “there will no calves in spring and the food situation will be even worse.”<sup>521</sup> As hoarded stocks were increasingly used up over the winter months, the loss of the last cow, to either Nazi or partisan, easily turned an already dire situation into an impossible one.<sup>522</sup> The impact on the population was as negative and seminal as the Gebietskommissar had predicted. Chronic food shortages and attendant spin-off problems such as the black market and petty crime seemed to boil over in early 1943. In a summary report of January 1943 the situation in Brest-Litovsk had deteriorated to the point where the Gebietskommissar worried that “it is impossible to keep a whole town together if the people are only eating food which they have had to purchase on the black market for high prices.” He described long bread lines and empty shops, residents with “a bread ration card at the end of the month, there was not one single occasion when the shops had bread.” While repeating the “old maxim that if people can eat till they are full, they are calm,” expectations had been lowered to a point where the civil administration now pleaded “we should at least try to

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<sup>520</sup> Partisan requisitioning is addressed in BA R94/7, “SSPF Brest Monthly Report,” 6.10.1942. The Gend. District Leader noted that the partisans “repeatedly made surprise appearances and extorted from the farmers’ cattle, which they let away.”

<sup>521</sup> BA R94/8, “Gebietskommissar, Dept. II,” 19.2.1943.

<sup>522</sup> See BA R94/7, “Gend. District Leader Brest: Situation Report,” 9.10.1942; BA R94/7, “Gend. District Leader Brest: Situation Report,” 8.11.1942; BA R94/8, Gend. District Leader Brest: Situation Report, 4.2.1943; BA R94/8, “Gebietskommissar, Dept. II,” 19.2.1943.

give the working population sufficient bread and potatoes.”<sup>523</sup>

The cumulative result on the Gebietskommissar and his staff, already aware of unhappy reversals at the front, was telling. Feelings of being ignored, isolated, vulnerable and increasingly hemmed-in were powerfully conveyed in reports as the civil administration explained that “an instruction to prevent this unhappy state of affairs is needed from a higher office.”<sup>524</sup> Reports clearly reflected the Gebietskommissar’s awareness that the machine barely functioned.<sup>525</sup> In the meantime and in the absence of any clear directives from the higher echelons, the Gebietskommissar continued to improvise. Given the critical deterioration in the food situation, Burat ordered his regional chiefs to provide poorer communities with “more balance” to supplement the diet of “great numbers of people who only eat potatoes.”<sup>526</sup>

By mid-1943, it was obvious that such measures had little impact on the overall situation on the ground. As the Red Army began to push across the front, rumours of evacuations and possible defeat raised tensions and fear to the point where “people in the rural areas [were] so frightened that whenever they see any policemen they try to get out of the way.”<sup>527</sup> By June, the occupation had clearly entered a new phase as the civil administration rapidly began to lose control of their fiefdoms and their status as “eastern kings.” In the hinterland, the District

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<sup>523</sup> BA R94/8, “Gebietskommissar, Dept. II,” 19.2.1943. The result of this policy was expected to: “bring an immediate reduction in the black-market prices because to stay alive everyone has to deal in something to earn more money.”

<sup>524</sup> Ibid.

<sup>525</sup> See Ibid for a representative and comprehensive example.

<sup>526</sup> BA R94/8, “Gebietskommissar Brest Monthly Report,” 10.4.1943.

<sup>527</sup> Ibid.

Agriculturalist informed the Gebietskommissar that "June 1943 [was] the most restless month during the almost two years I have been here" as partisans began to target guarded storage facilities rather than just burning crops in the field.<sup>528</sup>

By summer 1943, partisan activity was so intense that the civil administration could no longer control or oversee the work of its indigenous district leaders. Further, entire areas of the district were effectively "no go zones" that were "given over to the bandits" who were "advancing all the time."<sup>529</sup> In face of partisan success, the District Agriculturalist informed the Gebietskommissar that "the fields have not all been cultivated" meaning that "a large number of the planted areas will have to be left...until our police are again able to establish order and to ensure that the orders of the German authorities...are carried out."<sup>530</sup>

The effect of losing control was dramatic. Unrest and lack of discipline among indigenous police units only added fuel to the fire, having a negative effect on the delivery of quotas by farmers. Further, the civil administration witnessed a formerly docile (or cowed) population emboldened because "they have noticed that we cannot enforce orders and are becoming more casual and cheeky."<sup>531</sup> Ultimately, the most significant development was the open recognition and realization and confirmation of earlier warnings that when "once again no protection is provided...the bandits can carry out their destruction with

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<sup>528</sup> BA R94/8, "District "Agriculturalist Monthly Report," 9.6.1943.

<sup>529</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>530</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>531</sup> *Ibid.*



no fear of punishment.”<sup>532</sup>

The realities of the spiralling situation could not be lost on a Gebietskommissar. Perceiving that the population now behaved “passively” and sometimes with “concealed hostility,” Gebietskommissar Burat asserted a solution based not on repression but rather provisioning and reconciliation. By mid-1943, the problems facing the local civil administration had been diagnosed by the Gebietskommissar as twofold: as always supply and demand and increased partisan activity. Their interconnectedness was clear. There was not enough food to meet demand and, in turn, “bandit activity” was only amplified by the often forcible seizure of quota goods.<sup>533</sup> The remedy, the Gebietskommissar asserted, favoured the carrot rather than the stick. Demonstrating an understanding of the nature of his charges and the limitation of “stick discipline” and repression, Burat argued: “The only way to pacify the town people is to continue to supply them with goods. At the least, they must be continuously guaranteed a minimum amount of food.”<sup>534</sup> In the case of Brest-Litovsk, the Gebietskommissar continued to sanction soup kitchens, which, he noted “brought about a slight improvement.”<sup>535</sup> While such ideas certainly did nothing to shake the foundations of the racial ladder in the east, it does suggest that space existed

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<sup>532</sup> Ibid.

<sup>533</sup> BA R94/8, “Gebietskommissar Brest Monthly Report,” 24.7.1943. Burat also noted that of late, partisan activity had been influenced as a result of “the collection of younger age groups to work in the Reich.”

<sup>534</sup> Ibid.

<sup>535</sup> The Gebietskommissar cited frequent reports that the attitude of workers was not significantly improved by access to work kitchens because they complained: “if my family is starving, I cannot enjoy the food in the works kitchen.” BA R94/8, “Gebietskommissar Brest Monthly Report,” 24.7.1943.

for a Gebietskommissar not only to critically assess selective policies but also to implement corrective measures, however limited, within his fiefdom. In this way, influence and power at the local can be understood as flexible, negotiable and revisable.

Two further factors come to light in this report. First, Burat noted, with some frustration, that Reich Germans in his Gebiet continued to pester him concerning their access to food resources. While an RKU decree (22.3.1943) reduced food supplies allocated to Reich Germans, Burat reported that they continued to hold his Food and Agriculture Department responsible for not providing a “balanced diet with fruit.” While still “adequate,” he suggested that their plight was the result of the broader food allocation system, mandated at the centre, rather than any actual shortages in his area. He also noted that he would continue to try and rectify provisioning problems by growing more locally.

Second, the interest of the Gebietskommissar in the local population focused on those “valuable” to his operations. While situation reports exhibited an extraordinary regard for some locals, the focus remained strongly rooted in two assumptions: preserving productivity or maintaining security. If a particular local or group was not tied to either of these assumptions, they were simply cut loose entirely, if they were considered at all. While Reich Germans, farmers and workers represent the former such group, refugee gypsies and Russians certainly fell into the latter. In the case of the “several hundred Soviet families” still in the area by mid-1943, the Gebietskommissar ordered all women not actively employed sent to work in Germany and their children placed in

orphanages. Yet, even this “very unpleasant” solution was preferable to that imposed on the remaining gypsies. Referring to the deportees from Bialystok, Gebietskommissar Burat lamented the “ghastly sight” of gypsy “scum” whose “main occupation... [was] begging and stealing.” To solve the “vital” problem he requested authorization to ensure they “be treated like the Jews.”<sup>536</sup>

While the Gebietskommissar clearly had the interests of “favoured” locals in mind, it certainly was not based on altruistic notions. Rather, an effective Gebietskommissar understood that the requirements of a functioning regime did not always square with the dogma or overall agenda of his masters in Riga, Rowno or Berlin. As a result, he could advocate saving some, while actively working to repress and even kill others. In the climate of racist utilitarianism, an effective Gebietskommissar was perhaps more one-eyed king than “blockhead.”

By 20 July 1943, Operation Citadel had failed at Kursk. The results were felt almost immediately in OMi areas, most acutely in the RKU. Beginning in early fall 1943, situation reports began to describe new challenges to the regime. No longer were the partisans and quotas the sole enemies of the civil administration. In the face of a collapsing front, the Gebietskommissars faced the logistical nightmare of retreating German forces and, ultimately, the looming shadow of the advancing Red Army.<sup>537</sup>

In Brest-Litovsk, the impact was psychological as well as logistic. Not surprisingly, the Gendarmerie District Leader reported to the Gebietskommissar that: “due to the withdrawal from the front, the local people friendly to the

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<sup>536</sup> BA R94/8, “Gebietskommissar Brest Monthly Report,” 24.7.1943.

<sup>537</sup> Ibid, in which the Gebietskommissar requested additional troops for security.

Germans [were] very subdued.<sup>538</sup> In terms of logistics, the ongoing and intensified partisan war only heightened an already critical situation. In early fall, the Gebietskommissar's worst fears were confirmed as crops rotted in the field, unable to be collected due to partisan raids and sabotage. Not only was cultivation and collection difficult due to mundane factors such as labour and machinery shortages but had they, in fact, become "impossible in areas with significant partisans."<sup>539</sup> By October, the District Agriculturist reported to the Gebietskommissar that "1/3 of the Brest-Litovsk district is still controlled by bandits and from here the quota can only be delivered with Wehrmacht protection and with the use of force." Even after collection, crops were not safe. Persistent and effective partisan actions had reduced the number of usable storage facilities to a point where the Gebietskommissar was forced to consider using schools for storage space. Even guarded warehouses were not safe as wily "bandits," firing tracer ammunition, attacked and destroyed them. In one case, the civil administration lost 250 tons of hay to such a tactic.

The situation had moved beyond the capacity of the Gebietskommissar and his assets to handle.<sup>540</sup> Consequently, the civil administration turned to the

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<sup>538</sup> BA R94/8, "Gend. District Leader Brest Monthly Report," 4.10 1943. Not surprisingly, the Gend. District Leader also noted the heightened concern of indigenous police, clearly worried about the failing fortunes at the front.

<sup>539</sup> Ibid. The District Agriculturist reported however that "7,500 tons of grain [was] collected in a Gebiet" using "horse-drawn wagons ...to bring the crops in from the areas which do not have a large number of bandits." Further, farmers who continued to try and meet quotas were forced to take increasingly careful precautionary measures such as attempting to "vary their routes to enable them to deliver their quota and avoid bandits."

<sup>540</sup> For scarcity of local security forces see BA R94/8, "Gend. District Leader Brest Monthly Report," 4.10 1943 and 23.12.1943. A Gebietskommissar's

Wehrmacht to provide effective security.<sup>541</sup> With the assistance of the Wehrmacht, the civil administration continued to struggle against the partisans, in some cases with moderate success.<sup>542</sup> Yet the very presence of Wehrmacht units proved a double-edged sword for the Gebietskommissar. On the one hand, a larger number of Wehrmacht forces in the area allowed their deployment against partisans. On the other hand, their very presence in the rear areas was the result of their retreat from the front and a sobering reminder of the collapsing fortunes of the war. More important for the Gebietskommissar however was the impossible equation engendered by their presence in terms of provisioning and food economics. Due to defeats at the front, an increased Wehrmacht presence in OMi areas only exacerbated an already untenable situation.<sup>543</sup> At the moment when food became even scarcer and harder to harvest, the demand increased. For example, in Brest, the Army Supply Office pressured the Gebietskommissar

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appeals for assistance would not be unusual considering the manpower shortages in terms of German police and the fears of the growing unreliability in some indigenous forces. BA R94/8, "District Agriculturalist Monthly Report," 9.6.1943 and BA R94/7, "Gebietskommissar Brest Monthly Report," 22.8.1942. Nonetheless, it should be noted that there was praise rather than derision for some indigenous forces as they fought well against the growing tide of partisans.

<sup>541</sup> In terms of interagency cooperation, the trend towards more friendly relations continued even as the front collapsed. Gebietskommissar Burat reported that the local military forces were indeed very understanding. BA R94/8, "Gebietskommissar Brest. Situation Report," 23.12.1943.

<sup>542</sup> "During harvesting with the help of the Wehrmacht, bandit leaders have been found in the villages and handed over to the SD. Unfortunately, there are not enough Wehrmacht men to purge the entire area. We are doing all we can."

<sup>543</sup> The arrival of retreating Wehrmacht units was not the only problem as "trains arriving with refugees from the front" further compounded the problems in the area. BA R94/8, "District Agriculturalist Brest Monthly Report," 16.10.1943. In December 1943 the Gend. District Leader reported increased pressure due to massive population increase of Army units and refugees. BA R94/8, "Gend. District Leader Brest: Situation Report," 5.12.1943 and BA R94/8, "Gebietskommissar Brest Situation Report," 23.12.1943.

for even more cows due to the increased volume of troops in the area and the increased need for marching rations.<sup>544</sup> Such demands simply could not be met.<sup>545</sup> Perhaps even more threatening was the difficulty of even acquiring and distributing Wehrmacht provisions to Gendarmerie posts in rural areas.<sup>546</sup> By year-end, the security situation was so acute that district police assets could no longer rely on local food procurement, depending instead on supply from Wehrmacht stores.<sup>547</sup> Clearly, the situation was out of control.

Yet despite the crumbling situation and increasingly alarming reports, at the local level, the administration not only continued to function but to attempt, with some relative success, to function effectively. In late October 1943, Gebietskommissar Burat reported that his overworked staff continued to try to find solutions to the food problem.<sup>548</sup> His efforts were even recognized and commended by the Gendarmerie District Leader in late December for performing “tasks in an exemplary manner.”<sup>549</sup> Despite the obstacles and pressures, “in total, 80% of the grain and potato quotas [were] met” in spite of the fact that “in

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<sup>544</sup> BA R94/8, “District Agriculturist Brest Monthly Report,” 16.10.1943. Further, at the same time as pressure by the Army for meat increased the “partisan activity...put the meat supply for Brest in jeopardy.” BA R94/8, “Gend. District Leader Brest Situation Report,” 5.12.1943.

<sup>545</sup> BA R94/8, “District Agriculturist Brest Monthly Report,” 16.10.1943. Suggestions that cattle be procured from partisan held areas proved impossible.

<sup>546</sup> BA R94/8, “Gend. District Leader Brest Monthly Report,” 4.10.1943. Interestingly, the Gend. Leader also noted the plight of *Schutzmannschaft* /Gend. posts.

<sup>547</sup> BA R94/8, “Gend. District Leader Brest Situation Report,” 5.12.1943; “Gend. District Leader Brest Situation Report,” 4.1.1944 and “Gend. District Leader Brest Situation Report,” 3.2.1944.

<sup>548</sup> BA R94/7, Contribution to Monthly Report of Section II,” 31.10.1943.

<sup>549</sup> BA R94/8, “Gend. District Leader Brest Monthly Report,” 23.12.1943.

partisan infested regions, the harvest [was] way behind.”<sup>550</sup>

According to the Gendarmerie District Leader, “special praise” was due to the Gebietskommissar’s men ‘in the field’ for their efforts in the “collection of quotas.”<sup>551</sup> Ultimately, however effective the Gebietskommissar and his staff were, the whirlwind of larger events quickly engulfed them. In December 1943, a large scale partisan raid on the town of Domataschwo, a civil administration and police stronghold, resulted in the burning of the District Agriculturalist’s office and home and his narrow escape, despite his initial capture. In all, twenty-five buildings were burned, including the police barracks.<sup>552</sup> This event marked the death throes of the civil administration as the entire region “to the south of Brest [was] virtually entirely controlled by the bandits.”<sup>553</sup> Consequently, the civil administration could no longer venture beyond the “immediate vicinities of localities where there are police formations,” thereby surrendering “the greater part of the region” to the partisans.<sup>554</sup> No longer able to move about, much less exert influence on his fiefdom, the main concern of the Gebietskommissar

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<sup>550</sup> According to the Gend. District Leader, problems arose from seizing and requisitioning food “inconsiderately.” BA R94/8, “Gend. District Leader Brest Monthly Report,” 23.12.1943.

<sup>551</sup> Ibid.

<sup>552</sup> BA R94/8, “Gend. District Leader Brest Monthly Report,” 5.12.1943 and “Gend. District Leader Brest Monthly Report,” 23.12.1943. During this attack, the District Agriculturalist was “pulled from his house” by partisans but managed to escape with his staff. A second attack occurred in January 1944 in which an additional twenty-seven buildings were burned down. BA R94/8, “Gend. District Leader Brest Monthly Report,” 3.2.1944.

<sup>553</sup> At this point, all day to day operations outside the towns were virtually impossible. The Gebietskommissar understood “It [was] only possible to enter this area with very strong units.” BA R94/8, “Gend. District Leader Brest Monthly Report,” 4.1.1944.

<sup>554</sup> Ibid.

became scraping together enough supplies to feed those holed up in the few remaining redoubts.<sup>555</sup>

Food economics clearly demonstrated the harsh realities and irreconcilable challenges facing the civil administration, and particularly the Gebietskommissar. Yet, as we have seen, not every challenge, whether external or internal, was always impossible to manage. In the case of Brest-Litovsk, a close reading of the context and the networks of challenges and responses suggests the need for an important re-thinking of the local civil administration. If effectiveness can be measured by effort in addition to result, a savvy Gebietskommissar could claim some measure of it. In Brest, despite the overall failure of food policy to meet its stated aims, quotas continued to be met and dogged effort given even as the security situation fell apart. Finally, while not down-playing either the racism or brutal violence of the local civil administration, food economics highlights the complexities and inherent inconsistencies in the occupation. As both Dieckmann and Gerlach have shown, food economics contributed a further impetus for mass murder. Yet, as we have seen in Brest, it also reveals a level of concern, altruistic or not, that a Gebietskommissar could show towards the local population. Certainly, ethnic Germans enjoyed the most empathy, followed by those indigenous persons willing to collaborate with the regime. In spite of critical shortages, their welfare clearly was in the mind of the civil administration. Even Jews (if not gypsies) received a level of concern,

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<sup>555</sup> By early 1944, just weeks prior to evacuation, the Gebietskommissar faced a dire reality in which “supplying the town of Brest-Litovsk with its numerous *Wehrmacht* units with food and horse fodder [was] becoming increasingly difficult.” Ibid.



however wholly selfish and temporary it may have been. Such reactions do nothing to exonerate Gebietskommissars but did bring to light the complex web of choices they faced and ultimately to underscore their ability and willingness to make them.

In the end, however, Gebietskommissars failed their *Führer*. Yet why, when, and how they failed remain important considerations. Mismanagement and ineptitude are part of the explanation, yet other, perhaps equally representative possibilities existed. In these cases, the Gebietskommissar that emerges is like a conductor on a runaway train, collecting fares until the very moment when the train flies from the rails.<sup>556</sup>

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<sup>556</sup> This metaphor was originally attributed to German industrialists in the Third Reich but is equally applicable to the civil administration at the local level.

## Chapter 7

### “The Whole Thing Went Backwards”: Labour Policy, Procurement and Partisans

An important reality of the eastern occupation was just how thin the Germans were on the ground. Civil officials were faced with the hard truth that for the regime to function at all, some measure of cooperation with the indigenous population was required. However limited their abilities, suspect their racial lineage, questionable their loyalties, the simple truth was that a *Gebietskommissar* could not operate without them. To this labour prerequisite, the centre further muddied the waters. In important areas such as production quotas and evolving Jewish policy, the demands of the centre pushed outwards to the periphery. Simultaneously, there existed other policies, such as the demand for labour exported to the Reich, which added a pulling pressure to the *Gebietskommissar*'s already overwhelming workload. Yet, the *raison d'être* of the civil administration was “to represent the interests of the Reich.”<sup>557</sup> Ultimately, in both the short-term and long-term, *Gebietskommissars* failed.

Understanding and analyzing Nazi labour policy at the local level requires an understanding of the numerous socio-ethnic and age groups targeted by the local regime. In terms of socio-ethnic groups, five are identifiable: *Volksdeutsche*, indigenous Slavs (Ukrainians and Byelorussians), Russians

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<sup>557</sup> *Braune Mappe*, 3716-18.

(Soviets), Jews and Gypsies.<sup>558</sup> Each of these groups held a unique place not only in the Nazi universe but also in terms of their functions and place within the day to day operations of the district regime. Labour policy and location in operations also varied significantly over time underscoring the fundamentally complex and nuanced balancing act that a Gebietskommissar faced. From the outset, relationships with the various social and ethnic groups were complex and multifaceted. For some, the new regime brought the hope for positive changes and relief from the “twenty-three year Soviet psychosis.” For others, less hopeful of the liberating benevolence of the Nazis, the best strategy was passivity as a means to navigate the new reality. Yet overall, a Gebietskommissar could expect a kind of honeymoon period with the bulk of the indigenous Slavic population as the tendency of the locals was to adopt a “wait and see” outlook.<sup>559</sup>

Certainly, Gebietskommissars quickly became aware of the various competing national communities and their constant animosity-fuelled efforts to improve their own lot, at the expense of the other. In western Ukraine, this dynamic largely revolved around Polish-Ukrainian relations.<sup>560</sup> Throughout the occupation, the civil administration was forced to relate to a mixed and divided

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<sup>558</sup> Note note that the social backgrounds within these groups fluctuated dramatically. In BA R94/6, “Situation Report SSPF Brest,” 15.3.1942, the divisions within the Jewish community are clearly reported.

<sup>559</sup> CIDK, 1275/3/662, “Report by FK 675, Abt. VII (Mil. Admin) to SD,” 26.7.1941. Of course this did not impact the entire social order. As we have seen, the administration was certainly not above harsh measures against certain segments or suspected anti-German elements.

<sup>560</sup> Interestingly, the Brest civil administration detected that relations between Poles and Jews was much more sympathetic than the one between Ukrainians and Jews.

population intent on co-opting the regime for their own ends as much as the regime attempted the same.

As we have seen with taxation and food policy, an effective Gebietskommissar administration meant a hands-on approach was essential.<sup>561</sup> Yet in regards to labour policy, what was meant by effective? What system precisely was to be managed? Again, akin to taxes and food exploitation, labour policy had a particular framework, goals and methods. This policy, like food economics, contained two largely exclusive objectives: ensuring a functioning, productive local economy while simultaneously exporting labour to the Reich. This reality was further compounded by the consequences of war on the factors of production and also the way in which the war itself was fought, particularly behind the front lines. This combination of factors meant that the most likely outcome at the local level, regardless of ability, was an overwhelmed Gebietskommissar engaged in a losing struggle.<sup>562</sup> Seen in this way, the local civil administration is best understood as “bailing water” rather than building any sort of *Lebensraum*. Whatever their intentions, the harsh realities of meeting demands from above and below were obvious.

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<sup>561</sup> BA R94/6, “Situation Report SSPF Brest,” 15.3.1942. BA R94/7, “Gebietskommissar Situation Report,” 24.12.1941 notes the problems and unreliability of local indigenous administrators.

<sup>562</sup> In August 1942 Gebietskommissar Rolle reported that his administration had only 205 Germans in the entire district. BA R94/7, “Gebietskommissar Brest Monthly Report,” 22.8.1942.

Orders stated that the “responsibility for the use of Labour and sending people to the Reich [lay] with the Gebietskommissar in each case.”<sup>563</sup> To meet these demands, the Gebietskommissar turned to his Labour Office and numerous area sub-offices.<sup>564</sup> The first and cardinal task of the office was clearly spelled out by the Gebietskommissar: “identifying the members of the population...capable of work.”<sup>565</sup> Erecting the foundation of the new order required workers, lots of workers. Following the initial work of the Army, the civil administration focussed on registering labour assets with a Labour Office.<sup>566</sup> Initially, the main difficulty was too many workers rather than too few. Early assessments presented a harsh reality in which the combination of war damage and a lack of materials on hand meant “a large part of the population [was] available for work.”<sup>567</sup> Yet, even in this seemingly positive situation, the outcomes were indeed dubious. Unemployment meant a Gebietskommissar managed a population already “with little money to spend”, further compounded by an unpopular, centrally mandated wage scheme under which wages were artificially deflated and set at a range between 80-150RM.<sup>568</sup> Consequently, a

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<sup>563</sup> BA R94/6, “Report of Stadtkommissar Brest,” 25.4.1942 and BA R94/8, “Gebietskommissar Brest Monthly Report,” 21.8.1943.

<sup>564</sup> In the Brest-Litovsk district, the first head of the Labour Office was the ironically named Senior Inspector Kaiser. He was replaced in August 1942. BA R94/7, “Gebietskommissar Situation Report,” 24.12.1941.

<sup>565</sup> Ibid.

<sup>566</sup> CIDK, 1275/3/662, “Report by FK 675, Abt. VII (Mil. Admin) to SD,” 11.8.1941. Army registration with the Labour Office in Brest for example, registered 3600 by mid August 1941. However, they had anticipated 10,000.

<sup>567</sup> BA R94/6, “Stadtkommissar Brest,” 26.11.1941.

<sup>568</sup> Ibid. In the RKU, Erich Koch issued Wage Orders 90.50 and 91.12. BA R94/6, “Situation Report SSPF Brest,” 15.3.1942, also BA R94/6, “Situation Report of Stadtkommissar Brest,” 23.12.1941. For their unpopularity, BA R94/6,

double-bind tying labour to food economics resulted in a black market literally draining the population of whatever income could be earned.<sup>569</sup> The overall result of this policy was quickly draining the pool of potential voluntary labour as registration with the Labour Office generally heightened the detested prospect of transport to the Reich. Neither did working locally secure enough wages to get by.<sup>570</sup>

This bounty of labour soon proved ephemeral however as, with the establishment of the Labour Office, too many transformed into too few. Given the lack of food, work, and decent wages, compounded by high prices and the danger of deportation, a contracting labour force was inevitable. A Gebietskommissar quickly faced the additional problem of not only the declining number of workers available but also how qualified these workers really were.<sup>571</sup> In short order, all agencies at the local level understood that some workers were, in fact, better than others. In a peculiar inversion of the racial ladder, Jews were most effective and cheap, followed by Poles, Ukrainians, Russians and Gypsies.<sup>572</sup> While local Christians still had the possibility to move on or dodge labour, the Jewish population enjoyed fewer liberties. Already identified and

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“Stadtkommissar Brest,” 12.1.1942 and BA R94/7, “Gebietskommissar Situation Report,” 24.1.1942.

<sup>569</sup> In some cases, barter replaced currency as detailed in BA R94/6, “Situation Report SSPF Brest,” 15.3.1942 and “Stadtkommissar Brest,” 12.1.1942.

<sup>570</sup> BA R94/6, “Stadtkommissar Brest,” 12.1.1942 and BA R94/7, “Gebietskommissar Situation Report,” 24.1.1942.

<sup>571</sup> Reports indicate that all offices at the local level understood that some workers were, in fact, better than others.

<sup>572</sup> See BA R94/6, “Stadtkommissar Brest,” 26.11.1941; BA R94/7, “Gebietskommissar Situation Report,” 24.12.1941. Initially, the Labour Office used Jewish skilled workers exclusively to construct offices and winter quarters.

centrally managed, Jews afforded the Gebietskommissar an important interim solution to the critical labour shortage. Excluded from economic life, this relationship granted Jews precious opportunities to earn wages at the same time as it benefited the regime.<sup>573</sup> In Brest, Rolle reported that he “could not avoid allowing Jewish workers to work for some properties subordinate to the Food and Agricultural Office as there was no one else available.”<sup>574</sup> Unfortunately for the Gebietskommissar “the most skilled workers belonged to the Jewish population” anyway.<sup>575</sup>

All employment was to be formally arranged through the Labour Office that acted as a clearing house with labour requirements matched to available registered workers.<sup>576</sup> By coordinating various agencies, such as the police and Labour department, whatever labour could be raised in the area was centrally distributed to meet both local needs and deportation quotas.<sup>577</sup> Initially, he could turn to prisoners of war to meet demands. However, as these stocks dwindled

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<sup>573</sup> BA R94/6, “Stadtkommissar Brest,” 12.1.1942 for Jews excluded from economic life.

<sup>574</sup> BA R94/7, “Gebietskommissar Situation Report,” 24.12.1941.

<sup>575</sup> BA R94/6, “Stadtkommissar Brest,” 12.1.1942. . Jews themselves seemed to be aware of their value as workers. As the murderous intentions of the regime became increasingly obvious, many linked their survival to their efficiency and productiveness at the local level. As we have seen, this tactic, while time-tested and understandable, proved futile.

<sup>576</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>577</sup> Initially, the city prison in Brest was exclusively used to procure “agricultural workers for the German Reich” and was the responsibility of the Gebietskommissar. BA R94/6, “SSPF Brest Situation Report,” 15.4.1942. Excellent coordination at civil administration offices is indicated in BA R94/7, “Gebietskommissar Situation Report,” 24.1.1942.

by early 1942, he was forced to look to the local population.<sup>578</sup> In practice, the Gebietskommissar was constantly bombarded from all sides by requests for labour. Each month, local and Reich requests for workers would pour in, demanding the Gebietskommissar, through the Labour Office, engaged in a kind of juggling act in an effort to meet the growing demands with the dwindling labour resources.

As the numbers of prisoners of war dwindled by early 1942, the civil administration was forced to look to the local population. While for all intents and purposes the labour requirements proved infinite, the pool of registered labour, particularly skilled labour, quickly proved finite. Again, dismal wages and the prospect of deportation did little to encourage voluntary registration. Coordinating with his various offices, the Gebietskommissar was forced toward compulsory registration. Understanding the link between labour and food, the initial tactic was to cross-check ration lists with labour lists.<sup>579</sup> From these lists, labour assets could then be doled out to needy concerns such as the railway, state farms, local factories, agencies such as the OT, and even the civil administration itself.<sup>580</sup> However, given the twin pressures of local and Reich needs, the Gebietskommissar ultimately required a more detailed mechanism by

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<sup>578</sup> As labour became even scarcer, some police, deemed unreliable were transported to the Reich as labour.

<sup>579</sup> BA R94/7, "Gebietskommissar Situation Report," 24.1.1942.

<sup>580</sup> BA R94/6, "SSPF Brest Situation Report," 12.6.1942. On good cooperation with OT, BA R94/7, "Gebietskommissar Situation Report," 24.12.1941. This certainly was an imperfect system. While the Wehrmacht was simply outside this system, others overcame shortages by 'cheating'. For example, the OT and railways both set up their own camps to house the 900 workers they had simply recruited by pulling them off transports intended for the Reich. BA R94/6, Labour Office Brest Monthly Report," 6.7.1942.



which labour demands could be met. Of course, with a more complex mechanism, the possibilities and potentials for breakdowns proved even more acute. Further, the civil administration also faced the reality that transportations were, in fact, two-way: Gebiet to Reich and Reich to Gebiet. As trains left carrying workers to the Reich, other trains arrived, carrying those incapable of meeting the demands of working in Germany. Returning workers were billeted in a squalid reception camp, shared with those destined for deportation to the Reich. The entire enterprise was so poorly organized and maintained that returning workers could slip into the general population even before internment, thereby avoiding labour deployment altogether.<sup>581</sup> Consequently, the Gebietskommissar faced demands from those going and coming. Returning workers, like those departing, required classification, provisioning and, eventually, a final destination. This effectively doubled the demands on the civil administration as well as compounding an already deteriorating security situation.

In terms of Reich labour procurement, the process remained under the control of the Gebietskommissar and his attendant offices. Once deemed suitable for shipment to the Reich, workers were moved to a reception camp where they waited in dismal conditions. While interned awaiting transport to the Reich or release, workers were guarded by local police assets and tended to occupy their time primarily with repeated escape attempts. By mid-1942, a reception camp could contain over 3500 people, compounding the already

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<sup>581</sup> BA R94/6, "SSPF Brest Situation Report," 15.7.1942. Workers "unusable" by the local Labour Office could eventually expect to be returned home. However, even this was not a sure thing. In some cases, locals were sent to the wrong village by mistake.

untenable provisioning situation while providing yet another security headache for the Gebietskommissar. In Brest, Rohde reported openly:

the whole organization of the transportation to the German Reich and back is so deficient and poorly thought through that it can only end in disaster. There is, in particular, a shortage of German forces to take control of the transport operations. The small number of men available have, in my opinion, completely lost track of things. These transport operations can be no help to us as far as propaganda is concerned. It still remains a puzzle to me how cripples, heavily pregnant women and even blind people have been transported to the German Reich to work.<sup>582</sup>

In a single month, June 1942, the civil administration initially received 20,739 potential workers. Somewhere between their arrival and returning from delousing, 739 or almost four percent vanished. While 18,490 did move on to the Reich, 1510 remained under the care and responsibility of the

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<sup>582</sup> "Provision of workers to the Reich: 1.4 to 30.6.1942." This report detailed the reality of labour transportation.

Transportation from the station to the reception camp  
Number of transportations: 36  
Number of people: 20739

Transportation from the reception camp to the delousing station and back  
Number of transportations: 39  
Number of people: 20000

From the reception camp to the Reich  
Number of transportations: 16  
Number of people: 18490

From the hospital to Kiev etc.  
Number of transportations: 2  
Number of people: 1460

BA R94/6, "SSPF Brest Situation Report," 15.7.1942.

Gebietskommissar, requiring not only provisioning but also the constant guard of local police. In short, in a single month, 2249, about eleven percent of the total contingent, either escaped or deemed unsuitable for deportation. Finally, on top of this, the reception camp received about 5500 locals *returning* from the Reich, unfit for service.<sup>583</sup> The Gebietskommissar faced an enormous problem, reporting that proper supervision and management of these people was simply impossible for him. Clearly, the entire process was severely compromised.

Whatever problems the Gebietskommissar faced with the Reich labour procurement office, local needs only compounded his headaches. Again, the civil administration was caught between two conflicting demands: a functioning and productive occupation and the needs of the homeland. Locally, the administration required a labour force to meet both these needs, through production as well the repair, maintenance and expansion of the infrastructure.<sup>584</sup> Such demands required significant labour, an already scarce commodity.

Thus, by mid-1942, the labour procurement system was in crisis due to pressure to meet local needs. In July, the *Reichsbahn* alone requested an additional 1800 workers.<sup>585</sup> Demands for the future were equally dire: 1000 more for the railways in autumn, 200 for the local metal factory, 50 for wood-working and 2600 unskilled labourers. Eighteen months into the occupation, entire towns supported full employment. Yet manufacturing was not the priority of either the Gebietskommissar or the Reich. Having to prioritize demands, the civil

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<sup>583</sup> BA R94/6, Labour Office Brest Monthly Report," 6.7.1942.

<sup>584</sup> BA R94/7, "Labour Office Brest Monthly Report," 27.10.1942.

<sup>585</sup> Ibid. In general, the railway seemed insatiable in terms of labour needs.

administration favoured agriculture over all else. Beginning in 1942, workers were expected to be released from their businesses in order to assist in bringing in the harvest. So important was this effort that a Gebietskommissar could even order a halt to Reich labour recruitment for specific age groups for the duration of the harvest season.<sup>586</sup>

In the end, labour needs were never fully met. Pressured by a deteriorating security situation, lack of provisions and the abiding unwillingness of locals to fully embrace the new system, at best the Gebietskommissar could sometimes tread water before he inevitably sank. Labour procurement was a millstone for the Gebietskommissar. Obviously, from the indigenous perspective, labour in Germany was not a popular destination. Working locally for low wages and no food would have been little better. For the Gebietskommissar this situation only compounded the problems already inherent in the task of finding deportees. First, despite a critical lack of German personnel (even typists) locally, labour had to be identified as both capable of work and “surplus to [local] plans.”<sup>587</sup> Second, the entire enterprise was hamstrung because “there were some problems as this was all started in somewhat of a rush.” Third, the Gebietskommissar was forced to rely on local chiefs, already understood as unreliable, to carry out orders due to the chronic understaffing of Germans in the civil administration. Finally, as the “recruitment” process did not take place in an information or security vacuum, “a large number of farmers and workers

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<sup>586</sup> BA R94/7, “Gebietskommissar Brest Monthly Report,” 22.8.1942 and BA R94/8, “Gebietskommissar Brest Monthly Report,” 21.8.1943.

<sup>587</sup> BA R94/7, “Gebietskommissar Brest Monthly Report,” 24.4.1942.

suddenly disappeared into the woods.”<sup>588</sup> These core challenges, when taken together, help account for the central dilemma facing a Gebietskommissar: the dramatic shortage of labour. Further, even the effort at labour recruitment, whatever the results, placed an extraordinary strain on a Gebietskommissar already juggling multiple demands on his abilities and on his resources. The collection, concentration and deportation of workers, as well as those retained for local employment, all siphoned limited resources such as housing, food and security assets. Given the dropping production rates, desertion and attendant security and propaganda risks, the Gebietskommissar was forced to manage demands which could drain more than they generated.<sup>589</sup>

Yet failures in the realization of labour policy were not entirely situational but rather betray significant systemic failures built in to the exploitation policy of occupation. Critically, the civil administration was chronically understaffed. A Gebietskommissar was forced to stretch his resources as thin as possible, so far as to be woefully inadequate in most tasks. In Brest, Reich transports, the *raison d' être* of local labour policy, were allocated a mere three to five German policemen and ten to fifteen local police, in total, to both guard and carry out transports. In other efforts, such as local reconstruction, limited personnel meant that new concerns would, at some point, be handed over to local managers and labourers. Once out of the hands, and “transferred to locals, the whole thing

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<sup>588</sup> Ibid. On shortages, BA R94/6, “Report of Stadtkommissar Brest,” 25.4.1942.

<sup>589</sup> BA R94/8, “Gebietskommissar Brest Monthly Report,” 21.8.1943, for production at a standstill.

[went] backwards, the business stagnated,” requiring the Gebietskommissar to “start over.”<sup>590</sup>

In terms of efficiency and coordination, some local agencies displayed a remarkable lack of ability even considering the harsh external pressures. Far from the stereotype of German competence, the Gebietskommissars managed a network more prone to failure than success, where even apparent successes only laid the foundation for later failures. Local labour recruitment, carried out by agencies of the Gebietskommissar was:

sometimes performed so clumsily that the majority of the workers recruited escaped. The police are too weak to catch them and the escapees make colossal propaganda against the German administration and gradually the general situation is making it impossible for the German administration to keep control.<sup>591</sup>

Further, meeting some demands meant undercutting others. In some cases, a Gebietskommissar had to intervene directly as his own offices undercut each other in order to meet their demands. For example in the 1943 harvest, Gebietskommissar Burat noted that “the collection of the young age group [was] having a detrimental effect on the state farms as many of the farm labourers come from this age group. The resulting gaps cannot be filled.”<sup>592</sup> In the end, he was forced to order a halt to labour recruitments for the duration of the harvest.

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<sup>590</sup> BA R94/7, “Gebietskommissar Brest Monthly Report,” 22.8.1942.

<sup>591</sup> BA R94/8, “Gebietskommissar Brest Monthly Report,” 9.6.1943.

<sup>592</sup> Ibid, “Gebietskommissar Brest Situation Report,” 24.6.1943. Burat continued: “At present the situation is that these youngsters have escaped into the woods in order to escape the mustering. Other farm workers, who do not belong to this age group, have also escaped to the woods because they are frightened they will be sent to Germany. If the young farmworkers are permanent staff, I had issued

The nature of the regime also meant that a Gebietskommissar oversaw a system characterized by overlapping competencies and, to some extent, competing agencies. Initially, some districts with both a Stadtkommissar and Gebietskommissar were burdened with parallel administrations. In other cases, one administrator could actively lobby for replication, as was the case in Brest. It was not until October 1942 that redundant offices in the city and district administrations were merged. While according to Burat, this had certainly reduced some overlap and ensured his office was somewhat better staffed with Reich Germans, "the range of work and the workload has become greater, since four Reich Germans were retained from the former Stadtkommissar's office, whose work is now distributed among the remaining Reich Germans in my office."<sup>593</sup>

While locally, cooperation and coordination were the norm for most tasks, labour recruitment and maintenance really brought out the worst in the various agencies.<sup>594</sup> The Wehrmacht, for example, offered higher wages to attract local

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an order in accordance with the directives on the collection of workers to the effect that these workers should be left on the farms and gradually replaced."

<sup>593</sup> BA R94/7, "Gebietskommissar Brest Situation Report," 9.10.1942.

<sup>594</sup> Many reports directly referred to excellent cooperation and collaboration, even between local SD assets and the civil administration. Locally, close collaboration between agencies was the norm. Representative reports are: BA R94/7, "Gebietskommissar Situation Report," 24.12.1941; BA R94/6, "Situation Report SSPF Brest," 15.3.1942; BA R94/8, "Gebietskommissar Brest Monthly Report," 21.8.1943 and BA R94/7, "Gebietskommissar Brest Situation Report," 9.10.1942. This reality continued to the end of the occupation. BA R 94/8, "Gebietskommissar Brest Situation Report," 23.12.1943. However, outside the "direct control area" of the Gebietskommissar, problems could arise. Also the mobile nature of some SD killings squads was significant. If a unit was locally based, a better relationship between agencies was possible. Note that the killing in Domachevo employed units technically under the control of the civil

workers while others sought to entice workers from their current employer with the prospect of a free, warm lunch. The civil administration soon understood that not only was this tactic destructive but also seemingly endorsed, at least tacitly, by some agencies. While on the whole, close collaboration at the local level was the rule rather than the exception, competition for labour strained cooperation between some agencies, particularly the Wehrmacht which was beyond the control of the Gebietskommissar, if still subject to some informal cajoling and persuasion.<sup>595</sup>

As a matter of course, agencies tended to hoard labour while simultaneously trying to increase their labour pool by any means necessary.<sup>596</sup> Given the western location of Brest, for example, it acted as kind of hub where workers heading for the Reich from points east passed through. In spring 1942, Stadtkommissar Burat complained that some were being hijacked from the trains when he reported: "it is frequently obvious that German departments here are

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administration without the Gebietskommissar knowing or asking. Finally, the problems of gasoline, security risks and the isolated nature of each town were factors in limiting the size of a Gebietskommissar's "direct control area." BA R94/7, "Gebietskommissar Brest Situation Report," 9.10.1942.

<sup>595</sup> BA R94/6, "SSPF Brest Situation Report," 15.4.1942 and "SSPF Brest Situation Report," 12.6.1942. The Wehrmacht for example tended to pay higher salaries than other agencies such as the Reichsbahn.

<sup>596</sup> BA R94/7, "Gebietskommissar Brest Monthly Report," 22.8.1942. In an interesting case of labour stealing, Gebietskommissar Rolle reported: "only 350 Jews were working as craftsmen. The SSPF ordered the removal of 1000. The City Commissar and myself were not informed in advance about the removal of the Jews. One bright morning, when I went to visit the businesses there were no Jews there and my staff officer had to drive around all day and collect up Jews which were needed for vital war business. Nevertheless, we did not get them all back." These Jews were apparently stolen by the police for use in workshops he had set up.



taking these workers away quite improperly.”<sup>597</sup> Far from ending the practice, the civil administration would later embrace it.

Finally, while a Gebietskommissar could expect a great many demands arriving from higher authorities, in critical ways he was left unsupported, acting pretty much on his own as he interpreted the situation required.<sup>598</sup> In some cases, despite the requests of a Gebietskommissar, clarifications and directives relating to the situation were not forthcoming. In Brest, Burat complained that while he had repeatedly asked for decisions “of a basic nature” to be made at higher levels, he had failed to receive them, apart from one interim decision. As a result he noted “I am placed in a predicament, very often making provisional decisions according to my own assessment, even on basic questions, in which case there is a danger that these may be in contradiction to later decisions. A remedy for this deplorable state of affairs is urgently desired.”<sup>599</sup> Whatever his ability, a Gebietskommissar faced an uphill struggle. Saddled with challenging if not impossible demands with limited resources on hand, he was further handicapped by the nature of the system that was in place. Even if these obstacles were overcome (or at least worked around), he could expect little support from his own superiors. Not surprisingly, the results of this situation were long predicted and, at times somewhat cynically noted at the local level.

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<sup>597</sup> BA R94/6, “Report of Stadtkommissar Brest,” 25.4.1942.

<sup>598</sup> This reality was particularly acute in terms of law, at least initially, which, apart from some basic directives was left up to the Gebietskommissar to translate at the local level.

<sup>599</sup> BA R94/7, “Gebietskommissar Brest Situation Report,” 9.10.1942.

Gebietskommissars were also forced to contend with other pressures, in particular the strategies employed by local workers to ensure their own wellbeing, a goal which they understood was not the first priority of the new regime. Dealt uncompromising orders from higher levels concerning both wage schemes and the food exportation quotas, workers could never expect to see any fruits of their labour, either in their pockets or at the supper table. Initially, compounding the acute labour shortage, workers favoured a tactic of job-hopping in which an employed worker would shop around for the best deal in terms of wage and fringe benefits, such as free lunches. Yet, as the honeymoon period with the occupiers dwindled in 1942, desertion wracked the urban labour forces, as workers ran for the countryside to find, at best food and, at worst, a partisan band to join.<sup>600</sup> In the countryside, fearing deportation to the Reich, young men fled the state farms while others, released from other work to participate in the harvest simply never returned. By fall 1942, recruitment and labour recovery was increasingly endangered by the deteriorating security situation. In some rural areas, the surplus workers were “very difficult to get hold of as no-one dared approach them due to the bandit danger.”<sup>601</sup> As whole areas came under the control of partisan bands, labour recruitment came to a virtual standstill.<sup>602</sup>

Locals increasingly perceived that they had been “much better off under the Bolsheviks,” a perception no doubt reinforced by increased partisan activity

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<sup>600</sup> BA R94/6, “SSPF Brest Situation Report,” 12.6.1942, 2893. Lack of food is documented in BA R94/7, “Gebietskommissar Brest Monthly Report,” 22.8.1942.

<sup>601</sup> BA R94/7, “Labour Office Brest Monthly Report,” 27.10.1942.

<sup>602</sup> BA R94/8, “Gebietskommissar Brest Monthly Report,” 21.8.1943.

and, by early 1943, the proximity of the Red Army.<sup>603</sup> The conditions on the ground, the behaviour of the occupiers and their tactics for labour recruitment certainly prompted many to favour the partisans over the Nazis.<sup>604</sup> By 1943, the situation was dire indeed as Gebietskommissars faced a harsh reality where partisan activity had increased enormously.

Attacks on state farms, villages and Town halls are the order of the day. The delivery of the quota by the farmers has been stopped. It is impossible to use wagons to collect wood or provide workers for urgent jobs. If the bandits are not destroyed by the Wehrmacht and police in the near future, this year's harvest, which promises to be excellent, will be endangered.<sup>605</sup>

In early fall 1943, the full reality of the situation, and the general failure of labour policy was clearly summed up by the Brest Gebietskommissar: "the great demand for labour can only be partially covered as workers cannot be obtained from the territory controlled by the bandits or from the peaceful areas. It is not

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<sup>603</sup> BA R94/6, "SSPF Brest Situation Report," 12.6.1942..

<sup>604</sup> Ibid. BA R94/6, "Labour Office Brest Monthly Report," 6.7.1942 provides an insightful summary of the interrelated problems. Labour needs required workers who needed to be coerced. The system itself favoured harsh methods to soft ones yet did not have adequate resources to deal with fallout of such tactics. The result summarized: "We have to assume that they [fleeing workers] have joined the partisans." However it is also important to note that support for the partisans was not universal, particularly in 1941-1942.

<sup>605</sup> BA R94/8, Gebietskommissar Brest Situation Report," 24.6.1943. Also note that requests for more security forces were a constant feature. In Brest, the Gebietskommissar even directly appealed to other agencies. In a meeting with Wehrmacht and police superiors in Rowno, he asked for support in the pacification of the district. He reported: "Everyone showed great understanding for the difficult situation of the civil administration. The commander of the training regiment here, was also the senior officer in the garrison, has promised me active support, but so far nothing has happened. Even if something does happen it will only be small operations which will not contribute to the permanent pacification of the district. Therefore, I repeat my request for the permanent reinforcement of my gendarmes." BA R94/8, "Gebietskommissar Brest Monthly Report," 21.8.1943.

possible to travel around the district as bridges have been blown up and some districts are controlled entirely by bandits.”<sup>606</sup>

In the end, whatever the tactics and ability of those at the local level, they were undone and overwhelmed by the tide of war. By late 1943, the civil administration was no longer focussed on labour procurement but rather the processing and provisioning of the waves of refugees pouring in from the east. As the front buckled, points west received not only civilians but the retreating Wehrmacht. Rather than the deserted streets of the previous year, Brest was full to bursting with “Wehrmacht units, retainers and refugees. The town is now so heavily populated that I must refuse to take any more people, including Wehrmacht and refugees.”<sup>607</sup>

While limited efforts were attempted to use refugees for labour deportations, the Labour Office was “mainly occupied with forwarding and accommodating the refugees from the operational areas.”<sup>608</sup> However, both labour and security concerns remained. Despite the fact that the recruitment for the Reich had virtually ended, there still existed a great shortage of labour locally, particularly for the railway. Further, the Gebietskommissar reported that he had reached an *ad hoc* arrangement with the Field Commandant, Major General Spengler, with whom he had “an excellent relationship” to assist in providing additional security. Yet despite the General making “every effort to help us to

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<sup>606</sup> BA R94/8, “Gebietskommissar Brest Monthly Report,” 21.8.1943.

<sup>607</sup> Ibid, “Gebietskommissar Brest. Situation Report,” 23.12.1943.

<sup>608</sup> Ibid, “Gebietskommissar Brest Monthly Report,” 16.10.1943. As refugees from the front arrived in the district, “the people capable of work are sent to the German Reich.”

protect the district,” there remained “in the rural part of the district...insufficient security forces to support the work of the civilian population, particularly my agriculturalist.”<sup>609</sup> To the end, and despite an increased military presence, aggressive and successful partisan attacks continued to occur.

Ultimately, the core problems with labour policy at the local level were similar to those affecting other policies, save mass murder: internal hindrances to efficiency in carrying out tasks and external roadblocks to the ability to carry them out. These two factors were not only intimately intertwined but also reinforcing. In short, Gebietskommissars faced intense pressures with little support or even realization from higher offices as to the exact situation on the ground. Further, in effect, they were caught between a rock and a hard place. While certainly their reports must be seen as in some way an effort to pass the buck, it is significant that the different agencies and offices, each with differing goals and agendas tended to represent the situation relatively similarly. In the close-knit world shared by local agencies, a general consensus of not only the challenges facing the regime but their causes also was consistently represented in their reports across the span of the occupation.

In the face of the pressures and demands, efforts were made to find solutions to seemingly insurmountable problems. Over time, a Gebietskommissar could, and did, attempt various methods in terms of labour policy. Initially, surplus POWs could be utilized and whatever workforce remained after Barbarossa put back to work. Yet, as these stocks fell and the

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<sup>609</sup> Ibid.

reality of the occupation became increasingly obvious to local labourers, modifications were in order. Clearly, given the dynamic of low wages and high prices, for some, labour recruitment was not a positive prospect. Compulsory recruitment offered a way out.<sup>610</sup> Consequently, the Gebietskommissar, often with his police, ordered regular labour round-ups to be carried out in search of the unemployed.<sup>611</sup> If a person was identified as a potential worker, they were immediately taken into custody and “sent to the town prison to join the labour process.”<sup>612</sup> For those found in rural areas, a compulsory labour camp was established while others were forcibly brought into town from the hinterland.<sup>613</sup> In reality, the Gebietskommissar’s efforts at recruiting anyone caught up in dawn raids carried out by the Schupo also faced the familiar problems and limitations affecting the civil administration. Lack of manpower meant that such raids, usually involving about thirty men, were not particularly successful. In one series of raids, the police netted about ten workers a day but none were actually identified as unemployed.<sup>614</sup> The downside of this tactic was not lost on local agencies. For example, the District Agriculturalist in Brest informed the Gebietskommissar that “the continuous recruitment of workers for the Reich, which although necessary, caused unease throughout the district, the result of

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<sup>610</sup> BA R94/8, “Gebietskommissar Brest Monthly Report,” 21.8.1943. This tactic became increasingly relied upon as the occupation wore on.

<sup>611</sup> BA R94/6, “SSPF Brest Situation Report,” 12.6.1942; “SSPF Brest Situation Report,” 15.7.1942 and “Labour Office Brest Monthly Report,” 6.7.1942.

<sup>612</sup> BA R94/6, “SSPF Brest Situation Report,” 15.4.1942. .

<sup>613</sup> BA R94/7, “Gebietskmmissar Brest Monthly Report,” 24.2.1942, also BA R94/6, “Labour Office Brest Monthly Report,” 6.7.1942 for transportation to towns.

<sup>614</sup> BA R94/6, “SSPF Brest Situation Report,” 15.7.1942.

which is that people have lost all respect for the German police and no longer obey the rules and regulations.”<sup>615</sup>

Yet despite the widespread use of such methods, a Gebietskommissar, particularly a creative one, was not necessarily limited to them. Less aggressive tactics were also attempted. Initially, Rolle attempted to coordinate and share the assets of all employers in the area. In early August 1942, he successfully ensured that “urgent requirements from the railway” were met by the transfer of workers from Wehrmacht and private business.<sup>616</sup> However, this effort at finding local solutions was not permanent as the other agencies apparently caught on that they might lose labour faster than gain it. Some six weeks later, in early October 1942, new Gebietskommissar Franz Burat chaired a meeting of local agencies and “important employers” asking them to volunteer the release of workers as the situation demanded. In an obvious effort to formalize a process that had already occurred *ad hoc*, Burat implored the seventy-two local businesses and agencies, representing almost 8000 employees, to see the big picture. Unsurprisingly, he met with very limited success. The Wehrmacht, for example, offered an insignificant 100 to the cause.<sup>617</sup> Clearly some concerns trumped a general spirit of cooperation and collaboration.

If cooperation was not assured, and dawn raids ineffective and counter-productive, a Gebietskommissar could still manage. In Brest, netting workers

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<sup>615</sup> BA R94/8, “Gebietskommissar Brest Monthly Report,” 9.6.1943 and “Gebietskommissar Brest Situation Report,” 24.6.1943. The reality that “very few people are still friendly towards us Germans” was only compounded by the continued “collection of the younger age groups to work in the Reich.”

<sup>616</sup> BA R94/7, “Gebietskommissar Brest Monthly Report,” 22.8.1942.

<sup>617</sup> Ibid, “Labour Office Brest Monthly Report,” 27.10.1942.

from outside the district proved relatively effective.<sup>618</sup> As the war progressed, meeting demands meant that a Gebietskommissar would even employ methods previously condemned. When, in July 1942, there was an urgent need of 3000 workers, Rolle's Labour Office began to skim workers transports moving through his district to the Reich. Yet even this tactic was limited by the need to provision these workers and the security concerns inherent to deploying forced labour.<sup>619</sup> Further, while clearly not a concern to the local civil administrator, the labour procurement was a zero sum game. For the Gebietskommissar however, his immediate situation was so untenable that he was willing to engage in activities in which supplying specific Peter meant stealing from collective Paul.

Like taxation and food economic, overall labour policy failed to meet either broader expectations or specific local needs. There were simply not enough workers available.<sup>620</sup> The system itself was so fundamentally broken, inefficient

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<sup>618</sup> Ibid.

<sup>619</sup> BA R94/7, "Gebietskommissar Brest Situation Report," 20.7.1942. In the case of the train skimming, the scheme ultimately failed as "they [workers] could not be fed properly."

<sup>620</sup> This reality clearly demonstrates the surreal nature of the occupation. Despite massive deficits in workers, despite a general lack of expertise and ability in the workers that were available, the regime did not nor could not see past its ideological demands. In the face of labour shortages, the regime murdered Jews. In reality, Jews could remedy many of the problems facing the civil administration. The civil administration perceived them as a largely docile and obedient population, highly skilled and clearly motivated to prove their worth to the regime. Further, they were fundamentally alienated, cut off from the broader population and largely without any kind of safety net rather living in truly totalitarian environment. Yet regardless of this perfect fit, in time, the regime affected their extermination. It is significant to note that Gebietskommissars actively and effectively assisted in this process. However, it must also be noted that, at the local level, there was an acute awareness of the negative results of Jewish policy. While in the main, the solution was total, there were efforts at negotiating, and even sidestepping this most sacred of Nazi charges. While



and self-defeating that even the labour which was available could never be effectively exploited. At the heart of the matter, whatever the ability of a particular Gebietskommissar, scarcity of resources was the constant companion of his administration. Beyond the general failure to meet goals, labour policy provoked other significant failures. First, it proved a significant propaganda failure. Not only did this undercut the honeymoon period with the indigenous Christian population but also provided invaluable ammunition to resistance groups and the Soviet regime. With the formation of labour camps, compulsory labour and deportation, by mid-1942, the population was no longer willing to extend the benefit of the doubt to the occupiers. Second, combined with other factors such as food economics and Soviet military strategy, labour policy reinforced and accelerated a more general security failure. If the Labour Office supplied local demands with a work force, it also supplied partisan bands with willing recruits. Favouring life in the forest and the brutality of a war without mercy to the starvation and slave labour of life under the Nazis, labour policy literally sent people running into the arms of the Soviet partisans. Overall, the logic and practice of labour policy at the local level created more problems than it solved. Here, predictions that the results would be as bad as foreseen proved largely correct.

The work of the civil administration in the East provides important insights into aims, goals, values and priorities of both the Gebietskommissar and the Nazi

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certainly not motivated by decency or altruism, this reality must still be acknowledged. BA R94/7, "Contribution to Monthly Report of Section II," 31.10.1942 for a representative example. Also see Browning, "German Killers", 140-2.

regime itself. It offers a lens through which the various levels and types of interaction such as centre-periphery, Nazi-indigenous can be examined in detail. Focussing on a specific region, provides a microcosm of the eastern experience, a kind of Petri dish within the larger "laboratory...for understanding the essential features of the Nazi state."<sup>621</sup> As we have seen, occupation at the local level passed through several phases from 1941 to 1944. Exploring and understanding the Gebietskommissar's work provides a valuable barometer to understand the pressures and realities of the time. In some ways, Gebietskommissars enjoyed relative success, more in terms of problem solving than "goal-meeting" but victories nonetheless. In the end, this was simply not enough. The story of Gebietskommissars is, fundamentally, one of scarcity: of ability, support and direction, of food and labour. Yet in the inverted world of the Nazi east, there was an abundance of some things. In the kingdom of the blind there was no shortage of brutality, violence, coercion and resistance. In this context, particularly at the local level, orders were rarely enacted as written, tactics shifted and participants learned, for better and worse, that a cat could be skinned any number of ways.

Akin to the broader findings of Timothy Mulligan, the question is not whether the Nazis blew it, squandering what should have been the perfect opportunity. Rather, as we have seen, the big story is how the regime could not have succeeded, how ideological and practical choices made by the Nazis themselves fundamentally undercut any chance of long-term success. In short, asserting

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<sup>621</sup> Steinberg, "Third Reich Reflected," 621, fn. 3.

that they should have acted differently misses the point. In the grand scheme, as Nazis, they *could not* have acted differently. At the local level, where such broad considerations possess less weight, we see the results and the failures with particular clarity.

For the Gebietskommissar, the ability to overcome or even clearly navigate the web of reinforcing problems was simply absent. Yet, if effort and success are understood contextually and with a realistic sense of what indeed was possible, the general representation of the Gebietskommissar as utter failure, constantly on the short end of the stick in an inter-agency Hobbesian war of all against all, should be reconsidered. Contrary to such blanket conclusions of idiot and incompetent, we do find Gebietskommissars who doggedly pursued their tasks with resolve and, in some cases, ability. True, their backgrounds as Party *Mitarbeiter* and political soldiers ensured their abilities and expertise had important limits, but perhaps most damning was not a failure to work hard but rather a propensity to shovel out of a hole by digging straight down.

## Conclusion

"In a closed society where everybody's guilty, the only crime is getting caught. In a world of thieves, the only final sin is stupidity." *Hunter S. Thompson*

In the span of only about 18 months, the much vaunted German war machine went from kicking in the rotten door of the USSR to evacuating their eastern *Lebensraum*. While the fate of the war was decided in the ruins of Stalingrad and plains around Kursk, efforts at the demographic transformation of the colonial areas proved equally disastrous. Previous historiography has certainly provided important perspectives on this general failure. In the end, like the war at the front, behind the lines, in areas under the civil administration the eastern enterprise failed just as completely.

Beginning in 1956 with Alexander Dallin's seminal *German Rule in Russia*, historians have provided sweeping overviews of the occupation that, while providing a broad framework within which subsequent research has been conducted, raised as many questions as were answered. Dallin asserted that German policy toward the indigenous populations proved a disastrous missed opportunity. The architects of General Plan East missed the obvious, the occupiers failing to recognize that the Soviet experience had engendered intense hatred toward the Moscow regime and, with liberation, created a vast pool of peoples willing to collaborate with the Germans.<sup>622</sup> This missed opportunity appeared symptomatic of larger structural weakness. Dallin's implicit contention is that eastern policies reflected the totalitarian nature of Nazi regime itself.

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<sup>622</sup> Dallin, *German Rule*, 665.

Decisions, actions and principles determined at the centre by the elite proved the linchpin upon which success or failure (in the east) rested. Failure at this level ensured the failure of the entire enterprise.

The plausibility of the missed opportunity thesis came under fire in the late 1980s with Timothy Mulligan's *The Politics of Illusion and Empire* which addressed directly the conflicting, perhaps mutually exclusive, goals of the occupation.<sup>623</sup> For Mulligan, Nazi (racial) ideology ensured that all efforts at winning indigenous support proved futile. Simply, the distance between propaganda and reality ensured that the "reforms" that were carried out did not square with the brutality and exploitation already experienced. When pragmatic reform did manage to filter down with some success, despite the best efforts to de-rail them, any fundamental rethinking of eastern policy proved impossible as the entire enterprise took place within a context dominated by Hitler's unwavering ideological vision.<sup>624</sup>

While the studies of Dallin, Reitlinger and Mulligan did much to set the agenda, more recent research has highlighted three important factors that distorted their picture of the OET.<sup>625</sup> However, historians have limited their focus to the Nazi elite. While such key figures cannot be divorced from any analysis of eastern policy, new research has recognized power's negotiable character and the necessity of examining not only how and why policy was determined but also

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<sup>623</sup> The "incongruities" of eastern policies were certainly not lost on a number of Nazi elites, including Rosenberg. For conflicting goals see Mulligan, *Politics*, 70-71, 88, 103, 183-87. Also see Chiari, "Deutsche Zivilverwaltung," 76.

<sup>624</sup> Mulligan, *Politics*, 184-85.

<sup>625</sup> Chiari, "Deutsche Zivilverwaltung," 69.

how it was implemented, transformed and negotiated at the various levels. As a result, historians have turned to more regional, even local, case studies to more fully understand the nature of German occupation at the local level. With the opening of archives in the former Soviet Union, historians have been able to broaden the scope of research to include the periphery and enquire how the later interacted with the centre.

Building on this new material and resultant research, Jonathan Steinberg asserted that failure in the east was the result of individual short-comings and failings of the local leadership. As Gebietskommissars were universally failures so too was the civil administration and ultimately the Third Reich. In terms of tax collection, food economics and labour policy, clearly Gebietskommissars fell far short of Berlin's expectations. But Steinberg's historiographical essay reflected what recent works left out, namely; the wider structural roadblocks and the Gebietskommissars efforts to navigate them. While Steinberg and others have clearly detailed what they saw as personal failings, any consideration of attendant systemic and situational factors is not addressed.

The goals of the Nazi occupation were maximum exploitation and spoliation.<sup>626</sup> The OMi expected Gebietskommissars to operate, at least in theory, according to these guiding principles. From the outset, they were to be largely self-sufficient, that is, to cover their operating costs and fundamental non-military needs from their own areas.<sup>627</sup> Upon arrival, basic necessities such as

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<sup>626</sup> NA RG 238 PS-2718, 2.5.1941.

<sup>627</sup> It should be noted that a Gebietskommissar could be aware of the differences between local procurement and outright pillaging. As others have noted, some

housing, domestic supplies and office supplies were procured locally. Gebietskommissars, their staffs and their families moved into local houses, sharing accommodations, living and working closely not only with their personnel but other agencies such as the German police and SD. Everything from bedding to table-settings came locally as the civil administrators literally arrived by car with only the barest of necessities.<sup>628</sup> Not surprisingly, the needs of this initial deployment were largely met by the contributions of the local Jewish community.<sup>629</sup>

Yet despite their role in establishing the new colonial east, the civil administration was not always adequately supplied with even the most basic administrative supplies.<sup>630</sup> In August 1942, Gebietskommissar Rolle informed

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civil administrators were not above helping themselves to the spoils of war. However, this was not a universal reaction. For example, in early 1942 Gebietskommissar Rolle noted prophetically and candidly: "The administration from East Prussia attempted, and succeeded, to remove all documents and furniture. Similarly, of all things the agriculture has been greatly damaged. Everything, which was not nailed down, whether living or dead, has been removed from the farms. There will be difficulties ahead and it is not at all clear whether we will be able to make anything of it. The customs officers also try to take everything, they were not even too embarrassed to take furniture out of the schools. One could almost say that our compatriots behaved worse than the Bolsheviks." BA R94/7, "Gebietskommissar Brest Report," 24.1.1942.

<sup>628</sup> For bed linen see BA R6/243, "Stadtkommissar. Notes on Gebietskommissars Meeting in Luzk," 4.9.1942, 20-2. This was in contrast to initial Army policy by which "...all unauthorised confiscations are forbidden." BA-MA Freiburg RH 22/5, "Commander Rear Army Area 103. Special Instructions for Handling of the Ukrainian Question," 11.7.1941.

<sup>629</sup> BA R94/6, "Stadtkommissar Brest: Uniforms and Size of Brest Schuma," 12.1.1942 noted that local Poles were not unsympathetic to the plight of area Jews. A change in this attitude was noted by 5.12.42. BA R94/7, "Gendarmerie District Leader Brest: Situation Report," 5.12.1942.

<sup>630</sup> The supply situation was, at times, surprisingly acute. In a report from May 1942, one senior local civil administrator noted that he urgently required a new uniform as the one he had been issued at Krössinsee was falling apart. In

the OMi that “we will soon have to stop working because we do not have any more paper. I have to keep one official vehicle unused because we do not have the necessary tires so I have to use the tires for two trucks on one. If things go on like this, I will have to lay up all the wagons.”<sup>631</sup>

Rather than superimposing specific new structures onto the occupied Soviet Union, the civil administration improvised and adapted systems already in place. The result was a Nazi system largely copying the Soviet one it replaced.<sup>632</sup> Initially, the regime understood this solution as a temporary necessity that would entail significant systemic problems for the future and posed dangerous difficulties in the long-term development of the colonial east.<sup>633</sup> From

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another case, the Gebietskommissar complained that his supplies were so low that it was impacting not only his effectiveness but his public image. BA R94/7, “Gebietskommissar Brest Situation Report,” 9.10.1942.

<sup>631</sup> BA R94/7, “Gebietskommissar Brest Monthly Report,” 22.8.1942.

<sup>632</sup> Initial assessments by the incoming local civil administration in Brest-Stadt demonstrated that some changes were in order. In the case of Brest, this meant an effort to “reduce [the] administrative apparatus to a tolerable size.” BA R94/6, “Situation Report of Stadtkommissar Brest,” 21.11.1941. For the Stadtkommissar, this would only effectively happen when his own office was made redundant by the merger of the Gebietskommissar and Stadtkommissar administrations in 1942.

<sup>633</sup> CIDK, 1275/3/662, “Report by FK 675, Abt. VII (Mil. Admin) to SD,” 11.8.1941. Initial assessment concluded and informed the civil administration that: “the previous system may not be altered for the present. No reprivatisation. In individual cases permission to reoccupy private houses previously owned.” However, “The maintenance of existing economy should here very soon come up again psychological boundaries, however technically suitable it may be for our purposes.” He continued: “In my view, one cannot reckon on introducing a regular, precise administration on the Prussian model. Rather one must be content with the most essential items.” The dangers were also very clearly and prophetically spelled out: “In doing so a strong emphasis on the authoritarian aspect is not recommended, since otherwise the 23 year old Soviet psychosis which has destroyed all independents and initiative immediately breaks out. The people must first be re-educated to willingness to take responsibility. Leading the land remained at subsistence level and incidentally making it economic for



the regime's perspective, there simply were too few Reich Germans or local professionals on hand to do otherwise.<sup>634</sup>

The resultant Nazi-Soviet hybrid, proved largely out of step with local realities and particularities. In areas ranging from taxation to geographic re-organisation, the new system was superimposed on the old. Further, corrections, alterations and modifications were made on the fly and would largely be reactive rather than proactive.<sup>635</sup> Consequently, from the very beginning, at the local level the new civil administration proved largely “on the defensive.”

Aside from such larger structural complications, particular difficulties arose in the effort to translate broader policy for local application. Theoretically, the Gebietskommissar was a “guidance authority,” to act largely in a supervisory and advisory role. To this end, menial administrative tasks were to be delegated to the local indigenous administration. With the clerical work left to locals, broader authority and guidance remained the province of Nazi bureaucrats. The situation on the ground proved far different.

The 1941 invasion, however, often damaged local, indigenous industry resulting in chronic shortages and increased strain on an already struggling economy.<sup>636</sup> In this atmosphere, Gebietskommissars were expected to ensure that specific supply needs were met, take responsibility for the indigenous

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Europe, should encounter certain difficulties. Furthermore the East must not be the slum quarter of Europe. It is on this very point but the hopes which Germany has shown as a cultural supremacy are not to be disregarded.”

<sup>634</sup> Ibid. Note that the Army faced a similar dilemma. See CIDK, 1275/3/662, “Report by FK 675, Abt. VII (Mil. Admin) to SD,” 1.8.1941.

<sup>635</sup> Supra, chapters 4,6,7.

<sup>636</sup> For a concise summary of the situation in *Weißruthenien* see Gerlach, “German Economic Interests”, 212-17.

population and, when required, to take direct action.<sup>637</sup> To supervise conditions for the benefit of the Reich rather than the population, Gebietskommissars participated in native affairs in so far as “intensive intervention” allowed, despite critical shortages in German manpower.<sup>638</sup> In short, if Gebietskommissars were anxious to fulfill their economic tasks, they simultaneously faced security and political goals often incompatible with either maximum exploitation or pacification.<sup>639</sup> In a context where swords were increasingly favoured over plough-shares, Gebietskommissars fared poorly.

At the local level, the reality was an unfavourable combination of too much space, too few Germans or effective indigenous officials. As a result, Gebietskommissar authority tended to be spread thin and his ability to act as simply a steering element significantly limited. In short, Gebietskommissars faced a nearly impossible task. The sheer size of the territory and lack of manpower made meaningful and widespread translation and implementation of policy difficult if not impossible. Whatever the structure in place, eastern policy contained irreconcilable imperatives.<sup>640</sup> If an indigenous local authority existed

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<sup>637</sup> USHMM RG 31.002M Reel 11, 3206/1/69, “Erich Koch Order,” 5.09.1941. This certainly reflected and conformed to the disciplined vertical hierarchy envisioned by Hitler for the restructuring of the east. See *Hitler's Table Talk, 1941-1944, : His Private Conversations*. Translated by Norman Cameron and R.H. Stevens (London: Phoenix Press, 2000), 424.

<sup>638</sup> On the numbers of Germans active in the RKO see NARB 370/1/1255, “Eröffnungsrede des Herrn Reichskommissars Gauleiter Lohse zur Arbeitstagung der Gebietskommissare am 22 January, 1943.”

<sup>639</sup> BA-L AR-2218/60 v.16, 2224, “Testimony of Artur Wilke,”. For the case of Brest, see Browning, “German Killers,” 116-43.

<sup>640</sup> USHMM RG 31.002M Reel 11, 3206/1/69, “Erich Koch Order,” 5.9.1941 and BA R6/230, “Gedenken zur Behördenorganisation in der RKO,” 30.8.1943, 42. For an organisational chart detailing the relationship between Gebietskommissar

thereby allowing the system to function in a meaningful way, the Gebietskommissar would necessarily be forced to sacrifice, however *de facto* this might be, the totality of their authority. The danger for the Gebietskommissar was obvious: increase the responsibility of the indigenous administration and risk engendering a sense of parity or simply lose control of day-to-day bureaucratic functioning. In practice, this meant that local officials holding office could not function independently of the German administration or far from the eye of the Gebietskommissar, however watchful or not that may have been.

As my study has shown, the structure of the occupation did have some advantages for the civil administration that the Gebietskommissar might turn to his advantage. However, this reality was neither recognized nor appreciated at higher levels of the administration. Reflecting on the occupation administration in mid-1944, Generalkommissar Waldemar Magunia asserted that timely adjustments to local conditions were generally handicapped and in some cases impossible. Administrative “stiffness” made consideration of specific local conditions more difficult and ensured that the local administration was largely incapable of making rapid changes in light of either political or local requirements. The final outcome, he argued, was a kind of systemic atrophy that

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and local agencies see USHMM, Acc. 1996.A.269 ‘Zhitomir Oblast’ Records, Reel 5, 1465/1/1. Also see CSA-Kiev, 3206/1/62 and USHMM RG 31.002M Reel 6. The racist worldview of the civil administration certainly flowed from the top down. In the case of RKU, Reichskommissar Erich Koch possessed a particular fondness for whipping Ukrainians on the street. At the local level, Ukrainians were commonly dubbed ‘White Negros’. Quoted in Lower, *Nazi Empire-Building*, 109.

made local rule more difficult.<sup>641</sup> With a system imposed from above and favouring ideological and bureaucratic rigidity to flexibility and awareness of specific and special local conditions, local civil administrators seemed largely handicapped from the outset.

Certainly, in practice, Gebietskommissars were more concerned with the specific functioning of the administration than originally intended.<sup>642</sup> As a result, they spent more time working through administrative details compounded by juggling broader policy demands and local needs. The impact at the local level could be dramatic. Swamped with overseeing and carrying out the daily functioning of the district, Gebietskommissars faced significant challenges in the transfer, adaptation and translation of decrees and orders from the Generalkommissariate level to the local level. Yet, as we have seen, the Gebietskommissars did not simply supervise their application "as is" but rather proved willing and capable of translating decrees and policy into terms understandable and applicable to the character of their local area. It cannot be ignored that this process also demonstrated a significant impromptu and improvisational element in Gebietskommissar rule. In an environment charged with high expectations but few resources, the general sense that they made it up as they went along is strongly reflected.

The Nazi regime and the Gebietskommissar alike were engaged in demographic engineering and the construction of a racial empire. Part of this

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<sup>641</sup> BA R6/15/146-178 "*Erfahrungsbericht über 2 1/2-jährige Tätigkeit im Generalbezirk Kiew*," 31.5.1944.

<sup>642</sup> BA R6/251/117b.

undertaking was certainly the genocide of eastern Jewry and other assorted “life unworthy of life.” At one level, the micro-chronologies used in this study allow for a better understanding of the “machinery of destruction” in Nazi occupied Soviet territories and variations from area to area. At another, they also allow a better profile of the transformation of civil officials to mass murderers on a very personal and local level. Here it is vitally important to recognize that each event in this process unfolded without the certainty of any other subsequent acts. However, the “tuned in” administrator was able to see ahead and recognize the direction and contours of evolving Jewish policy and the resulting demands of the day.

While the civil administration was not tasked specifically with murdering their charges, the occupation featured a particular atmosphere of organized violence from its inception. For the civil administration, this reality was initially manifested in the brutal treatment of the civilian population. This behaviour generally took the form of beatings, public humiliation and robbery, often masked as quasi-official confiscations and contributions. While such activities were rarely deadly, they took place within an increasingly radical context highlighted by the plight of locally interned Soviet prisoners of war.

Beginning almost immediately after taking their posts in 1941, Gebietskommissars worked closely with their police in the imprisonment, interrogation and murder of “undesirables.” Escalating violence generally began with local or isolated killings where victims were abused and murdered. In these cases, Gebietskommissars tended to be more ecumenical than not, targeting local Christians as well. In this way, they got their feet wet with killings that,

however brutal or unjust, were cloaked in a veil of legality, expedience and necessity.

The final steps on the path to genocide began in late 1941 with the transition from murder to mass murder. Again employing local police assets, the shift from local and isolated killings to more select and ideologically flavoured murder generally began with the murder of the Roma. In this phase, “useless eaters” and non-productive racial enemies could be eliminated and the productive, whatever their racial status, retained. The murder of gypsies and other rural undesirables marked the acceleration toward killing on a massive scale. The 1941 murders of local Byelorussians, Poles and gypsies established the two types of violent performance that the civil administration would repeat in targeting Jews in the coming months.<sup>643</sup> For local non-Jews, killings were generally selective, targeting rural undesirables and those deemed a security risk.<sup>644</sup> For gypsies, the killing was total as the administration destroyed every single one they could get their hands on.<sup>645</sup> Such actions certainly highlight the interplay of ideological assumptions with local conditions and realities.

Brutal behaviour, while not preordained, was certainly not entirely out of character. Many Gebietskommissars were violent men. In the ranks of the *Freikorps*, national army and the SA, they had experienced repetitive violent performance long before eastern deployment in 1941. By 1942, they were again

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<sup>643</sup> NARB 370/55/11.

<sup>644</sup> Ibid. Also see Rajak, *Memorial Book of Glebokie*, 38.

<sup>645</sup> BA-L AR-2218/60 v.16, 2224. “Testimony of Artur Wilke.”

operating in this familiar situation in which violence was part of the job.<sup>646</sup> With their eastern deployment (if not earlier), ideology and practicality reinforced the perception that provocation and conflict be resolved primarily by force and violence. Consequently, future violent performance often resulted from minimal provocation.<sup>647</sup>

Personnel records demonstrate that while they were not unaccustomed to violence, such activities took place within a particular hierarchical and militarized context. As Nazi thugs, street fighters and foot-soldiers, they engaged in violence collectively and professionally. Overall, however, the strongest linkage of career and large-scale violence occurred in the east and within the Nazi context of *Weltanschauungskrieg*. In this way, eastern service marked a kind of recidivism.

Mass murders and the day-to-day violence of occupation were intensely local affairs. Certainly, outside agencies were prominently involved. Yet in 1941-1942, victims would recognize the faces of the local Nazi agents at every stage of the genocidal process: collection, selection, transportation and killing. The undertaking of mass murder was not a project designed or capable of being undertaken in secret and rather spawned close working relationships and a generally cooperative spirit at the local level. In essence, a dynamic existed favouring locally engineered and collaborative action in which inter-agency cooperation was the norm rather than exception. In terms of mass murder, more often than not, the Gebietskommissars were equal to the task.

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<sup>646</sup> NA RG 238, PS-2174.

<sup>647</sup> Browning, *Ordinary Men*, 161.

Yet, given the variances in factors such as personality, interpretation of the canon worldview and local conditions, ranges of behaviour existed. Gebietskommissars were certainly not carbon copies but rather exhibited a range of responses to a common set of circumstances. In general, this span can be roughly characterized as having three nodes: eager, active and provisional. More simply Gebietskommissars can be described as (a) those who embrace killing (b) those that “got on with it” (c) those that “dragged their feet.”

The existence of a range of behaviour collectively called foot dragging, meaning reluctant and/or protracted compliance to orders, raises important questions concerning the interpretation and negotiation of orders, the effective application of central power in the periphery, the existence of and limitations on “real power” in the *Gebietskommissariate*, ranges and limitations on acceptable behaviour and the absolute primacy of ideological motives for mass murder. In the final analysis however, Gebietskommissars consistently facilitated murder: the intentional killing of another person with premeditation. In specific situations this was in the form of mass murder while in others it involved individual, even isolated murders.

The nature of the Nazi war in the east produced a radical and escalating Jewish policy towards a Final Solution. In a similar fashion, repetitive violence ending in mass murder followed a pattern of escalating commitment. The Gebietskommissar’s path to genocide was both twisted and incremental, fashioned through the combination of specific backgrounds, local needs and



conditions of the occupation. In the end, the process of “becoming evil” began long before the shooting pits were dug and the pistols loaded.<sup>648</sup>

Steadily improved rank and status within the Party throughout the 1930s suggests Nazism was a snug fit for Gebietskommissars. Further, most were *Altkämpfer*, joining prior to the 1933 seizure of power. Social rank and status was tied to fortunes of an organization yet to be established politically as a “sure thing.” No longer a fringe party by 1930, involvement with the Nazis afforded nobodies the means to achieve status and social dominance as a self made man.

Gebietskommissars had certainly experienced significant “ups and downs” professionally. In the embrace of the Party, universally, they experienced promotion and professional success. In general, Gebietskommissars seized on these opportunities, rising relatively quickly and regularly through the ranks of the SA and civil administration. The brown shirt meant status and professional place. Simply, Nazism allowed for a bright future and a better life. Yet, as the Second World War began, Gebietskommissars, holding important ranks in the SA (and Party), found themselves demoted to the junior echelons of the army, holding ranks of sergeant or lower. Certainly, this relative decline in status would reinforce the intimate link between social status, rank and party involvement. As long-time Nazi functionaries, they were accustomed to the Nazism’s particular idiosyncrasies in terms of how it operated. Given their survivability and relative

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<sup>648</sup> James Waller’s phrase “becoming evil” is certainly helpful for understanding both process and the reality that extraordinary evil does not necessarily require extraordinary explanations.

success in promotions, they understood both how to navigate and prosper.

Motivations such as careerism and “job-protection” played a significant role.<sup>649</sup>

Undoubtedly, their long careers in the Nazi Party and ideological training infused their worldviews with an anti-Semitism that imagined a world free of the taint of Jewry. However, whatever their personal experiences with Jews, they could not have imagined the scale of the “problem” in the USSR. On coming east, they were confronted with tens of thousands of Jews.

Gebietskommissar interaction with Jews should be understood as a sliding scale of radicalism. When a solution was required, increasingly radical options were not only considered but enacted. When combined with the nature of violent performance, the scale of the problem allowed for a relatively seamless transition to violence on a grand scale.

Nazism tended to engender a “climate of impunity.” This gave rise to a new ethics. In this Nazi world, hijacked principles like “*Es ist schon alles Scheisse, mach was du willst*” obliterated the fine line ensuring civil behaviour.<sup>650</sup> What is so troubling about this process is that this reality did not reject morality or conscience but instead inverted it turning virtue to vice and vice to virtue.<sup>651</sup> In understanding these killers, their motives and path to genocide, beliefs systems and self-interest remain important links in the murder chain.

Gebietskommissars came to their posts with distinct, invested personal and professional interests. Further, this interest as well as much of their identity

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<sup>649</sup> Mann, “Were the Perpetrators,” 339.

<sup>650</sup> Paul, *Die Täter*, 156.

<sup>651</sup> *Ibid*, 144, 179.

was profoundly linked to Nazism. Within the movement, they had experienced the greatest fulfillment of their needs and expectations. At the apex of their Nazi careers, command of an eastern district ensured an even stronger affiliation and adherence to the organization. At best, duty demanded it while, at worst, being onside was in their best self-interest.

Clearly motivation must be seen as containing complex and interconnected elements based on disparate factors. Further, each individual contains within themselves myriad motivations, some complimentary, others contradictory. As we have seen, the interconnectedness between Gebietskommissar motivation and behaviour can be expressed as a “perpetrator equation,” a chain that facilitated the transition from Nazi functionary to murderer. In this mutation, a poisonous confluence of factors merged personality with a background influenced by “Nazi values” and local-temporal realities of occupation. Gebietskommissar were men, but not “ordinary men.”

Collective biography has enabled significant inroads into establishing and analyzing Gebietskommissar identity. Certainly, individual stories are often hard to consistently establish. Yet when Gebietskommissars are addressed more broadly, important shared attributes and patterns of experience emerge. The resulting “Gebietskommissar X” composite, discussed in chapter 3, marks the first effort to comprehensively and collectively reconstruct and identify local civil administrators.

In this way, new findings about background and experience allow for new insights. A Gebietskommissar’s particular background interacted intimately with

the demands of eastern service as they consistently, and in some cases tenaciously, tried to carry out their duty. We have seen how they employed the tools learned as career Nazis and relied on “muscle memory” engendered by paramilitary experience. Not surprisingly, previous experience often shaped responses by forming both the foundation and the boundaries of their choices and responses. Yet, clearly Gebietskommissars were not merely Nazi automatons as similarities in background did not prompt identical responses. Indeed, while ranges of behaviour were certainly limited by background, experience and the realities of the east, Gebietskommissars did make individual choices that proved not entirely predictable, universal nor consistent with past historical representations.

Critically, sensitivity to grey zones and individual complexities is not to say that they were “accidental Nazis.” Gebietskommissars tended to follow the pattern of making increasingly radical life choices with attendant escalating commitments. This propensity to extremism marks yet another fundamental separation from “ordinary men.” Like every other German male of their generation, they grew and came of age in “hard times.” In response, they chose paramilitarism, violence, and the simplicities of bigotry on the ideological fringes. Like every other German male of their generation, they needed a career. Gebietskommissars chose a Nazi one, tied their futures to it and were rewarded. Finally, in eastern service, we find a string of incrementally more radical decisions. In terms of mass murder and genocide most quickly involved their agencies. And, in most of their tasks they “stuck with it” right to the end.

Detailing the lowest level of the German occupation administration and the men who functioned there bridges a gap in the historiography and promotes a fuller picture of the Nazi regime itself. If the regime was the sum of its parts, to better understand it, the more parts we know about the better. In the end, Gebietskommissars were not only products of Nazism but Nazism also a product of them.

This study has revealed who these administrators were and detailed their social backgrounds and ideological experience. By way of their orders, actions and their own words, we have seen what they perceived as their main functions and the key features of how they exercised power. Finally, their relationship with the indigenous population and their role in mass murder and the genocide shows a range of behaviours and responses to the demands of the “eastern mission.”

Chronically under-supplied, particularly in terms of manpower, Gebietskommissars faced the high expectations of both their superiors and other agencies. Levels of success, if not effort, were directly related to the difficulty of realizing a given task or policy. Simply, in tasks that were consistently hard to enforce or fiercely contested such as taxation, food economics or labour policy, Gebietskommissar generally fell short.

In some cases, despite difficulties and growing sense of a general failure, hard work was neither always shunned nor unrewarded. In significant ways, managing the east became more feasible and widespread than transforming it. Further, dissenting voices from the periphery can also be heard offering candid criticism and blunt denunciations of both certain policies and the methods of their

application. Whatever they may have been, Gebietskommissars were not silent “cogs.” Ultimately, this study has shown Gebietskommissars to be complex personalities and active historical agents and in this role they were not simply a collection of incompetent failed party-men, “blockheads” and “ass-lickers.”

If the local civil administration found some tasks nearly impossible to carry out and enjoyed only limited success, others were considerably easier. Here lies the fundamental dichotomy of the civil administration in the occupied Soviet Union. In the east, bringing in the harvest proved far more difficult for a Gebietskommissar than mass murder and genocide and not a single Gebietskommissar resigned.

## Appendix I: Biographies

“The man in the violent situation reveals those qualities least dispensable to his personality, those qualities which are all he will have to take into eternity with him...”

~Flannery O'Connor

### **Robert Georg Marschall, Sdolbunow (Reichskommissariat Ukraine)**

Gebietskommissar Marschall was born March 22, 1903 in Löbau, Germany. The middle child (of three boys), Marschall's father was a businessman. Educated in his hometown until 1918, Marschall then studied in the Sorenbohm *Pädagogium* (Pomerania) where he took his school leaving exam/university entrance qualification [*Abitur*] after about 18 months.<sup>652</sup> Receiving his certificate (*Zeugnis der Oberprima*), he moved to Berlin as trainee with the Deutschen Bank in 1921 where he worked for the next two and half years. While employed as a bank trainee, the young Marschall continued his education, studying at the *Handelshochschule* in Berlin, taking his business diploma exam in 1926. His part-time continued education continued until 1933, first at technical schools and then an urban professional school in Berlin.<sup>653</sup>

In 1933, Marschall began teaching economics and “social policy” in Kulmbach and Königswinter. In 1936 (or 1937), this training allowed him to accept at teaching position at *Ordensburg Vogelsang* where he remained until entering the military in September 1939. While Marschall's position at

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<sup>652</sup> BA-L 204 AR-218/66 Paur Case, GebK. Marschall, 5-9. Sorenbohm is located in present day Poland.

<sup>653</sup> “Thereafter I worked initially in occupational trade schools at the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and after that at a municipal school of commerce.”  
Ibid, 4.

*Ordensburg Vogelsang* remains unclear, the facility itself was intended to provide the ideological and spiritual element in an Ordensjunker's three tier education.

Marschall joined the Nazi Party in 1930 while living in Berlin. Within the Party, he acted as a cell-leader while simultaneously serving in the SA. According to Marschall, he was appointed *Hauptsturmführer* without any effort or desire on his part ("*ohne mein Zutun*").<sup>654</sup> He was also a member of both the National Socialist Teachers Alliance (NSLB) and a Berlin city delegate for the German Labour Front (DAF). Called up for military service in 1939, the thirty-five year old Marschall's war service began as a corporal (*Gefreiter*) in a flak unit. Stationed in Köln, Marschall rose in rank to an NCO prior to his deployment in the east in September 1941.<sup>655</sup>

Like all Gebietskommissars, Marschall's *Osteinsatz* began at Ordensburg Krössinsee in Falkenburg. Following this initial training, Marschall was sent east, to Rowno (RKU) and ordered to wait for a Gebiet to open up. In short order, one did and Marschall began his Gebietskommissariat career in Sdolbunow (RKU) in October 1941. One year later, he transferred to Kostopol where he remained until evacuated in January 1944.<sup>656</sup> With the tide of war definitively turned, the former Gebietskommissar continued to work for the civilian administration, ironically in his birth place of Löbau in the *Generalgouvernement*. The collapsing

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<sup>654</sup> "Ich war auch in der SA seit 1930 und bin ohne mein Zutun durch den SA-Obergruppenführer Schöne zum Hauptsturmführer ernannt worden." Ibid, 5-6.

<sup>655</sup> Marschall later claimed that he did not volunteer but rather was called up for eastern service. Ibid, 4.

<sup>656</sup> Ibid, 5.



eastern front pushed Marschall west.<sup>657</sup> In late March 1945, he returned to the Wehrmacht and the final month of the war was spent in the infantry. At war's end, Marschall entered British custody where he remained until September 1945.

### **Wilhelm Söhlmann, Minsk Stadt (Reichskommissariat Ostland)**

Wilhelm Söhlmann was born 22 March 1886 in Braunschweig, Lower Saxony. A businessman (*Kaufmann*) by profession, he belonged to Obergruppe VI, Nordsee, Brigade 61 in nearby Hanover where he resided.<sup>658</sup> Söhlmann's formal education proved rather limited having only attended primary school. However, his martial instruction was more substantial. At 20, from October 1906 to October 1907, he served in Fusilier Regiment 73. He returned again to the Army at 26 between 1912 and 1913 with Infantry Regiment 74. A career NCO, the highest rank Söhlmann attained was *Vizefeldwebel* ("vice sergeant"). But the majority of his service was at the more modest rank of platoon commander and machine-gun platoon leader. Significantly, he did not see service in the Great War. Despite his apparent absence from the trenches, Söhlmann returned to uniform in the wake of German defeat. After the Armistice, Söhlmann enlisted in the ranks of *Freikorps Stahlhelm*, enjoying a successful tenure until 1928. Whatever his military record prior to this service, Söhlmann, a machine gun specialist, flourished with the unit ultimately being awarded an Iron Cross (second class).<sup>659</sup>

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<sup>657</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

<sup>658</sup> NA BDC, SA Personnel Files. A3341, Series SA-Kartei, "Wilhelm Söhlmann, 22.3.1886," SA Führer Fragebogen, 28 August 1934. Söhlmann married Johanne Seitz

<sup>659</sup> Additionally, he was awarded the *Braunschweiger Verdienst Kreuz*.

Two years after leaving *Stahlhelm*, Söhlmann joined the NSDAP in May 1930 and the SA three months later in August. He immediately became an active member. While not formally well-schooled, Söhlmann's political education was strengthened by his attendance at a *Reichsführerschule* training course in Munich and participation in four Party marches in his first four years.<sup>660</sup> Further, his service to the Party included membership in Hanover City Council beginning in March 1933 shortly after the Nazi seizure of power.

Wilhelm Söhlmann enjoyed steady promotion in the SA after his enlistment and proved himself a committed "street-fighter" where martial prowess counted more than classroom pedigree. In July 1932, Wilhelm Söhlmann was convicted and fined 100 RM (100,00 RM) for illegally carrying a weapon.<sup>661</sup> Concurrently, he moved through the ranks for the movement: *Scharführer* (1.7.30), *Sturmführer* (1.10.30), *Sturmbannführer* (1.5.31), *Standartenführer* (1.7.32) and *Oberführer* (1.3.33). Promoted five times in three years, by September 1932, Söhlmann was also serving as *Führer der Standarte 73*.<sup>662</sup> By 1938, he was also sitting as the *Bürgermeister* of scenic Norderney.<sup>663</sup> The initial OMi deployment in the East in 1941 slated Söhlmann for service as *Gebietskommissar* for Mogilew.<sup>664</sup> However, the area remained under military administration and was never handed over the civil administration. As a result, Wilhelm Söhlmann would have to wait for his appointment. It was not until (sometime) in 1943, that a post opened and he assumed the

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<sup>660</sup> Ibid. Marches included Braunschweig (2), Oldenburg and Nürnberg. SA Führer Fragebogen, 28 August 1934.

<sup>661</sup> The matter was resolved 5 months later with the *Erlass d. Amnestie v. 20.12.1932*.

<sup>662</sup> See handwritten notations for further citations in 1936.

<sup>663</sup> Situated in the North Sea, Norderney is one of the East Frisian islands and belongs to Lower Saxony.

<sup>664</sup> BA R6/13/2.

role of Gebietskommissar for *Kreisgebiet* Minsk-Stadt. He was the third person to hold the post and, by far, the least educated.<sup>665</sup>

### **Hermann Hanweg, Lida (Reichskommissariat Ostland)**

Hermann Hanweg was born in 1907 probably in Hanover.<sup>666</sup> At 21, he joined the Nazi Party.<sup>667</sup> In 1936 Hanweg attended Ordensburg Vogelsang and Ordensburg Krössinsee as *Kameradschaftsführer*. After graduating from the training academies, he entered the Army and served as an Infantry corporal, seeing action in the 1940 France campaign.<sup>668</sup> In summer 1941, Hanweg again returned to Ordensburg Krössinsee in preparation for eastern service. In the fall he traveled with his new staff by car to Lida to assume his position as Gebietskommissar.

Two of Hanweg's staff, Leopold Windisch and Rudolf Werner, did not think highly of him.<sup>669</sup> In fact, Werner characterized him as arrogant and taken with himself. In general, Hanweg tended to rely not on the functionaries at his disposal but rather on the manager of his administration, namely Windisch. According to information of numerous domestic and foreign witnesses, Hanweg was fundamentally a soft person, who was rather apathetic about his professional duties, who here and there allowed Jews supplementary provisions.

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<sup>665</sup> His predecessors were Dr. Bernhard Kaiser (1941) and Dr. Ludwig Ehrenleitner (1942-43).

<sup>666</sup> BA-L AR-Z 94d/59, v.5. "Testimony of Witness Ripper." Windisch claimed he might have been from Hesse in Ibid, 835.

<sup>667</sup> NA BDC Blaue Kartei, A 3340 MFOK H003, 2522. Hanweg's party card listed his date of birth as 25 July, 1907. He joined the party on 1 January 1928.

<sup>668</sup> BA-L AR-Z 94d/59, v.5, 835.

<sup>669</sup> An identically named Rudolf Werner was also deployed in Baranowitsche.

Some Jews even spoke of him as a father figure.<sup>670</sup> In regards to local Jewish affairs, Hanweg displayed a far more sophisticated approach than “stick discipline” and overwhelming violence. With Lida’s Jews, he apparently maintained a congenial relationship. Significantly, he did so without losing his credibility as a Nazi. Whatever his behaviour, it was clear to Werner that Hanweg never felt beholden to “his Jews” and proved himself “a convinced national socialist.”<sup>671</sup>

Whatever his abilities as a Gebietskommissar, it was Hanweg’s immoral personal behaviour that led to his removal in spring 1944. Presumably due to his “open love affair” with his secretary, the Gebietskommissar was transferred to the Wehrmacht and moved west. In August 1944, he posted his last letter from Nancy and went missing, presumed killed in the fighting around Metz.

### **Fritz Buschmann, Novogrodek (Reichskommissariat Ostland)**

A late addition to the ranks of the Gebietskommissars, Fritz Buschmann was born 11 August 1903, in Dortmund.<sup>672</sup> As a youth, he attended primary school, two years of secondary school, three years of business school and two years of pharmaceutical studies. Based on this experience, Buschmann worked as a pharmacist in Soldin, Brandenburg, where he combined employment with

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<sup>670</sup> BA-L AR-Z 94d/59, v.5, 835., p.835.

<sup>671</sup> Ibid, v.1, 146.

<sup>672</sup> NA BDC, SA Personnel Files. A3341, Series SA-Kartei, “Fritz Buschmann, 11.8.1903.” Bushmanns’s 1934 *SA Führer-Fragebogen* listed his faith as Evangelical-Lutheran.

his party activity.<sup>673</sup> While the area remained under German control after the Great War, it occupied the very frontier bordering territories (eastern Pomerania) seized by Poland under the Versailles Treaty. Buschmann was married and fathered two children in 1930 and 1932. In his personnel record it was reported that he had recently fathered a son, Peter Wolfgang, born 20 May 1943, on assuming his position as Gebietskommissar in Novogrodek.<sup>674</sup>

Buschmann's political and paramilitary education began early. He claimed that in 1918 (age 15) he joined the *Deutschwölkischer Schutz und Trutz Bund*. In 1921, he served nine months with the infamous *Freikorps Oberland* where he attained the rank of *Gefechtsordonanz*.<sup>675</sup> In 1924, he served six months as a volunteer junior enlisted officer (*Unteroffizier Freiwilliger*) in the "schwarzen Reichswehr." By the mid-1920s, Buschmann was an active paramilitary belonging to several organizations concurrently. From 1924-1928, he was a conservative *Stahlhelm* (Steel Helmets) member and, for one year, a county secretary. In 1926, he joined two additional organizations, *Wehrband Ostmark* as a platoon leader (*Zügfürher*) and *Wehrwolf* (1926-1931) where he served as

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<sup>673</sup> Soldin is located in Brandenburg, just south of Hinter Pommern (Eastern Pomerania), close to the Polish border. Prior to 1945, Soldin was one of twenty *Kreise* making up the *Regierungsbezirk* (district) of Frankfurt an der Oder.

<sup>674</sup> Ibid, *Personalbogen*, 208, Fritz Buschmann. The undated document contained the date 22.2.44. Thus, without other supporting information the document is dated 1944-1945. The document failed to note the identity of the mother nor does Buschmann list the names of his first two children.

<sup>675</sup> This Freikorps produced such Nazi notables as *Reichsführer-SS und Chef der deutschen Polizei* Heinrich Himmler, *Reichstag deputy & SS-Gruppenführer* Hans Hinkel, *SS-Oberst-Gruppenführer und Panzer Generaloberst der Waffen-SS* Josef Dietrich and *SS-Gruppenführer* Franz Hayler.

*Landesverbandsführer Grenzmark*.<sup>676</sup> His service was significant enough for him to warrant two commendations: the Silesian Eagle (first and second class) and the *Bewährungsabzeichen des Freikorps Oberland*. Buschmann's paramilitary service was not without personal sacrifice, as he received a severe wound in the fighting.

Buschmann joined the Nazi Party on 4 January 1929 and acted as district speaker (*Kreisredner*) until October 1931. By March 1933 he was a *Mitglied des Kreistages* and Special Representative of the Higher SA Leadership at the Soldin District Council Office. On 1 September 1931, Buschmann joined the SA as an active member. Between 1929 and 1934, he attended numerous courses focused on leadership, physical fitness and weapons training. Additionally, beginning in 1932, he attended important marches and rallies including the 1933 *Reichsparteitag*. Between enlistment in the SA in October 1931 and February 1934, Buschmann received three promotions from *Truppführer* in 1931 to *Obersturmbannführer* by 1934.<sup>677</sup> By 1934, he served as leader of Standarte 205 (22 Brigade, *Ostmark*) in Soldin.

Fritz Buschmann did not possess an unblemished criminal record either before or after joining the Party. As an active radical, he was charged with various offenses on three occasions between 1926 and 1931. On 11 May 1926, he was charged with unauthorized possession of arms and in October 1927, while a member of *Wehrbund Ostmark*, with conspiracy. Both occurred prior to

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<sup>676</sup> Ranks: *Wehrbund Ostmark*: *Zugführer*, *Stahlhelm*: *Krissekretär*, *Wehrwolf*: *Landesführer*.

<sup>677</sup> *Obersturmbannführer* was roughly equivalent to Lieutenant Colonel in the Army.

enrolment in the Party. However, the young Buschmann seemed unable to entirely break with his troubled past once enrolled. In June 1931, just ten weeks prior to admission into the SA, he was charged with resistance to State Authority (13. 6. 31: *wegen widerstandes gegen die Staatsgewalt* (SA). Certainly, Buschmann proved an active political soldier.

In the middle of October 1943, Buschmann became the Gebietskommissar of Novogrodek, replacing Wilhelm Traub. Nine months previously he had been promoted to *Standartenführer* (9.11.42) from *Obersturmbannführer*, a rank he had held for the previous eight years (20.2.34). However, the tide of war having turned against the Nazis, this appointment proved short-lived. Nonetheless, even after evacuation from the east, Buschmann remained a valuable and loyal Nazi. Given his significant experience and political reliability he was promoted to the rank of Major on 22 February 1944 with the Reserve Army.

### **Rudolf Werner, Baranowitsche (Reichskommissariat Ostland)**

Rudolf Werner was born 19 December, 1898 in Chemnitz, Germany.<sup>678</sup> A textile specialist by trade, his formal education consisted of *Volksschule*, *Realgymnasium* and *Höhere Werkschule*. Werner was certainly proud of his his war experience, which he cited on his SA leader questionnaire (*SA-Führer Fragebogen*).<sup>679</sup> Despite his lack of higher education, he claimed knowledge of French and English. Married, Werner sired

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<sup>678</sup> Chemnitz, located in the Ore Mountains, is the third largest city in Saxony.

<sup>679</sup> NA BDC, SA Personnel Files. A3341, Series SA-Kartei, "Rudolf Werner, 19.12.1898," *SA-Führer Fragebogen*, 15.10.1934.

six children beginning with Rolf (1923) and Irmhild (1934).<sup>680</sup> Between 1936 and 1942, he had four more children. His first, a daughter was born in early 1936 followed by two sons (April 1939) and (May 1941) and another daughter a year later in May 1942. In October 1943, Rolf was killed in action shortly after his twentieth birthday.

At the outbreak of war in 1914, Werner enlisted in the *Nationale Wehrverbände Jungsturm* serving as a platoon leader (*Zugführer*) until 1917. In May 1917, Werner enlisted in the Army at 19. He remained in the service until February 1919. In the Great War, Werner was a front soldier, serving primarily as a corporal and machine-gunner with Infantry Regiment 104 on the Western Front. For his service he received an Iron Cross (Second Class)

Werner joined the NSDAP 1 June 1930. Two months later, he entered his hometown branch of the SA. Werner proved an active and effective Nazi activist. Throughout the early 1930s, Werner participated in numerous Nazi training courses and programs that suggest his life interests were threefold: sports, combat, and the Party. Between 1931 and 1933, he attended two sports courses (*SA-Sportschule*) in Döberitz. He also attended two other courses in Schmorkau-Königsbrück that combined his interests in sport and combat. A dedicated education in weaponry was simultaneously pursued as Werner honed his marksmanship with a month long police machine-gun course in Chemnitz and at a SA Weapons course in Königsbrück a month later. Finally, Werner was a regular attendee at Party leadership courses, participating for nine weeks in two programs in Munich between 1932 and 1934 (*Lehrgang Reichsführerschule*

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<sup>680</sup> Werner married Elise (nee Heinitz), one year his junior. Rolf was born in 1923 and Irmhild in 1934. Additionally, Werner claimed an Evangelical-Lutheran background.



*München*). Like thousands of other Nazi “co-workers” Werner also participated in the most significant Party functions in the early 1930s, *Reichsparteitag Nürnberg*, in 1933 and again in 1934.

Werner’s diligence did not go unrewarded. In just over four years, he enjoyed a meteoric rise from *Truppführer* to *Standartenführer*, the Army equivalent of rising from Sergeant to Colonel.<sup>681</sup> His final promotion came 30 January 1940 when he moved to *Oberführer* (Brigadier General). His promotions were accompanied by appointments to increasingly more positions. Beginning in Chemnitz as *Führer des Sturmes* 13/104 he moved on to staff work with Group Thüringen in late 1933. In 1936, assumed the position of Referent for Organisation and Deployment and, finally, to Head of Leadership Division of Group Thüringen in March 1937.

In the wake of the invasion of the USSR, Rudolf Werner assumed his post as Gebietskommissar of Baranowitsche in 1941. It was here that he would be able to tie together strands of experience, training, ideology and personality.

### **Willi Müller, Hansewicze (Reichskommissariat Ostland)**

Willi Müller was born 10 February, 1907 in Großrückerswalde, Saxony near the Sudeten border. He was married to Elsa who bore him one child in April 1937.<sup>682</sup> Müller’s education began at *Volksschule* in Großrückerswalde followed by attendance at *Realschule* in Marienberg and *Realgymnasium* in Annaberg. He received a higher

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<sup>681</sup> *Truppführer* (15.7.31), *Sturmführer* (1.7.32), *Obersturmführer* (2.9.33), *Sturmhauptführer* (9.11.33), *Sturmbannführer* (1.12.34), *Obersturmbannführer* (20.4.34) and *Standartenführer* (9.11.35).

<sup>682</sup> It was unclear whether Müller’s wedding was a Church or civil ceremony. He claimed to be Evangelical-Lutheran.

education at the University of Leipzig and Freiburg studying Law and political science. In 1927 he took the first State exam in 1930 and the second in 1934. Müller supplemented his formal education with a paramilitary one while he was still a teenager. In 1924 at 17, Müller enlisted in the ranks of *Freikorps Wehrwolf* where he held the rank of *Wehrwolfmann* (private) until leaving the unit in 1927 presumably to continue with his formal education.<sup>683</sup>

Despite his paramilitary past, Müller was not immediately attracted to the Nazi movement. Rather he claimed that the Young Plan in 1929 opened him to the voice of the NSDAP.<sup>684</sup> He joined the party on 1 April, 1931 at age 24. Müller served as a Party *Regierungsrat* in Saxony throughout the 1930s and joined the SA after four years in the party's ranks on February, 1935. Following enlistment in the Brownshirts, his Nazi career really began in earnest as Co-chair of the District Court (*Zivilberuf Regierungsassessor an der Amtshauptmannschaft*) in Flöha.<sup>685</sup> Having completed his *2.Staatsexamen* in 1934, Müller continued training hard to sharpen his legal skills to understand the "points of the jurisdiction of a party court." By August 1939, Müller was acting as Chairman of the District Court and Government Council in Annaberg.<sup>686</sup>

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<sup>683</sup> Also see NA BDC, SA Personnel Files. A3341, Series SA-Kartei, "Willi Müller, 10.2.1907," *Dienstleistungszeugnis*, 25 May, 1943. *Wehrwolf*, the third largest Freikorps, was formed in Halle on 11.1.1923 in response to the Ruhr crisis. Fritz Buschmann also served in the ranks of the unit.

<sup>684</sup> Ibid, *Personalbogen* for Willi Müller, "Bei welcher Wahl haben Sie das erste Mal der NSDAP Ihre Stimme gegeben? Youngplan 1929."

<sup>685</sup> Ibid, *Dienstleistungszeugnis*, 8.1.1937. "Pg. Müller ist ein Mitarbeiter von echtem nationalsozialistischem Empfinden und sein Urteil durchaus treffsicher. Er ist mir ein sehr wertvoller Mitarbeiter." For *Ersatzbeisitzer* see *Dienstleistungszeugnis*, 28.3. 1938.

<sup>686</sup> Ibid, *Dienstleistungszeugnis*, 25.5.1943.

On 16 June 1941, Müller, then delegated to the Saxony Ministry of the Interior, was immediately given a leave of absence for eastern service and sent for training to Ordensburg Krössinsee. While the transfer came only a few days prior to Barbarossa, Müller had already been considered for eastern deployment as early as 10 May 1941.<sup>687</sup> Müller assumed his post as Gebietskommissar in Hansewicze in late summer-fall 1941.

From his earliest Party assessment report, he was recognized for both his professional acumen and his ideological correctness.<sup>688</sup> High praise and excellent work proved the hallmark of his service. While in 1937 he was assessed as a “very valuable co-worker,” high praise indeed, his 1938 review proved even more gushing.<sup>689</sup> Clearly, as the report recommended, Müller was marked for higher things.<sup>690</sup> Müller’s 1943 Service Report confirmed his consistent commitment to the Party. During his service as Gebietskommissar he continued to be commended for his skill, energy and comradely demeanour. Further his reputation for objectivity and fairness (*Gerechtigkeitsempfinden*) assured him the confidence of his comrades, his superiors and the Party.<sup>691</sup>

But there was far more to Willi Müller than simply a capable SA-man and party functionary. In November 1940, Müller revealed to the Chairman of the

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<sup>687</sup> See Ibid, “*Letter from Eckardt to Versitzenden den Gaugerichts Sachsen NSDAP, 10.5., 1941.*” This letter accompanied Müller’s *Dienstleistungszeugnis*. Also see *Dienstleistungszeugnis*, 25.5.1943. It was expected that Müller would eventually return to his duties in Annaberg.

<sup>688</sup> Ibid, *Dienstleistungszeugnis*, 8.1.1937.

<sup>689</sup> The reported stated: “Mit seiner Tätigkeit bin ich sehr zufrieden. Pg. Müller hat sich bereits in dem Kreisgericht Flöha II bestens bewährt. Weltanschaulich ist er gefestigt. Er besitzt wegen seines Verhaltens und Auftretens das Vertauen der Parteigenossen. Seine Beschlüsse sind der Form und dem Inhalte nach einwandfrei.” Ibid, *Dienstleistungszeugnis*, 8.1.1937. For similar praise see report from Oberste Parteigericht der NSDAP-Zentralamt/Personalabteilung-München 13.12.1940.

<sup>690</sup> Ibid, *Dienstleistungszeugnis*, 28.3.1938.

<sup>691</sup> Ibid, *Dienstleistungszeugnis*, 25 May, 1943.

Party Court in Munich that he was, in fact, also an agent for the Security Service (SD). He had been active in the SD since 1935, the same year he joined the SA.<sup>692</sup> Between 1935 and 1940, Müller split time between the Party job and the SD. By early 1940, Müller believed that he could no longer maintain both positions and would like to move into the SD full-time and be “released from any other party work.” However, Müller simultaneously found himself indispensable in his Party work in Annaberg and he asked for a postponement of his SD transfer. As a result, Müller faced a critical career choice. Unable to permanently hold his position as *Kreisrichter* and facing the expiration of the offer to move to the SS, Müller intended to submit his documents to the SD. But fully aware of the impact this decision would have on his career, Müller hesitated, fearing his transfer to the SS would strip him of the service rank he had attained in the Party. Not surprisingly, he did not relish the prospect.

Müller proposed an arrangement whereby he might retain his service rank. Choosing careful words, Müller made his pitch. Suggesting himself an important official, he claimed leaving his party post proved a hard task. To solve the problem, Müller offered to continue as a *Kreisrichter* even if he moved to the SS.<sup>693</sup> Believing the problem solved, Müller remarked that he assumed that the SD would assent or at least the issue would be settled after mediation. If no dispensation was possible, Müller would select the Party over a transfer.

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<sup>692</sup> Ibid, “An den Vorsitzenden des Gaugerichts Sachsen der NSDAP, Pg. Eckardt in Dresden A-1,” 26.11.1940. Müller declared: “Seit 1935 bin ich im SD der SS tätig.”

<sup>693</sup> Ibid. Eckardt held Müller in high esteem and endorsed his appointment. “Letter from Eckardt to Versitzenden den Gaugerichts Sachsen NSDAP, 10 Mai, 1941.”

Ultimately, Müller hopes were dashed by the Party in early 1941. Simply, a Party judge could not simultaneously be an SD member.<sup>694</sup> However, the career-minded Müller was not left entirely unrewarded. Less than a year later, he would find himself a Gebietskommissar in the east. Finally, on June 7, 1943 Müller received a final important promotion while still serving in the east. Upon his return to the Reich, he would assume the position of Presidency over the Party Court in Annaberg.<sup>695</sup>

Willi Müller proved himself a valuable, high-prized and savvy Nazi. Despite his humble origins, he worked hard within the Party to create a promising, if not mercurial, career. From his joining the Party in 1931, to deployment in Hansewicze a decade later, Müller effectively wedded ideological commitment with careerist aspirations. Certainly, in this case, the OMi did not dredge the bottom of the Party barrel.

### **Heinrich Carl, Sluzk (Reichskommissariat Ostland)**

Heinrich Carl was born November 12, 1895 in Drage, Schleswig.<sup>696</sup> Like many of his Gebietskommissar colleagues, he was a military veteran. In the First World War, the young Heinrich served as a non-commissioned officer (*Unteroffizier*) where he developed

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<sup>694</sup> Ibid, "Betriff den Pg. Willi Müller," 31.1941.

<sup>695</sup> Ibid. See Letter from Pg. Müller to Oberste Parteigericht, z.Hd.d. Reichsleiters Pg. Buch, 23.7.1943. Müller diplomatically remarked: "Ich werde mich durch weitere tatkräftig Mitarbeiter im Einsatz der NSDAP dieses Vertrauens würdig zu erweisen suchen."

<sup>696</sup> BA-L 262/59. Carl came from the same region as his Reichskommissar Heinrich Lohse.

an abiding respect for the armed forces.<sup>697</sup> In 1939, his position as NSDAP *Kreisgeschäftsführer* in Rendsberg exempted him from military service. However, the forty-three year Carl immediately volunteered for active duty. He re-entered the Army, again as an *Unteroffizier*, and saw action in the 1940 France campaign. For his service, he was promoted to Lieutenant. Unfortunately, Sciatica (*Ischiasleidens*) prevented continued active duty, prompting his transfer to a reserve battalion. One year later, Carl was selected for eastern service and deployed, as Gebietskommissar, to Sluzk in August 1941.

#### **Gerhard Erren, Slonim (Reichskommissariat Ostland)**

Born March 4, 1901 in Mittenbrück, in contemporary Poland, Gerhard Erren was raised by his father, a farmer and *Handwerksohn*, and received his formal education from 1907 to 1930.<sup>698</sup> From 1907 to 1913, Erren attended his hometown city school (*Stadtschule*) before graduating to *Realschule* and *Seminar* in Myslowitz where he completed his schooling with an *Abitur*.<sup>699</sup> In 1927, Erren continued his education at the College for Physical Education

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<sup>697</sup> Carl's later testimony demonstrated his affinity for the military. While Gebietskommissar of Sluzk, he claimed to have excellent relations with local Wehrmacht units.

<sup>698</sup> NA BDC, SA Personnel Files. A3341, Series SA-Kartei, "Gerhard Erren, 4.4.1901," SA-Führer Fragebogen, 15.10.1934, *Lebenslauf*, Slonim, 27.10.1943. In terms of family origins, Erren was pulled to the German frontiers from both the east and west. His father, a *Bauern* and *Handwerksohn* came from Niederrhein in the west and his mother from *Ostschlesien* in the east.

<sup>699</sup> Located just west (9km) of Katowice, Myslowitz had a population of about 19,000 in 1914. Significantly, in 1922, the city became Polish.

(Berlin-Spandau), graduating as a Physical Education teacher.<sup>700</sup> From 1929-1930, Erren was again in the classroom studying biology, geography and history.

Erren married twice, he fathered two children, Evamaria in 1929 and Gerhard in 1935. In 1936, Evamaria died of diphtheria. On 25 September 1943, Erren's second marriage took place while he served as the Gebietskommissar of Slonim. This marriage, to the 32 year old Wilma Lohmeyer, marked the formalization of a relationship that had already produced children.<sup>701</sup> Despite an undoubtedly hectic schedule that included both local administration and a cardinal role in the mass murder of local Jews, the prolific Erren fathered two children: Geert, born in April 1942 and Edda, in July 1943. Interestingly, his betrothal occurred in September 1943, two months after the child's birth.<sup>702</sup>

Too young for service in the Great War, Erren embraced paramilitary membership at 18, serving from 1919 to 1922 as a *Freikorps* border guard and also *Stahlhelm* (1920-1923).<sup>703</sup> In 1922, while on *Freikorps* duty, Erren's father died from a wound he received in the so-called *Polenaufstand* (Polish Rebellion) a year earlier.<sup>704</sup> From 1919 to 1922, Erren was actively engaged in *Freikorps* combat operations in Upper Silesia which earned him the Silesian Eagle (I & II class) in the process. Further service was in the ranks of East-Silesian *Grenzschutz-Wehrverband "Landeschützen"* under *Reichswehr* jurisdiction

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<sup>700</sup> Erren was an intensely physically active person. His *Lebenslauf* listed numerous sports in which he engaged as well as the awards and distinctions he subsequently achieved.

<sup>701</sup> No mention of divorce was made in the *Lebenslauf*. Erren's Roman Catholic upbringing apparently had no impact on his decision to divorce.

<sup>702</sup> Ibid. *Lebenslauf*, 27.10.1943.

<sup>703</sup> Ibid.

<sup>704</sup> Ibid.

which netted him more citations.<sup>705</sup> Finally, his active duty days behind him, he trained for several months with Infantry Regiment 94 in the late 1920s and 1930s.

Erren remained active in paramilitary circles throughout the 1920s. He worked as a District Manager for the National League of Cosel (1923-1927) and District Chief of Sports and Defence training courses. From 1926-1933, he continued such activity acting as an instructor at the *Reichswasserschutz Coselhafen* and a *Gymnasium* Physical Education teacher in Leobschütz und *Neisse*.<sup>706</sup>

While Erren certainly possessed characteristics highly valued by the NSDAP, he was a relative latecomer to the Nazi party. Joining the movement on 1 May 1933, Erren appears a March violet, climbing aboard the Nazi bandwagon almost immediately after the seizure of power.<sup>707</sup> However, this was far from the case. Rather, Erren claimed that his long and dedicated service with various *Freikorps* and paramilitary groups had soured him on party politics. Rather than the party, he claimed his mission was guided by his *völkisch* commitment to the German people. Further, membership in *Wehrverband "Landeschützen"* forbade membership in any political party. However, Erren was indeed a Nazi in spirit if not in uniform. He stated, that from the beginning of 1931, he publicly confessed his sympathy with the movement and its worldview. Clearly, the message of the NSDAP struck Erren as different from that of the traditional

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<sup>705</sup> Ibid. Erren earned: "*Goldene und Silberne Hindenburgmedaille, Bronzeabzeichen der 100 besten Schützen von Ostschlesien.*"

<sup>706</sup> Ibid.

<sup>707</sup> Ibid and BDC Blau Kartei, A3340 MFOK E016, 2538.



parties in which he had lost faith. In 1933, with the absorption of the *Wehrverband "Landeschützen"* into the SA, Erren enthusiastically threw himself into the uniform and the work of the NSDAP.

From 1933 to 1936, Erren put his teacher training to use as a NSDAP physical education teacher in Upper Silesia where, from 1934 onward, he functioned mainly as political leader. His formal Nazi education came at *Ordensburg Vogelsang* in October 1936 with the Special Course Key Leaders. Here his physical education was supplemented with classes on hereditary biology, ethnology, population politics, ancient and early modern history, political philosophy, German history and geo-politics. In 1937, he began work at Ordensburg Krössinsee as a "Comrade-Leader" and sub-commander providing forty candidates with a solid Nazi ideological education.

On 10 September 1939, he again returned to military duty with Infantry Regiment 747. Seeing action again, Erren fought in the 1940 France campaign between May and July 1940, where he distinguished himself in combat, earning an Iron Cross (2<sup>nd</sup> Class) and War Service Cross (2<sup>nd</sup> Class) and promotion from corporal to Sergeant.<sup>708</sup> He was discharged in July 1941 for service with the civil administration in the east. In July – August 1941 Erren attended the Gebietskommissar training course at Krössinsee. He then traveled to his new post, Slonim, arriving on 1 September 1941. Over the next two years, he would earn the moniker "The Bloody Commissar."<sup>709</sup>

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<sup>708</sup> Erren saw action in the invasion of France.

<sup>709</sup> For his service in Slonim, he earned the ironically named "*Verdienst und Tapferkeitsauszeichnung für Angehörige der Ostvölker II, Kl. in Silber mit*

As the tide of the Red Army rolled over Slonim, Erren was brought into the SS by Generalkommissar von Gottberg on 28 November 1943 as a leader of the *SS-Hauptamt* staff.<sup>710</sup> Gottberg had personally cleared the appointment with Himmler and lavished praise on the former Gebietskommissar considering him “politically important.”<sup>711</sup> As the war entered its final phases in early 1945, Erren joined the ranks of the Waffen SS as *SS-Führer* for ideological schooling.<sup>712</sup>

Gerhard Erren proved highly motivated and reliable. In fact, Gerhard Erren was the “perfect Nazi”: obsessed with physical fitness, a decorated combat veteran and ideologically correct.<sup>713</sup>

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*Schwersten.*” Additionally, he also claimed participation in anti-Partisan operations (*Beteiligung an Partisaneneinsätzen*) as part of his war service. See *Ibid. Lebenslauf*, 27.10.1943.

<sup>710</sup> *Ibid. Personalverfügung*, 18.10.1944.

<sup>711</sup> *Ibid.*, “Letter from v. Gottberg to SS-Grfhr. V. Herff, 23.1.1944.” Also see *Ibid.*, “*Betr: Aufnahme des Gebietskommissars Gerhard Erren, geb. 4.3.01, in die Schtzstaffel, 25.2.1944. “Die Aufnahme von Erren hat politische Bedeutung.*” Erren entered as a *SS-Sturmbannführer*.

<sup>712</sup> *Ibid.*, “*Meldung Berlin, 9.2.45.*” He was granted the rank of *SS-Untersturmführer der Reserve der Waffen-SS*.

<sup>713</sup> Generalkommissar von Gottberg even noted that “urgent considerations of political significance justified speeding up the paperwork for his SS admission.” NA BDC, SS Officer Personnel Files. A3343, SSO, “SS Admission (*Aufnahme*), 1944.”

## Appendix II

### The Case of Gebietskommissariat Lida

Under the command of General Commissar Wilhelm Kube, headquartered in Minsk, GK-*Weißruthenien* was to consist of five *Hauptkommissariate* [Main Commissariats, HK]: Minsk, Baranowitsche, Vitebsk, Smolensk, and Mogilev.<sup>714</sup> Realities of the war however ensured civil administrations were set up only in the Minsk and Baranowitsche regions, the rest remaining military districts. Located in western Belorussia (formerly eastern Poland), SA-Gruppenführer Fenz headed the administration of *Hauptkommissariat* Baranowitsche.<sup>715</sup> The 41,000 sq km of the region was further subdivided into five *Gebietskommissariate* (*Kreisegebiete*): Baranowitsche, Slonim, Novogrodek, Hansewicze, and Lida.

Occupied by the Soviets in 1939, Lida fell within the area east of the Grodno-Brest Litovsk line promised to the Soviet Union in the nonaggression pact of 23 August 1939. Immediately, the Soviets absorbed Lida into the Belorussian SSR. With the initial success of Barbarossa in June 1941, the area fell quickly to advancing German forces. By June 28/29 the city itself, extensively damaged in the fighting, was formally occupied as Military District 102.<sup>716</sup> In total, the district comprised the city and seven rayons: Ivje, Juraciski, Radun,

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<sup>714</sup> Also referred to as a *Hauptbezirk*. This administrative unit was unique to *Weißruthenien*.

<sup>715</sup> Fenz was killed in action 17.2.1943. For the administrative arrangements see BA-L AR-Z 94d/59, v.11, 1488, v.19, 2634.

<sup>716</sup> Lida was damaged primarily by Luftwaffe bombardments. For military occupation see *Ibid*, v.17, 2351.

Shchuchin, Voronovo (Werenow), Vasiliski and Zoludek.<sup>717</sup> Transfer from military to civilian administration proved relatively speedy. On 31 August 1941, western areas of the USSR were transferred to the civil administration.

The population of the Lida region totalled approximately 283,000, the vast majority of the population ethnically Polish (192,474 – 68%).<sup>718</sup> Byelorussians proved the next largest groups totalling 66,657 (23.5%) followed by: Jews (4,419), Lithuanians (2,963), Tatars (531), Ethnic Germans (76) and a remaining 268 “people of miscellaneous nationality.”<sup>719</sup>

In 1937, the population of Lida city sat at 24,870. Although an accurate count is impossible to determine throughout the occupation, witnesses estimated the population ranged from 15,000-30,000.<sup>720</sup> According to a German witness, in the summer of 1941 Lida supported a population of 25,000 including about 8,000 Jews.<sup>721</sup> As a result of the 1939 and 1941 invasions, the Jewish population fluctuated dramatically with refugees.<sup>722</sup> With the onset of Barbarossa and the subsequent first wave of shootings this population further swelled as Lithuanian

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<sup>717</sup> See NARB 370/1/80, USHMM RG 53 003M Minsk, Reel 11, “*Verzeichnis der Gebiete und Kreise des Generalbezirks Weißruthenien*,” Minsk, 5 .4.1943. BA-L AR-Z 94d/59, v.8, 680. “The region of Lida consisted of 8 districts about the size of normal Prussian districts, and – in addition to Lida – the rayons Ivje (about 4500 – 5000 inhabitants), Juracishki, Radun, Shchuchin (2000 – 3000 inhabitants), Vasiliski (about 3500 – 5000 inhabitants) Voronovo and Zoludek (1700 inhabitants).”

<sup>718</sup> The approximate totals do not equal the sum of the listed individual ethnic figures. Using these sums, Poles equaled 71.9%.

<sup>719</sup> BA-L AR-Z 94d/59, v.1, 80; v.17, 2442.

<sup>720</sup> Ibid, v.8, 680.

<sup>721</sup> Ibid, v.1, 83, 90, v.17, 2356. “For the period of the German occupation, one can also assume a population of 20,000 to 25,000 people, of them about 7,200 to 7,500 Jews.”

<sup>722</sup> Ibid, v.1, 172.

Jews fled to Lida.<sup>723</sup> Finally, as the military campaign continued, the refugee population of the area continued to grow as Soviet-displaced persons were driven west by the devastation of the advance.<sup>724</sup>

As an urban hub, the city contained important services including the regional Gymnasium, “barracks, electric plants, mail and telephone offices, a railway station, airport and hospitals.” Industrial development proved considerable and included a pair of mechanical equipment factories, “a nail factory, saw mill, oil presses, a soap factory, a city abattoir” and a brewery. Perhaps the most important industry, the “Arda” galoshes factory, one of the largest in Poland, ceased production for the duration of the German occupation.<sup>725</sup>

By 1942, the civil administration in Lida presided over an indigenous population over 250,000 people distributed over 7 Kreise and 32 communities.<sup>726</sup> At the apex of the local German administration sat the Gebietskommissar. In Lida, Hermann Hanweg held this post from late summer 1941 to spring 1944. Among his other duties, Hanweg, as Gebietskommissar, enjoyed control of regional police posts and substations. Directly under Hanweg was the Staff Chief [*Stabsleiter*], “simultaneously Chief of the Division of Politics and Nationality. In line with other RKO areas, the administrative structure in Lida consisted of six divisions: Politics, Race, and Nationality (I), Economics and

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<sup>723</sup> *Ibid*, v.2, 437.

<sup>724</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>725</sup> *Ibid*, v.2, 327, v.13, 1807. Initially, Lida supported two breweries but one was destroyed in the fighting in 1941.

<sup>726</sup> Agregate totals are derived from NARB 370/1/80.

industry (II), Labour (III), Administration, credit union, and taxes (IV), Forestry and wood (V) and Agriculture (VI). Beneath this level was the indigenous administration consisting of local mayors in cities and towns followed by local leaders in smaller villages.

The administrative staff arrived in Lida by way of the OMi training facility Ordensburg Krössinsee in Pomerania. Following this initial training, the German staff began to arrive in their new posts in late summer-early fall 1941.<sup>727</sup> The most senior Lida staff including the Gebietskommissar, Staff Chief and Chief Administrative Secretary arrived in September 1941 from Krössinsee via motor car and established headquarters in the Gymnasium and living accommodations nearby.<sup>728</sup>

After the initial deployment in later summer/fall 1941, the office of the civil administration began to develop.<sup>729</sup> As Staff Leader, Leopold Windisch controlled the Politics Division. In this capacity, his power extended “over cultural and religious matters, as well as propaganda (public relations).”<sup>730</sup> The Labour Department was created and controlled by an official named Cordes. Originally sent to the east as an Army Administration Inspector with the Army Economic Command in Minsk, Cordes was discharged from the Wehrmacht on 1 March

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<sup>727</sup> The civil administration sported yellow-brown uniforms that resembled NSDAP and SA livery leading to the pointed nick-name “*Goldfasane*” (Golden Pheasant). Additionally, neither insignia nor epaulettes adorned staff uniforms except for a lapel cord. Headdress consisted of the familiar NSDAP peaked cap marked with rank designation and golden cord.

<sup>728</sup> BA-L AR-Z 94d/59, v.2, 315.

<sup>729</sup> In total the entire command supported about 40 Germans. See *Ibid*, v.1. 135.

<sup>730</sup> *Ibid*, v.5, 783.

1942 to work as the Director of the Lida Work Office.<sup>731</sup> However, this appointment proved short-lived as he was recalled to the Wehrmacht on 31 July 1942 and was replaced by Wittig.<sup>732</sup>

Even prior to the establishment of the Work Office, Gebietskommissariat Lida possessed a Forestry and Wood Division. From 25 September 1941 to 2 July 1944, the division was under Kahler. Like Cordes, Kahler too came east as an Army Administration Inspector of the Administrative Command Minsk. Kahler remained in the army, again like Cordes, until early 1942. Beginning on 15 February 1942, he became “administratively part of the Gebiet administration as a forester” in a department that employed both Germans and indigenous people. Others in the administration included interpreter Eduard Ripper, forester Valentin Kuczynski and Kahler’s personal secretary Sophie Zakrczewska. Interestingly, the division also employed a local academic, a gymnasium professor named Kleindienst.<sup>733</sup> Finally, the Agricultural Division maintained a staff of District Agriculturalists stationed in towns throughout the region. In 1943, the Division was under the direction of Edgar Germer. District Agriculturalists included Kipper and Weber.<sup>734</sup>

Given that Lida was one of the first regions to be turned over to civil administration, the area also served as a training ground. In January 1942, five trainee administrators, intended for deployment in Polozk, arrived in the city for

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<sup>731</sup> Ibid, v.5, 788, v.16,2320.

<sup>732</sup> Ibid, v. 2, 421.

<sup>733</sup> Ibid, v.1, 89, v.2, 62, v.5, 58, v.9. 301.

<sup>734</sup> Ibid, v.2, 423, v. 7, 2357.

“on-the-job training.”<sup>735</sup> The group included expectant Gebietskommissar Borman and his Chief of Staff Selzener.<sup>736</sup> While active in the activities in the area, the trainees held “no official positions there themselves.” Ultimately, Polozk was never established and remained under military administration for the duration of the occupation.

Apart from the civil administration numerous other agency offices operated in Lida. Perhaps the most significant was the military presence. Immediately in the wake of the occupation, the *Feld und Ortskommandatur* (Field and Town Command) Lida was established under the command of *Ortskommandant Hptm.* Laudien. This agency maintained only a minimal presence of about 30 men.<sup>737</sup> Initially, the *Ortskommandatur* headquartered next to the offices of the civil administration in the Lida Post Office before transferring to a number of buildings near the railway station.

As the first German agency to administer the area, the *Ortskommandatur* undertook numerous organisational responsibilities beyond its purely military tasks. Upon occupation, military administrators in the office appointed *Gemeinderate* and issued new identity papers. Given the war damage in Lida itself, a local workforce was engaged to rebuild “various buildings, particularly barracks” and “built from scratch” other buildings and businesses and materiel with materials abandoned by the retreating Soviet Army.<sup>738</sup>

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<sup>735</sup> Ibid, v. 7, 1123, v. 14, 1946, v.16, 2280.

<sup>736</sup> The ironically named SA-*Standartenführer* Borman was slated to be Gebietskommissar of Polozk and Selzener, his Chief of Staff.

<sup>737</sup> BA-L AR-Z 94d/59, v.17, 2351, 2355, v.18, 2550.

<sup>738</sup> Ibid, v.17, 2351f, 2355, 2358.



Beginning in mid-August 1941, area security was provided by 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, Infantry Regiment 727 of the regular Army under Battalion Commander *Hauptmann* Mayer. In place prior to the arrival of the civil administration, the unit's headquarters was in the Lida Gymnasium.<sup>739</sup> Component companies of the battalion were stationed in outlying areas of the region. Under First Lieutenant Amberg, 10<sup>th</sup> Company was "stationed in Ivje with the Company staff and two squads"<sup>740</sup> while First Lieutenant Kiéfer's 12<sup>th</sup> Company resided in Shchuchin.<sup>741</sup> The deployment of an Army line unit lasted only until early spring 1942. On 13 March 1942, the entire unit transferred east to the Bobriusk region and was replaced by a "part of the Security Brigade 2."<sup>742</sup> This unit was reinforced in summer 1942 by 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 217 Reserve Infantry Regiment. This unit in turn moved on to Mitau in early 1943.

The German military presence in Lida was not limited to combat or even training forces. Coinciding with the establishment of the civil administration, *Sonderführer* [special operatives] of the Wehrmacht War Administration Inspectors, formed throughout the Generalkommissariate including an office in Lida. Charged with re-building local industries and economies, the *Sonderführer* were to regulate and supervise the renewed production and associated labour. Part of the Army Administrative Command Minsk, this office acted as the catalyst for re-starting area industry and as the training ground for future civil administrators. In Lida, both Cordes and Kahler were initially assigned as

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<sup>739</sup> Ibid, v.8, 1163, 1169, 1186, v.9, 1299, v. 14, 1933, v. 23, 3157.

<sup>740</sup> Ibid, v.8, 1176

<sup>741</sup> Ibid, v.8, 1169, 1177, v.10, 1354, 1357.

<sup>742</sup> Ibid, v.14, 1933, v.18, 2484.

*Kriegsverwaltungsinspektoren Sonderführer* until spring 1942. Agricultural Leaders “who came later” were also under the auspices of the Wehrmacht.<sup>743</sup> Finally, Armament Command Minsk also maintained an outpost of three soldiers in the Lida. This unit was to liaison between the military, the civil administration and “local business engaged on Wehrmacht orders.”<sup>744</sup> Finally, the military presence in the area was rounded out by the placement of a Luftwaffe Field Construction Office at the Lida airfield. In the employ of the air force were at least 50 Jewish forced labourers.<sup>745</sup>

With Lida’s location on the rail lines, the Reich maintained a staff at the train station consisting of the Director of the Railway Ministry, a station master, depot officer and assistant.<sup>746</sup> Given the overarching goal of spoliation, Lida also contained a *Zentralen Handelsgesellschaft Ost* [ZHG] substation. Like other ZHG stations, the Lida post was “charged with economic exploitation...and [was] divided into several divisions in the economic and agricultural sector.”<sup>747</sup> Finally, the area also included an Organisation Todt (OT) unit.

The city of Lida supported the headquarters of the “Police/ Gendarmerie regional commander, in charge of all [types of] police in the Lida region.”<sup>748</sup> Significantly, this command “with only a few employees” shared offices with the civil administration in the Lida Gymnasium building.<sup>749</sup> The command of the local

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<sup>743</sup> Ibid, v. 1, 307, 327, 362, v.5, 788, 805, 858.

<sup>744</sup> Ibid, v. 19, 1371, v.16, 2245.

<sup>745</sup> Ibid, v.20, 20, v.14, 1954.

<sup>746</sup> Ibid, v.5, 782, v.14, 1954, v.18, 2540, v.19, 2653.

<sup>747</sup> Ibid, v.1, 1, 106.

<sup>748</sup> Ibid, v.14, 2007, v.16, 2228, 2237, v.18, 2560.

<sup>749</sup> Ibid, v.16, 2235, v.16, 2292.

police proved unstable throughout the occupation. From its establishment in October 1941 to April 1942, three different commanders led the Gendarmerie.<sup>750</sup> Shortly after the May 1942 mass shootings, the third commander, Gendarmerie Lieutenant von der Heide was replaced by Bez. Oblt. of Gendarmerie Ueck as police regional leader. However, von der Heide remained in Lida as Ueck's assistant until he himself was replaced as regional police leader and reassigned as assistant police regional leader.<sup>751</sup>

Organisationally, the Gebiet was policed by eight Gendarmerie posts: in large part after the May 1942 mass shootings. Lida was divided into eight posts: Lida, Ivje, Juraciski, Radun, Shchuchin, Vasiliski, Voronovo, and Zoludek.<sup>752</sup> Additionally, outposts in hamlets, important estates, settlements, and militarily important sites ensured some measure of police presence throughout the region.

Whatever the limitations placed on the civil administration's control of local police forces, the Gebietskommissar did enjoy a qualified "power of command."<sup>753</sup> In Lida, rather than being disempowered, Hanweg maintained substantial authority as "announcements and reports by the Gendarmerie posts outside Lida did not go to the police regional leader, but directly to the Gebietskommissar."<sup>754</sup>

While the position of Gendarmerie leader proved a precarious one, command of the Lida Gendarmerie Post was considerably more stable.

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<sup>750</sup> Ibid, v.4, 688, v. 23, 3138-47.

<sup>751</sup> Ibid, v.18, 2559.

<sup>752</sup> Ibid, v.1, 159, 190, v.2, 237, 239, v.3, 609, 611, v.20, 2768, v.21, 2894.

<sup>753</sup> Haberer, "German Police", 20-1.

<sup>754</sup> BA-L AR-Z 94d/59, v. 18, 2560.

Established in October 1941, the post remained under the control of Riedel until 1944. The post was also responsible for the administration of the local jail out of which investigations were undertaken.<sup>755</sup>

Sporting grey-green uniforms (with brown sleeve trim), on average 5-15 Germans officers manned a Gendarmerie post with the assistance of 15-80 indigenous *Hilfswillige* or *Schutzmänner*.<sup>756</sup> Locally recruited, trained and commanded, the Lida auxiliary police was made up primarily of Belorussians, Ukrainians, Poles, and a lesser number of Lithuanians and Latvians.<sup>757</sup> While initially distinguishable only by a white armband, over time *Schutzmänner* were outfitted in second hand black SS-uniforms with black kepi and brown collar and sleeve appliqués.

Such local *Hilfswillige* were not the only indigenous units stationed in the area. Until March 1942, a German staffed Lithuanian Battalion under 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, Infantry Regiment 727 was tasked with “security jobs.”<sup>758</sup> Further, not all non-German units were raised and deployed locally. In Lida, two Lithuanian *Schutzmannschafts* Battalions, similar to the Lida based Motorized Gendarmerie Platoon 13, were intended as mobile supplementary forces. As a result, these formations were directly under the SS-and *Polizeiführer* in Minsk rather than the Lida Gendarmerie regional leader.<sup>759</sup>

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<sup>755</sup> Ibid, v.1, 3, v.4, 773, v.16, 2234, v.10, 1345 v.16, 2235.

<sup>756</sup> Ibid, v.4, 773, v.5, 795, v.9, 1312, v.10, 1345, v.12, 1675, v.16, 2236.

<sup>757</sup> Ibid, v.4, 670.

<sup>758</sup> Ibid, v.1, 53, v.4, 675, v.10, 1403.

<sup>759</sup> Ibid, v. 5, 867.

Over the duration of the occupation, in total, 200 Germans were deployed. Perhaps more striking was the nature of the deployment. Rather than continual policing or security duties, the majority of these German were deployed to secure the 1943 spring harvest.

In early July 1944, the civil administration in Lida evacuated their post in the face of Soviet advances. Having occupied the area for less than three years, the Gebietskommissar and his staff failed to complete most of their efforts at colonial re-organization. For most of these tasks, there simply were not enough personnel or time. However, in other respects, such as demographic “restructuring”, they proved lethally efficient and highly successful.

### Appendix III

#### The Civil Administration in *Weißruthenien*, 1942

Generalkommissar KUBE  
Minsk

Hauptkommissar FENZ  
Baranowitsche

Hauptkommissar EGER  
Minsk

HANWEG  
Lida

HACHMANN  
Glebokie

ERREN  
Slonim

SCHMIDT  
Wilejka

TRAUB  
Novogrodek

KAISER  
Minsk-Land

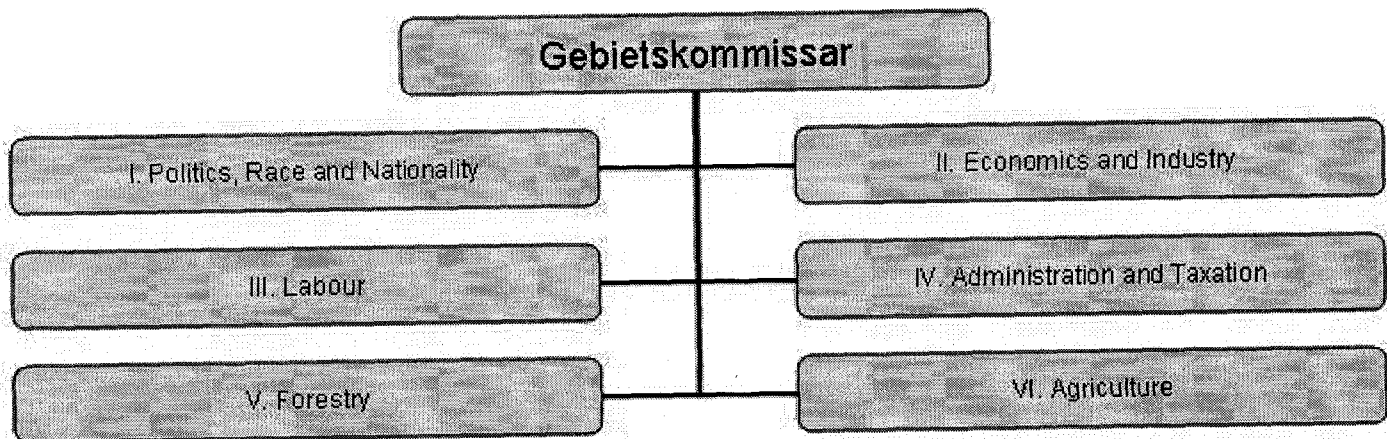
MÜLLER  
Hansewicze

JANETZKE  
Minsk Stadt

WERNER  
Baranowitsche

BAUER  
Borissow

Appendix IV  
Departments of the Gebietskommissariat in *Weißruthenien*, 1941-1944



Source: BA-L 94d/59 v.1, 80.

## Appendix V: Maps

### German Administration in the Occupied East, 1941



Source: Zellhuber, *Unsere Verwaltung*, 135.



## German Administration in the Occupied East, 1942



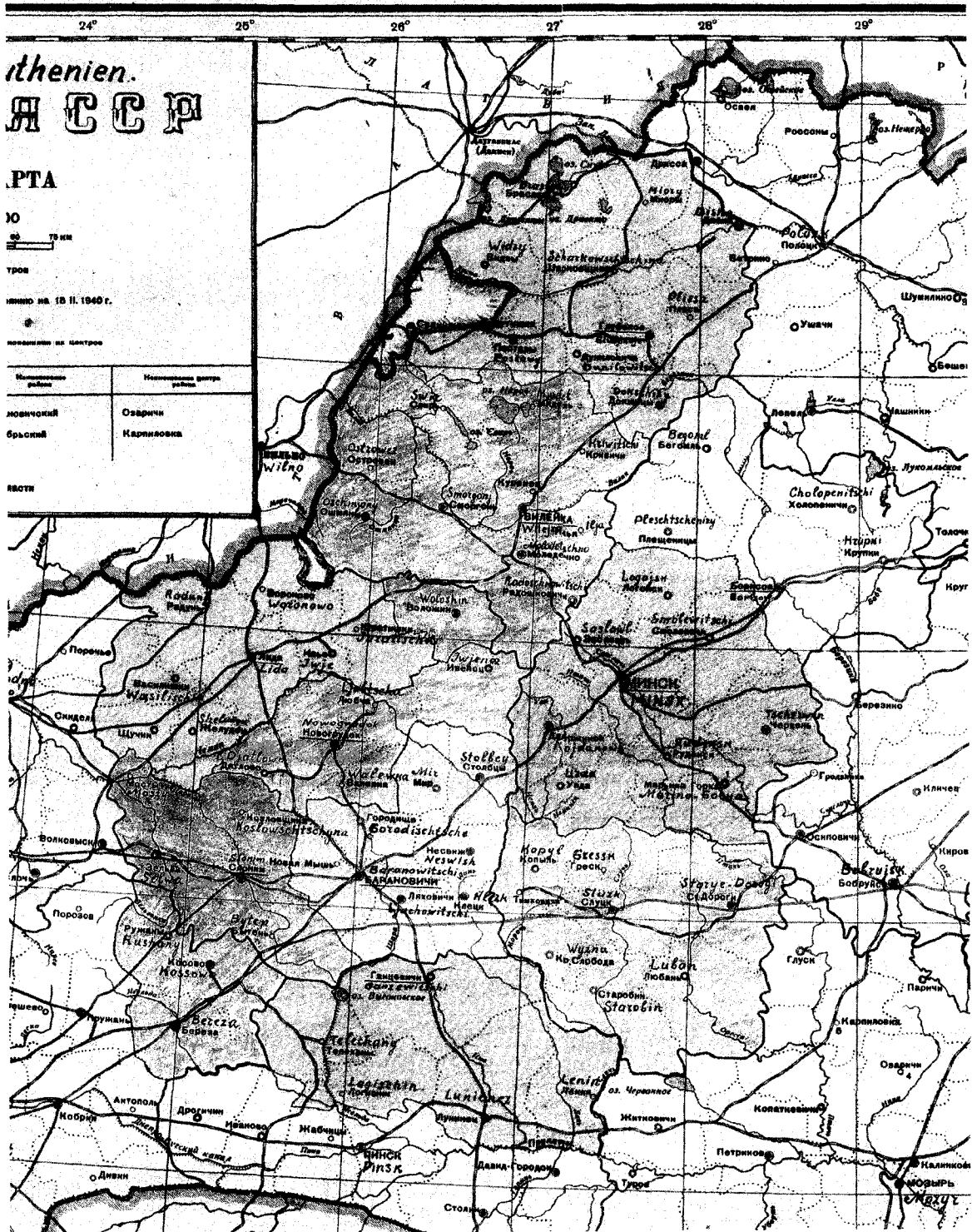
Source: Zellhuber, *Unsere Verwaltung*, 140.

German Administration in the Occupied East, 1943



Source: Alexander Dallin, *German Rule in Russia*, 92.

# Generalkommissariate Weißruthenien, 1942



Source: NARB 4/33a/524

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### Germany

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BA-L (Bundesarchiv Ludwigsburg, formerly Zentrale Stelle der Landesjustizverwaltung Ludwigsburg): AR-Z 94d/59, 218/66, 228/59, 262/59, 2218/60

BA-MA Freiburg (Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv Freiburg): RH 22/5, 23/228

### Israel

Yad Vashem: M-33/1159

### Russia

CIDK (Central Historical Document Collection, Moscow, formerly *osbyi arkhiv*): 500-1-25, 1275-3-662, 1323-2-267

GARF (State Archive of the Russian Federation): 7021

### Ukraine

CSA-Kiev (Central State Archive of Ukraine): 3206/1, 3206/2

### United States

USHMM (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum): RG 22.002M, RG 31.002M, Acc. 1996.A.269, Reel 5, 1465/1/1

NA (United States National Archives): RG 238/PS-2174, 238/PS-2718

NA BDC (United States National Archives, Berlin Document Center): SA Personnel Files. A3341, Series SA-Kartei, SA Personal & Process Akten. A3341, Series SA, SS Officier Personnel Files. A3343, SSO

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