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Administration Versus Extermination: The *Wehrmacht*'s Initiatives Toward Executing the Final Solution Between the Eastern and Western Fronts

In addition to the Third Reich's rapid territorial conquest and acquisition of *Lebensraum* during the Second World War, Adolf Hitler employed Germany's military forces in his greater war against world Jewry. Hitler's obsession with the Final Solution to the Jewish Question quickly became one of the leading tasks for not only the Nazi SS and *Einsatzgruppen*, but also the regular German *Wehrmacht*. Initially tasked with swiftly defeating the Western Allies--i.e. France and Britain--through its rapid *Blitzkrieg* tactics, the *Wehrmacht* successfully conquered and occupied most of Western Europe by the summer of 1940. Following the invasion of the Soviet Union in June of 1941, Hitler tasked the *Wehrmacht* with rounding up and shooting Jews in addition to their military objectives; the first steps of the Final Solution. Between 1941 and 1944, the *Wehrmacht* became increasingly involved with locating, deporting, and killing local Jewish populations across the Eastern Front. However, this could not be said for the same *Wehrmacht* forces which invaded the West one year earlier, even after the establishment of their militarized, occupational regimes. Why were *Wehrmacht* soldiers on the Western Front less actively involved in the rounding up, shooting, and deportation of Jews? If not German soldiers, who, then, were the intended perpetrators of the Final Solution in the West and how did they factor into the larger picture of Hitler's genocidal initiatives?

On the Western Front--albeit not militarily active again until the Western Allies' counter-attack in 1944--the *Wehrmacht*'s contribution to the Final Solution was limited to a sort of administrative occupation. This entailed the *Wehrmacht* occupational command's skeptically monitored, and even mitigated, persecution of local Jews in countries like France and Belgium.

This system relied greatly upon Jewish deportations *to the East* for mass extermination in the concentration camps. These efforts, however, were often squandered in favor of maintaining public order and collaborator complacency with the German occupation authorities. Whereas, on the psychologically brutalized and physically daunting Eastern Front, the Third Reich enacted a war of extermination against world Jewry. This demanded--but did not force--the active contribution of the *Wehrmacht* in achieving Hitler's goals. Indeed, Hitler viewed the Eastern Front as the symbolic, *real* war due to its immense political implications toward the success of Nazism over world Jewry. Seemingly neglecting the tactical significance of all other fronts, the centrality of Hitler's hatred toward the Jews and Slavs elevated the supposed necessity and stakes of a war in the East. The *Wehrmacht's* contribution toward executing the Final Solution was not uniform between the Eastern and Western fronts. Therefore, it is important to analyze what influenced the *Wehrmacht's* distinct operational environments for committing to Jewish annihilation.

Historiographically, the study of the *Wehrmacht's* involvement in the Final Solution focuses primarily on the forces of the Eastern Front. Most first-hand accounts of soldiers and units who participated in the extermination of Jews are from those who served in the East. As a result of the intensely brutalized warfare along the Eastern Front, these soldier accounts are more psychologically daunting, making for an excellent study into the men's motivations to kill. Through the extensive work of historians like Omer Bartov, Bryce Sait, and Stephen Fritz, veterans of the Eastern Front voice their experiences to a broad audience while placing them into a greater retrospective, reflective context. Supporting these scholars, historians Thomas Kühne, Lisa Pine, and Christopher Browning provide thorough, interpretive analyses of soldiers' motivations and underlying influences along the front. Most importantly, Kühne's landmark research on German soldierly comradeship studies the intangible bonds between German soldiers fighting along the

Eastern Front. Forged out of the psychological trauma and paranoia of combat in the East, Kühne's concept of comradeship factors into most scholars' analyses of German soldiers' participation in the Nazis' genocidal project. Coinciding with soldierly comradeship, Pine and Browning provide additional interpretations encompassing German standards for masculinity, a sense of duty, and psychological brutalization against the enemy. Thus, helping scholars better understand the psychological impact of Hitler's eastern war of extermination on its perpetrators as well as the motivations of *Wehrmacht* soldiers to commit mass murder.

As for the *Wehrmacht* and Final Solution on the Western Front, few first-hand or administrative accounts reveal the centrality of German soldiers to Jewish persecution. Most soldier accounts from the West focus on the military, tactical aspects of combat against the British and French in 1940 and then the Americans, British, and Canadians in 1944--the Western Allies. They make little mention of German combatants' widespread interaction with, let alone mass killing of, local Jewish populations. The purpose of this study is to examine the processes for disseminating orders and undertaking attacks on Jews between the Eastern and Western Fronts. In the East, orders were disseminated from the *top*--Hitler and the *Wehrmacht* high command--and executed by those from *below*, particularly rank and file soldiers. Whereas, in the West, orders were disseminated from the top, but remained near the top as German occupation and collaborationist officials--or *administrators*--mandated the persecution, roundup, and deportation of Jews. Thus, providing the structural basis for the German military's administrative occupation approach to Jewish persecution in the West. Through broader studies of the Third Reich during the Second World War, historians like Ben Shepherd provide a more cohesive analysis of German occupational authorities' efforts to appease--or rather mitigate--the Final Solution in the West. Particularly in Belgium and France, Shepherd details how German occupational governments were slow to

radicalize their campaigns of Jewish persecution, despite Hitler's demands. Recognizing the reluctance of French and Belgian collaborationist regimes to partake in the racialized, widespread persecution of Jews, German occupational authorities made compromises to appease Hitler's initiatives whilst mitigating friction with local populations. The resulting destruction of local Jewish populations in these two countries was far less severe compared to the East. Similar to how Kühne, Pine, and Browning provide analytical support to the study of soldiers on the Eastern Front, scholars such as Michael Marrus, Robert Paxton, and Philippe Carrard offer more abstract analyses of the psychological forces at play in the West. Focusing largely on France, these scholars study the perspective, subjective, and particularly cultural disconnects between the Vichy French and Hitler's genocidal project. That is, certain humanist--even judicious--aspects of French culture and dignity hindered Vichy officials' willingness to buy into Hitler's indiscriminate persecution of Jews. Such abstract analyses provide an indirect route toward understanding the complicated, delicate interaction between the German occupiers and local collaborationist regimes.

Nearly all noncombatant accounts from the Western Front depict the Germans' reliance on Jewish *deportations* to the East as well as an immensely administrative system for organizing Jewish persecution. Few sources draw this analysis, but it is clear the Nazi regime sought to contain the brunt of its genocidal crimes to the East; the homeland of the inhumanly portrayed people it sought to annihilate. With the construction of most concentration camps across Central and Eastern Europe, Hitler's enormous killing operation was clearly centered far beyond the borders of the West. Therefore, the process of executing the Final Solution in the West resorted to *exporting* their share of the Jewish Question eastward. This kept local killings and reprisals to a relative minimum despite many collaborationists' aversion to Hitler's extensive demands. Many accounts from German occupation officials in Belgium and France discuss internal conflicts over the roundup

and deportation of Jews, but rarely of their localized extermination. This alleviated the regular rank and file of the *Wehrmacht* from enacting local shooting operations or solely operating the deportation system as they were expected in the East. The Nazi regime expected local collaborationist regimes and their German administrative overlords to cooperate diligently toward rounding up and deporting Western European Jews eastward for extermination. Although, such genocidal idealism could not stray further from the reality of the Western Front's delicate occupational dynamics.

This study bridges the scholarly gap between historians' understanding of the Final Solution in the West and the historiographically developed East. It examines how the psychological devastation and paranoia described by Kühne, Browning, and Fritz on the Eastern Front saw no appropriate counterpart in the West. Instead, it utilizes the arguments of Marrus, Paxton, and Carrard to analyze collaborationist resistance to the Nazis' genocidal project. Thus, fostering a unique interpretation of how German and collaborationist officials perpetrated the Final Solution in the West--via administrative occupations--compared to the well documented war of extermination in the East.

The Eastern Front and the War of Extermination

Firstly, it is important to analyze the *Wehrmacht*'s ideological indoctrination into the Nazi regime's political agenda. By the outbreak of war in September of 1939, asserts historian Omer Bartov, "the fighting spearhead of the Third Reich was composed of men who spent their formative years of their youth under National Socialism."¹ That is, "most of the men who served as the

¹ Omer Bartov, "The Distortion of Reality," in *Hitler's Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich* (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 1992), 108-109.

Wehrmacht's combat troops during the Second World War were either children or teenagers when Hitler came to power in 1933."² This new, rising generation of soldiers enabled the Nazi regime and military command to preemptively educate *Wehrmacht* troops on the ideals of Nazism in relation to their military duties. German Armed Forces Minister, General Werner von Blomberg, "wanted [the *Wehrmacht*] to become a highly politicized fighting force, and he viewed the education of the rank and file as the most crucial step in achieving this goal."³ Thus, the *Wehrmacht* enacted "a considerable effort to[ward] the...National Socialist education of the troops" by "instilling into them a mystical belief in Hitler."⁴ This educational process was executed in two stages. The first instructed soldiers to forever "trust Hitler's political and military wisdom, and never to doubt either the morality of his orders or the outcome of his prophecies."⁵ The second stage portrayed "an image of the enemy [that is, many enemies] which so profoundly distorted [the troops'] perception" of the actual threats such 'monstrous' entities posed to the Third Reich.⁶ Without extensive combat experience, the *Wehrmacht's* ideological indoctrination was intended to both motivate troops based upon irrational prejudices as well as brutalize them according to the violent agenda of Hitler's regime. Bartov argues that "faith in Hitler allowed one to believe in the essential moral value of the most heinous crimes," bringing a sense of legitimacy to "one's own sacrifices and the atrocities committed against the enemy."⁷ Essentially, these young men were trained and educated through a curriculum tailored to produce the type of soldier necessary to perpetrate Hitler's genocidal initiatives.

² Bartov, "The Distortion of Reality," in *Hitler's Army*, 108.

³ Bryce Sait, *The Indoctrination of the Wehrmacht: Nazi Ideology and War Crimes of the German Military* (Oxford, NY: Berghahn Books, 2019), 41.

⁴ Bartov, "The Distortion of Reality," in *Hitler's Army*, 118.

⁵ Bartov, "The Distortion of Reality," in *Hitler's Army*, 118.

⁶ Bartov, "The Distortion of Reality," in *Hitler's Army*, 118.

⁷ Bartov, "The Distortion of Reality," in *Hitler's Army*, 118.

German military success in the early years of the Second World War bolstered an upsurge in ideological vigor prior to the invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941. With the success of the *Wehrmacht's Blitzkrieg* on the Western Front, Bartov notes how the “celebration of the irrational, this cult of the Führer, reached its peak following the victory over France” in 1940.⁸ Even within the final year of the war, accounts from German troops indicate a relatively undeterred devotion to the cult of the *Führer*. In American military surveys conducted with German POWs between August and December of 1944, “two-thirds of [the POWs] expressed ‘belief’ in the Führer.”⁹ The surveys also revealed “that there was little defeatist talk amongst the [German] troops, and that ‘[t]here is a firm conviction that the tremendous military efforts of [their] people will lead [them] to victory.’”¹⁰ Apart from wartime nationalism, such unwavering devotion to their nation and leader--especially from captured, defeated POWs--remained widespread even after the war was no longer in Germany’s favor. Through their devotion to Hitler and Germany, these soldiers proved both their willingness and determination to carry out the directives of their superiors.

Whether it be the 1944-45 Ardennes Counteroffensive or rounding up Jews in Poland in 1939-43, the soldiers of the *Wehrmacht*--at least the majority--willingly pursued the daunting tasks at hand. In summary, Bartov concludes that “the Wehrmacht’s barbarous policies were...utilized for propagandistic purposes” and “provid[ed] a vivid and frightening model of what Germany itself could expect in defeat.”¹¹ The unwavering devotion of German soldiers to their nation, people, and leader was viewed as a common necessity. Within the *Kampfgemeinschaft*, or ‘fighting community,’ the *Wehrmacht* convinced its recruits “that they were fighting a justified and

⁸ Bartov, “The Distortion of Reality,” in *Hitler’s Army*, 122.

⁹ Bartov, “The Distortion of Reality,” in *Hitler’s Army*, 145.

¹⁰ Bartov, “The Distortion of Reality,” in *Hitler’s Army*, 145.

¹¹ Bartov, “The Distortion of Reality,” in *Hitler’s Army*, 126.

necessary war against racial and political enemies.”¹² Thus, historian Lisa Pine concludes that German soldiers’ “veneration of Hitler and their readiness to embrace the racist goals of his government turned these young recruits into ‘tenacious, increasingly brutalized, and fanaticized soldiers.’”¹³ Lest these brave German combatants fail, Hitler preached, Germany itself would fall victim to the many enemies seeking its destruction.

Moreover, it is necessary to address the strategic, ideological differences between the Eastern and Western fronts as well as their underlying significance to National Socialism. Embedded within the *Wehrmacht*’s ideological training regimen, the Nazi regime sought to instill in its soldiers the same preconceived prejudices preached by Hitler. Beginning in 1935, the *Wehrmacht* educational curriculum incorporated manuals on topics such as ‘The National Socialist World-view,’ ‘The Military as the Instrument of the Führer’s Political Will,’ ‘The Protection of the German Race,’ and ‘The Ordering of the German People’s Land,’ referencing the acquisition of *Lebensraum* in the East.¹⁴ The intended purpose of these early manuals “sought to foster aggression towards those [the Nazi regime] considered different, presenting these ‘others’ as essential threats” to the *Volksgemeinschaft*, or German ‘National Community.’¹⁵ The political education of *Wehrmacht* soldiers directed such prejudice outward onto foreign, non-German populations which harbored the enemies of the Third Reich.

Predictably, at the root of all Nazi hatred and prejudice were the Jews. *Wehrmacht* educational manuals, including ‘The Destructive Influence of Jews’ and ‘The Genocidal Jewish Bolshevik Regime in Moscow,’ “referred to Jews as ‘parasites’ who needed to be ‘radically

¹² Lisa Pine, “Men, Masculinity and the Wehrmacht,” in *Hitler’s ‘National Community’: Society and Culture in Nazi Germany, Second Edition*, 89-101 (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Publishers, 2017), 95.

¹³ Pine, “Men, Masculinity and the Wehrmacht,” in *Hitler’s ‘National Community’*, 95-96.

¹⁴ Sait, *The Indoctrination of the Wehrmacht*, 44.

¹⁵ Sait, *The Indoctrination of the Wehrmacht*, 44.

eliminated from the sphere of German life.”¹⁶ In the attempt to radicalize such prejudice, the *Wehrmacht*’s “curriculum also spoke of the soldiers’ task of combating ‘World Jewry’ beyond Germany’s borders” by “implementing a ‘new, radical solution to the Jewish Question.’”¹⁷ Such early rhetoric clearly alludes to Hitler’s desire to implement the *Wehrmacht* into the mass extermination of Jews. Therefore, *Wehrmacht* soldiers were raised as the intended perpetrators of Hitler’s Final Solution. This task was further explained by manuals such as Dr. C.A. Hoberg’s ‘The Jew in German History’ which “emphasized [Jewish] ‘otherness’ and status as an existential threat” to the *Volksgemeinschaft*.¹⁸ Manuals like that of Hoberg “attempted to place as much psychological distance as possible between soldiers and members of the ‘Jewish race’” through the use of “‘racial antisemitism.’”¹⁹ This radicalized antisemitism was geared primarily toward the East where the Nazi regime argued Judaism and Soviet communism festered in unison: the two leading sources of inhuman filth located in one vague geographic region. As proof of the Jews’ parasitic, bloodsucking, and even monstrous control over Bolshevism and the Soviet Union to the East, Dr. Hoberg quoted the writings of Vladimir Lenin. He cited Lenin’s claim that Russia had “‘few intelligent people’” since Russians “‘are a predominantly talented people, but [are] lazy when it comes to thinking.’”²⁰ Critically, Lenin admitted that “‘the intelligent person among the Russians is almost always the Jew, or a person with a mixture of Jewish blood.’”²¹ With this bombshell admission, Hoberg asserted “how strong the influence of Jewry [on] Bolshevism was from the beginning” as the Jews “attained the[ir] authoritative position of power” in “control [of]

¹⁶ Sait, *The Indoctrination of the Wehrmacht*, 44.

¹⁷ Sait, *The Indoctrination of the Wehrmacht*, 44.

¹⁸ Sait, *The Indoctrination of the Wehrmacht*, 70-71.

¹⁹ Sait, *The Indoctrination of the Wehrmacht*, 70-71.

²⁰ Vladimir Lenin in Sait, *The Indoctrination of the Wehrmacht*, 153.

²¹ Lenin in Sait, *The Indoctrination of the Wehrmacht*, 153.

all areas of [Russia's] public life and politics."²² According to such subjective justification, Hoberg and the Nazi regime argued that the greater war against world Jewry and the subversion of National Socialism lay in the East.

For many soldiers, the *Wehrmacht's* National Socialist curriculum succeeded in reforming their preconceived racial and cultural notions of the East. In a letter from one Corporal in the 111th Mountain Artillery Regiment written shortly after the invasion of Poland, the *Wehrmacht's* efforts to instill irrational hatred of Eastern European Jews surges to the forefront. He wrote how local Jews were "beasts in the flesh" and how "their beards and kaftans, with their devilish grimaces...made a ghastly impression upon [his Regiment]."²³ The Corporal concluded by stating how it was "no wonder that after twenty years the Polish state has become victim to these [Jewish] parasites."²⁴ Echoing the fierce, racial antisemitism of the *Wehrmacht's* educational curriculum, this nameless Corporal exemplified the ideologically preconditioned soldier of Blomberg's politicized *Wehrmacht*. Another soldier in the 35th Infantry Division rejoiced following the German invasion into the East. He marked it as "the first reaction...to make Europe Europe again, and Germany into a Reich of all those of Germanic origins," nearly 2,000 years after "the first intrusion of Jews and their religion in Europe."²⁵ Bolstered by military success, soldiers saw their *Wehrmacht* propaganda as the prophetic truth. In an even more irrational display of hatred, Lance-Corporal Paul Lenz lamented how "only a Jew can be a Bolshevik," concluding that "for this blood-sucker there can be nothing nicer than to be a Bolshevik."²⁶ These self-assured truths were only reaffirmed after the German military's arrival in Eastern Europe--particularly Poland early

²² C.A. Hoberg in Sait, *The Indoctrination of the Wehrmacht*, 153.

²³ Sait, *The Indoctrination of the Wehrmacht*, 81.

²⁴ Sait, *The Indoctrination of the Wehrmacht*, 81.

²⁵ Sait, *The Indoctrination of the Wehrmacht*, 82.

²⁶ Paul Lenz in Bartov, "The Distortion of Reality," in *Hitler's Army*, 160.

on--justifying their duties to the will of the *Führer*. As Bartov summarizes, military propaganda on the Eastern Front “did not make [all German soldiers] into committed Nazis; but it provided them with an outlook which profoundly influenced their manner of both physically and mentally coping with and reacting to the realities of the war.”²⁷ The *Wehrmacht*’s reassuring propaganda “equipped [soldiers] with...a social Darwinian division of humanity” which they applied to life and death between *us* Germans and the *other*, the vile enemy, Judeo-Bolsheviks.²⁸ Under this mindset, Blomberg ideologically preconditioned the soldiers of the *Wehrmacht* for the radicalized war Hitler aimed to launch in the East.

The Eastern Front took on the projection of a monumental battle between the good of National Socialism and the evils of Judeo-Bolshevism. Summarizing Hitler’s goals for his armed forces in March of 1941--three months before the invasion of the Soviet Union--*Wehrmacht* General Franz Halder revealed the *Führer*’s intent for a war in the East. Quoting Hitler, Halder wrote how Germany was “not fighting a war in order to conserve the enemy,” but rather “a war of extermination” against the “tremendous danger” of Judeo-Bolshevism to the East.²⁹ Further echoing Hitler’s comments, Halder wrote how “Bolshevism...[was] the equivalent of social delinquency” and that “Communism [was] a tremendous danger for the future” of Nazi Germany.³⁰ It was clear that the impending Eastern Front would be a battle of fundamentally opposed ideologies fueled by Hitler’s intensified and extremely irrational racial antisemitism. In the official ‘Directives for the Behavior of the Troops in Russia’ issued in May of 1941, the *Wehrmacht* high command rearticulated the ruthlessness Hitler desired for his eastern war of extermination. The

²⁷ Omer Bartov in Sait, *The Indoctrination of the Wehrmacht*, 181.

²⁸ Bartov in Sait, *The Indoctrination of the Wehrmacht*, 181.

²⁹ Franz Halder in J. Noakes and G. Pridham, *Nazism 1919-1945*, vol. 3, *Foreign Policy, War and Racial Extermination: A Document Reader* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2001), 483.

³⁰ Halder in Noakes and Pridham, *Nazism 1919-1945*, vol. 3, *Foreign Policy, War and Racial Extermination*, 483.

directives ordered “ruthless and energetic action [be taken] against Bolshevik agitators, guerrillas, saboteurs, and Jews, and the total elimination of all active or passive resistance.”³¹ The directives also depicted “the Asiatic soldiers of the Red Army” as “devious, cunning, and without feeling” as well as how “Jewry is strongly represented in the USSR” since the Soviet Union was “held together by [its] Bolshevik rulers by force.”³² Through such blatant, pointed rhetoric, the Nazi regime deemed unbridled hatred necessary in maintaining the troops’ ferocity against their Soviet --and indisputably Jewish-controlled--adversaries. Furthermore, the strategic reasoning behind an invasion of the Soviet Union was depicted as “a preventative measure...thwart[ing] the approaching invasion of [Germany by] ‘Asiatic barbarism,’ led by ‘Judeo-Bolshevism’” with the goal of “devastating Europe and destroying its ‘culture.’”³³ Justified by such irrational paranoia, the German political and military command sought “to eradicate the Soviet enemy’s ‘power basis’ --that is, the communists and the Jews.”³⁴ Hitler and the *Wehrmacht* were then poised to commence a symbolic war of extermination in the East; the *real* war was on the horizon.

However, with the launch of Operation Barbarossa in June of 1941, the unindoctrinated reality of warfare in Eastern Europe fed the irrational prejudices of many *Wehrmacht* soldiers. As historian Bryce Sait explains, the Eastern Front presented the *Wehrmacht* a cultural environment “that was unfamiliar, and seen by many [soldiers] as being primitive and backward.”³⁵ Under the paranoia of war, “this hostile and alien environment made for confusion, nervousness and bouts of panic” amongst the troops fighting on or near the front.³⁶ Such widespread uneasiness complicated the fighting along the front and dramatically blurred the lines between the resistance of Soviet

³¹ Noakes and Pridham, *Nazism 1919-1945*, vol. 3, *Foreign Policy, War and Racial Extermination*, 487.

³² Noakes and Pridham, *Nazism 1919-1945*, vol. 3, *Foreign Policy, War and Racial Extermination*, 487.

³³ Bartov, “The Distortion of Reality,” in *Hitler’s Army*, 131.

³⁴ Bartov, “The Distortion of Reality,” in *Hitler’s Army*, 131.

³⁵ Sait, *The Indoctrination of the Wehrmacht*, 88.

³⁶ Sait, *The Indoctrination of the Wehrmacht*, 88.

military personnel and local partisans. As the fighting on the Eastern Front intensified, the *Wehrmacht's* ideological and political education “supplemented official orders by attempting to inculcate its men with the notion that ‘the Jew’ was implicated in each act of resistance by the Soviet population.”³⁷ Soldiers on the front increasingly believed the Jews were not only controlling the monstrous Soviet state, but also commanded the psychologically daunting guerrilla war that was undermining German confidence. In the *Wehrmacht* propaganda department’s newsletter, *Mitteilungen für die Truppe* (News for the Troops), military propagandists attempted to reinstate German confidence along the front while reaffirming Hitler’s goals in the East. In its first issue, the newsletter reaffirmed that “‘the goal [of Hitler’s war in the East] is to wipe out the species of subhuman Red represented by the rulers in Moscow’”; the Judeo-Bolsheviks or, more directly, the Jews.³⁸ The propagandists then “made it clear to German soldiers...that they were members of a *Herrenvolk*, a ‘master race’” while “blunt[ing] their scruples [with killing] and feelings of guilt likely to surface in conjunction with such brutality.”³⁹ To make the process of killing--even mass killing--easier, the *Wehrmacht's* racist propaganda “creat[ed] a psychological distance between German soldiers and [their] enemies through [the] continual denigration and dehumanization of the latter.”⁴⁰ Even as German propagandists attempted to reassure soldiers of their righteous duties in the East, members of the *Wehrmacht* knew the Eastern Front was going to remain a bloody, daunting battle.

Many *Wehrmacht* soldiers correctly assessed why Germany’s war against the Soviets was so psychologically devastating. In one reflective account from the front, soldiers were dumb-

³⁷ Sait, *The Indoctrination of the Wehrmacht*, 153.

³⁸ Wolfram Wette, “The Wehrmacht and the Murder of Jews,” in *The Wehrmacht: History, Myth, Reality*, 90-138, translated by Deborah Lucas Schneider (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 98-99.

³⁹ Wette, “The Wehrmacht and the Murder of Jews,” in *The Wehrmacht*, 99-100.

⁴⁰ Wette, “The Wehrmacht and the Murder of Jews,” in *The Wehrmacht*, 100.

founded by the continuous “wave[s] of futile attacks” by the Red Army, how “Soviet troops climb[ed] over rows and rows of their dead comrades,” and how whole “battalions...sacrifice[d] themselves in order to clear a path for [subsequent] attacks.”⁴¹ The account concluded that “it is not enough to blame the political commissars”--the typical personnel blamed for ‘Jewish influence’ in the Red Army--since “something else makes the Soviet soldier dangerous in battle.”⁴² Writing from the front in January of 1942, Lieutenant Helmut von Harnack offered a comprehensive answer to this open inquiry. Harnack recognized “the extreme modesty of the personal needs of the Russian soldier, who in his mixture of doggedness and toughness possesses an enormous power of resistance.”⁴³ Reducing Harnack’s analysis down to the bluntest of terms, one Private claimed he had “never yet seen such tough dogs as the Russians.”⁴⁴ Not entirely blinded by hatred, many *Wehrmacht* soldiers understood and respected their Soviet adversaries’ tenacity and psychological vigor. Although, little could stop the Nazi regime from assigning blame to the Jews for the ferocity of Soviet resistance. Nazi officials professed how the Jews utilized the immense Soviet population as “a mass of people who could provide ideal cannon fodder [in] their quest for world domination.”⁴⁵ Thus, German soldiers were taught to regard “the deaths of Soviet citizens [with] little consequence, since Soviets themselves saw little value in human life.”⁴⁶ Representing the first psychological barrier constructed by troops along the front, indifference to the deaths of Soviet combatants--both military and civilian--actively brutalized men to warfare in the East. According to historian Hannes Heer, “the anti-partisan campaign stripped German

⁴¹ Sait, *The Indoctrination of the Wehrmacht*, 154.

⁴² Sait, *The Indoctrination of the Wehrmacht*, 154.

⁴³ Helmut von Harnack in Stephen G. Fritz, *Frontsoldaten: The German Soldier in World War II* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1995), 60.

⁴⁴ Fritz, *Frontsoldaten*, 60.

⁴⁵ Sait, *The Indoctrination of the Wehrmacht*, 154.

⁴⁶ Sait, *The Indoctrination of the Wehrmacht*, 154.

soldiers of all civilized norms” and “replac[ed] them with an ‘extermination mentality’ directed against the enemy population as a whole.”⁴⁷ This rapid brutalization bolstered the perceived necessity of Hitler’s eastern war of extermination as well as ordinary soldiers’ willingness to perpetrate mass murder.

As the German *Blitzkrieg* stalled just miles outside Moscow, Hitler’s war in the East morphed into both an ideological and physical battle of attrition, challenging the *Wehrmacht*’s preconceived notions of military superiority over the Soviet Union. The treacherous fighting on the Eastern Front “rapidly eroded German material strength” as “casualties accumulated at a terrifying rate,” pressing the military’s propaganda machine to shift “from ecstatic to frantic, often verging on the hysterical.”⁴⁸ Bartov asserts that since “technology and skill were now... increasingly replaced by devotion and fanaticism, [so were] rational thought by ‘blind’ belief.”⁴⁹ Realizing the desperation of warfare in the East, soldiers and officers alike turned to their ideological training and vested their undivided faith in Hitler’s campaign. Such fanatical devotion threatened soldiers’ psychological endurance on the front, paving the way for further brutalization. These concerns were noted by the head of the German Eighth Army, General Johannes Blaskowitz, in reference to the psychological health of his men. Blaskowitz “worried about the possible effect of the [mass] killings on discipline among his own men, fearing ‘immeasurable brutalization and moral debasement.’”⁵⁰ Again, despite some concerned murmurs amongst the German military command, the Nazi regime refused to back down from its destined battle against Judeo-Bolshevism in the East. In the April 1942 issue of the *Mitteilungen für das Offizierkorps*--the officer corps’ news-sheet--commanders in the East professed that “‘in the struggle against the

⁴⁷ Hannes Heer in Pine, “Men, Masculinity and the Wehrmacht,” in *Hitler’s ‘National Community’*, 100.

⁴⁸ Bartov, “The Distortion of Reality,” in *Hitler’s Army*, 123.

⁴⁹ Bartov, “The Distortion of Reality,” in *Hitler’s Army*, 123.

⁵⁰ Johannes Blaskowitz in Sait, *The Indoctrination of the Wehrmacht*, 89.

capitalism and imperialism of the English and the Americans and against...the Bolsheviks[,] the weapons of the Wehrmacht alone will not achieve victory.”⁵¹ Instead, the news-sheet proclaimed that victory can be attained ““only...when the people...confronts the political and ideological theses of the enemy with better political concepts...based on the German people’s unshakable sense of loyalty to Führer, *Volk*, and Fatherland.”⁵² Coupling blind devotion to Hitler’s ambivalence with soldiers’ rapid brutalization, the Eastern Front devolved into a psychological apocalypse. An apocalypse dominated by death where the death of an enemy was deemed necessary in reprisal for the death of a comrade.

The Western Front and Administrative Occupations

Unlike the symbolic, real war on the Eastern Front, Hitler viewed the Western Front more so as an unfortunate side effect of Germany’s otherwise justified military aggression. To start, the term Western Front itself is a rather adjunct expression when referring to the extermination of Jews in occupied western countries. Unlike in the East, where German troops near the frontlines were responsible for organizing the destruction of local Jews, soldiers fighting in the West--both in 1940 and after 1944--were not burdened with such duties. Berlin, however, still tasked the occupational governments in the West with contributing their share to the Final Solution. As declared by Dr. Elmar Michel, economic chief of the military government in occupied France, German authorities ““must do what is necessary to eliminate [French] Jews even after the occupation.”⁵³ Though, Michel admitted that the military government alone ““cannot...provide sufficient manpower to deal

⁵¹ Bartov, “The Distortion of Reality,” in *Hitler’s Army*, 123.

⁵² Bartov, “The Distortion of Reality,” in *Hitler’s Army*, 123.

⁵³ Elmar Michel in Ben H. Shepherd, *Hitler’s Soldiers: The German Army in the Third Reich* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2017), 106.

with the great number of Jewish enterprises” still operating in France.⁵⁴ *Wehrmacht* forces on the Western Front were still at work executing the final stages of the *Blitzkrieg* in 1940 and enacting cohesive defenses and counteroffensives thereafter. Thus, Michel resolved “to have the French authorities participate in the elimination of Jews” in France.⁵⁵ Such simple resolve--formed almost entirely out of necessity--illustrates the Nazi regime and *Wehrmacht*'s less severe views toward the war in the West as well as the countries and populations Germany now dominated.

While German animosity toward the occupied countries and cultures of Western Europe nowhere near emulated the brute hatred of the Eastern Front, *Wehrmacht* troops still held reservations about the people they dominated. Following the establishment of the military occupation in France, infantryman Karl Fuchs, observing French culture, wrote how one “can truly see that in the areas of cleanliness and morality, the French people have skidded to a new low.”⁵⁶ While the Nazi regime deemed Jews and Slavs the filth of humanity in the East, the French were viewed more as second-class citizens in both race and social status. Despite being inherently inferior to the Germans, Nazi ideologues considered the French a competent people with whom local power sharing was permissible. This was especially bolstered by France's swift military defeat as well as French conservatives' willingness to collaborate with the occupying Germans; a fate which Great Britain was unwilling to accept. Revealing the German military's tactical frustration with Britain, Fuchs confidently wrote in August of 1940 how “the days are numbered for those bums over there in England” who soon “won't be able to attack German cities and peaceful farms anymore.”⁵⁷ Placing immense confidence in Germany's military superiority, he predicted that “once we're over there, no one will show any mercy whatever, no matter who's

⁵⁴ Michel in Shepherd, *Hitler's Soldiers*, 106.

⁵⁵ Michel in Shepherd, *Hitler's Soldiers*, 106.

⁵⁶ Karl Fuchs in Bartov, “The Distortion of Reality,” in *Hitler's Army*, 150.

⁵⁷ Fuchs in Bartov, “The Distortion of Reality,” in *Hitler's Army*, 151.

involved.”⁵⁸ Since the British presented a competent defense, halting the *Blitzkrieg* at the English Channel, German soldiers held primarily *tactical*--as opposed to racial--animosity toward their stubborn adversaries. These tactical frustrations would continue well after the failed Battle of Britain when the Western Front reopened in 1944.

With the launch of Operation Overlord and the Allied invasion of Normandy in June of 1944, *Wehrmacht* soldiers were reengaged in extensive combat. Only now, they were on the defensive, working feverishly, yet confidently, to repel the Western Allies. *Wehrmacht* soldiers also continued their narrow, tactical animosity towards their British and American counterparts along the front. Although, such animosity remained less severe than the racially motivated, brutalized, and desensitized hatred held against Soviet soldiers and partisans in the East. Veteran Heinz Hickmann asserted that German soldiers ““had no respect for the American soldier”” since the Americans, as cited by another soldier, ““liked a bit too much comfort”” in preparation for battle.⁵⁹ Again, German soldiers confidently dismissed their western adversaries in favor of their own training and self-diagnosed tactical superiority. Similarly, in paratrooper Martin Pöppel’s interactions with British soldiers in Sicily, he noted how ““they were ‘certainly not eager to fight, and [that] their equipment look[ed] fairly pathetic.””⁶⁰ Pöppel described British fighting ““spirit [as] none too good”” and that ““they tend to surrender as soon as they face the slightest [enemy] resistance.””⁶¹ Furthermore, conversing with a Canadian prisoner of war in September of 1943, Pöppel noted that the Canadians, too, ““are by no means hungry for battle and don’t know why they are fighting.””⁶² Notably absent from these criticisms is any mention of the Western Allies’

⁵⁸ Fuchs in Bartov, “The Distortion of Reality,” in *Hitler’s Army*, 151.

⁵⁹ Heinz Hickmann in Fritz, *Frontsoldaten*, 61.

⁶⁰ Martin Pöppel in Fritz, *Frontsoldaten*, 61.

⁶¹ Pöppel in Fritz, *Frontsoldaten*, 61.

⁶² Pöppel in Fritz, *Frontsoldaten*, 61.

subhuman, racial inferiority commonly cited in the East. The pitiful forces of the West, many German soldiers believed, were no match against Germany's tactical, military superiority.

Only later did Pöppel reluctantly identify any tactical skill or advantages possessed by the Western Allies along the front. Initially, he “professed admiration only for [American] medical equipment and rations” during the Normandy Campaign.⁶³ As fighting in France intensified, Pöppel slowly recognized the Americans' tactical and material advantage over the German military. After he was taken captive by advancing American forces, Pöppel was awestruck as he and his captors “drove past kilometer after kilometer of Allied artillery positions,” amounting to “thousands of guns.”⁶⁴ In his bitter analysis of the Americans' material advantages, he concluded that Germany's motto “was always ‘Sweat Saves Blood,’ but with [the Americans] it was, ‘Equipment Saves Men.’”⁶⁵ Crucially, Pöppel's animosity and analysis of Allied soldiers in the West did not foster his brutalization, even as his preconceived notions of German military superiority lay in ruin. The brutalized sentiment and desperate attrition of racialized warfare in the East was largely absent from most soldier accounts of the Western Front. Soldiers, much like the *Wehrmacht's* occupational regimes, maintained two separate camps for executing one's tactical duties and then Hitler's greater campaign to annihilate Western European Jewry. The *Wehrmacht* felt little pressure to intertwine these camps due to the individual duties of both local and German occupational authorities. Despite placing Jewish influence at the heart of capitalism and imperialism--completing the trifecta of National Socialism's nonsensical Jewish-Bolshevik-capitalist conspiracy--Hitler's regime did not relate the Western Allies to the greater Jewish

⁶³ Pöppel in Fritz, *Frontsoldaten*, 61.

⁶⁴ Pöppel in Fritz, *Frontsoldaten*, 61.

⁶⁵ Pöppel in Fritz, *Frontsoldaten*, 61.

menace. The Western Front, therefore, took on the appearance of an almost secondary battle against capitalism and imperialism; second, that is, to the war against world Jewry in the East.

This is not to say, however, that *Wehrmacht* soldiers did not enact violence against local Jews in occupied western countries. For instance, after the German military conquered Belgium and established an occupational regime in May of 1940, *Wehrmacht* soldiers participated in antisemitic violence on their own initiatives. One month later, the deputy police commissioner in Antwerp received reports “from [local] Jews that they had been beaten up in the marketplace by German soldiers.”⁶⁶ These Belgian Jews ““were stepped on, beaten up, mishandled, pulled by [their] beards”” and only when ““threatened with a revolver”” were they allowed ““to flee the marketplace.””⁶⁷ But, for the most part, the execution of the Final Solution in the West was orchestrated by the higher echelons of the German occupational authorities. Ironically, the *Wehrmacht* official at the head of Belgium’s military government, Alexander von Falkenhausen, was not as fervently antisemitic as one might expect for a deputy selected by Hitler’s regime. To prove himself a devout National Socialist worthy of such a high position, Falkenhausen was in no doubt antisemitic, but only “to an extent that fell short of Nazi [Hitler’s] standards.”⁶⁸ Similarly, the commander of the military government in France, Otto von Stülpnagel, was also a more reserved, less radicalized antisemite. Stülpnagel routinely found ways to lessen both the impact and outreach of the Final Solution in France. As a counter to the ‘Aryanization’ of Jewish businesses, he informed the Supreme Commander of the German Army, Walther von Brauchitsch, in January of 1941 “that he approved of registering Jewish businesses, but that there was no legal precedent for confiscating them.”⁶⁹ Unfortunately, there was little these top officials could do to

⁶⁶ Shepherd, *Hitler’s Soldiers*, 105.

⁶⁷ Shepherd, *Hitler’s Soldiers*, 105.

⁶⁸ Shepherd, *Hitler’s Soldiers*, 105.

⁶⁹ Shepherd, *Hitler’s Soldiers*, 107.

dampen the demands of Hitler's war against world Jewry. With limited access to reserve resources and manpower, Stülpnagel required French assistance to enact his military government's contribution to the Final Solution.

In Western Europe, the goals of the Final Solution relied largely on the acquiescence of local authorities and conservative puppet regimes. France offers a leading example of this dynamic due to its considerable geographic size and prominent, collaborationist Vichy regime. Despite the military and civil dominance of German occupation authorities in France, members of the military government "recognized that...their objectives concerning Jews" could be achieved "only 'if the French people decide to liberate themselves from Judaism.'"⁷⁰ This created an awkward dichotomy between the Germans' administrative mechanisms mandating Jewish persecution and the extent of French collaboration. One of the leading German agencies in France tasked with persecuting non-German Jews was the *Einsatzstab Rosenberg*--or 'special action staff' Rosenberg--headed by Nazi ideological theorist Alfred Rosenberg. Rosenberg's agency began operations in July of 1940 and was initially "charged with repossessing property that Jews had allegedly stolen from Germany."⁷¹ However, German Ambassador to Vichy France Otto Abetz, in conjunction with the military government, "feared that these measures would damage their efforts at collaboration" with the Vichy regime.⁷² Berlin's predatory demands threatened the already delicate power sharing dynamic between the German occupation authorities and their French collaborators. Though, once Hitler officially backed the actions of the *Einsatzstab*, Abetz "changed his tune over the repossessions, and placated the French authorities by placing them on a 'legal' footing."⁷³ Hitler

⁷⁰ Michael Marrus and Robert Paxton, *Vichy France and the Jews, Second Edition* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2019), 47.

⁷¹ Shepherd, *Hitler's Soldiers*, 106.

⁷² Shepherd, *Hitler's Soldiers*, 106.

⁷³ Shepherd, *Hitler's Soldiers*, 106.

would not simply allow French Jews to evade his determined, transnational war against world Jewry, nor their ultimate destruction.

Fearing the Nazi regime's reaction to delaying Jewish persecution, Stülpnagel's military government forced its administrative hand in France to appease the *Führer*. On August 26, 1940, the military government issued a directive stating "the Jews, with their anti-German attitude and their multifaceted connections to the unoccupied part of France...are carrying out anti-German espionage...or are at least supporting [it]."⁷⁴ As evidence, the directive cited "the presence of Jews at public disturbances, [such] as the demonstration on 20 August in Paris," referencing Parisian protests against wartime rationing.⁷⁵ With this convenient justification, the military government could openly persecute French Jews as a way to defend German interests in occupied France. In October of 1941, Carl-Theo Zeitschel, a former physician for the German merchant marine made Jewish specialist for the military government, first advocated to radicalize Jewish persecution in France. Zeitschel "proposed the deportation 'to the East' of all the Jews in [French] 'concentration [internment] camps...because of [a] lack of space in the camps [italics mine]."⁷⁶ The first seeds of mass Jewish deportations eastward had been sown. In March of 1941, the military government also established a General Secretariat for Jewish Affairs with the Vichy regime's approval. The General Secretariat was "charged with proposing legislative measures against Jews, fixing dates for liquidating Jewish property and designating trustees" to execute these agendas.⁷⁷ As a result, "German and French officials together 'Aryanized' 43 per cent of Jewish business" between the military occupation and the end of the war; a relatively low percentage compared to

⁷⁴ Shepherd, *Hitler's Soldiers*, 106.

⁷⁵ Shepherd, *Hitler's Soldiers*, 106.

⁷⁶ Carl-Theo Zeitschel in Marrus and Paxton, *Vichy France and the Jews*, 46.

⁷⁷ Shepherd, *Hitler's Soldiers*, 107.

the efforts in Germany after 1933.⁷⁸ These sluggish efforts to appease Hitler's antisemitic initiatives placed Stülpnagel's government in a precarious position with both the Nazi regime and local French authorities. With Berlin calling for total Jewish annihilation and the Vichy French supporting more reserved approaches, German occupational authorities were caught in an antagonistic crossfire. Entering the summer of 1941, Stülpnagel's diplomatic situation grew increasingly complicated as Germany extended the war eastward.

In many cases, the persecution and subsequent resettlement--or forced deportation--of Jews in the West heightened after the invasion of the Soviet Union. With the initiation of Hitler's radical, racialized war of extermination in the East, the *Wehrmacht* became increasingly incorporated into the Final Solution on all fronts. In Belgium, one month after the invasion of the Soviet Union, Falkenhausen's military government reported that ““despite their relatively small significance,...a *systematic proceeding against the Jews* was necessary, in order to come into line with how they are handled in other areas occupied or influenced by Germany.””⁷⁹ Falkenhausen knew this drastic, irrational demand for Jewish persecution would not bode well amongst the Belgian people. It was clear to the German occupation authorities that the less antisemitic ““Belgian authorities””--while ordered by the military government--““cannot be expected to work loyally”” towards the radical persecution of Jews.⁸⁰ Instead, the military government in Belgium formed its own agency, the *Treuhandgesellschaft*, to organize such work as well as “an association of Belgian Jews” in November of 1941 “to help promote and facilitate Jewish ‘emigration’” eastward.⁸¹ Thus, initiating the destruction of Belgium's Jewish population by exporting it eastward. Feeding off the motto ‘out of sight, out of mind,’ Falkenhausen's military government attempted to mitigate the

⁷⁸ Shepherd, *Hitler's Soldiers*, 107.

⁷⁹ Shepherd, *Hitler's Soldiers*, 191.

⁸⁰ Shepherd, *Hitler's Soldiers*, 191.

⁸¹ Shepherd, *Hitler's Soldiers*, 191.

tension between itself and the Belgian authorities while simultaneously appeasing Hitler's Final Solution. Such an approach was duplicated by most German occupational regimes, benefitting from the brutalized war of extermination in the East.

In France, internal tensions continued to swell after the launch of Hitler's eastern war of extermination. Military government commanders Otto and Carl-Heinrich Stülpnagel--both cousin and successor to Otto von Stülpnagel in early 1942--failed to exert the Nazis' radicalized, antisemitic initiatives to the degree desired by Hitler's regime. Following the late summer, 1941 assassinations of three German military personnel in separate partisan attacks, Hitler "urged a ruthless response" in the form of mass reprisal killings executed by the *Wehrmacht* in France.⁸² Stülpnagel, however, "ordered the shooting of only ten people, far fewer than Hitler wanted."⁸³ Justifying his reserved actions, Stülpnagel "maintained...that limiting the number of executions was encouraging the French authorities to cooperate" since it sufficiently "remind[ed] them of the consequences of not cooperating."⁸⁴ With Berlin pressing him to act increasingly ruthless, Stülpnagel remained persistent. Even into October of 1941, he "pleaded that shooting [Jewish and other civilian] hostages only damaged collaboration and that more effort should go into finding the actual culprits" of partisan attacks.⁸⁵ Therefore, embodying a plea to judicial action amongst Germany's greater, militarized paranoia and demand for retribution.

Stülpnagel was quite forward with his convictions. He asserted that "'based on [his own] knowledge of the French population,'" only "'limited executions,...and not mass executions, will work'" to deter resistance and ensure collaboration.⁸⁶ He later reaffirmed his theory that "'these

⁸² Shepherd, *Hitler's Soldiers*, 192.

⁸³ Shepherd, *Hitler's Soldiers*, 192.

⁸⁴ Shepherd, *Hitler's Soldiers*, 192.

⁸⁵ Shepherd, *Hitler's Soldiers*, 192.

⁸⁶ Otto von Stülpnagel in Shepherd, *Hitler's Soldiers*, 194.

measures in no way [negatively] affect French people,” stating how violent reprisals only instigate “those individuals who are in the service of Germany’s enemies...and who are intent on thwarting Franco-German reconciliation.”⁸⁷ Stülpnagel was content with a limited doctrine of both Jewish and French partisan persecution; a complete disconnect from the radical, Machiavellian doctrine demanded by Berlin. Directly comparing the conduct of the Eastern Front to that of his military government in France, Stülpnagel strongly “warned against [the] Polish methods [of mass Jewish exterminations and civilian reprisals] in France.”⁸⁸ To his great dismay, the German architects of the Final Solution began demanding mass Jewish deportations eastward to bring France into line with other occupied countries.

Stülpnagel’s bitter reluctance to permit mass Jewish executions and deportations clashed directly with the more aggressively antisemitic SS who were also operating within France. By July of 1944, SS *Reichsführer* Heinrich Himmler “claimed that Stülpnagel’s difficult, obtrusive behavior was preventing the complete annihilation of the French Jews.”⁸⁹ As a direct result, “indigenous police forces, collaborators and administrators did the main legwork of processing and assembling Jews for collection across the western occupied territories.”⁹⁰ Committing to the initiative, the Vichy regime was quick to enact its own pre-existing antisemitism under the consent of the German military government. Vichy French antisemitism, however, did not mirror its racialized, National Socialist counterpart. Xenophobia was still the driving influence behind antisemitism in France. According to historians Michael Marrus and Robert Paxton, France’s xenophobic antisemitism stemmed from the fiscal and social devastation of the Great Depression. During the Depression, “refugees”--and especially Jewish refugees--“were rivals for jobs” in a

⁸⁷ Stülpnagel in Shepherd, *Hitler’s Soldiers*, 194.

⁸⁸ Stülpnagel in Shepherd, *Hitler’s Soldiers*, 192.

⁸⁹ Shepherd, *Hitler’s Soldiers*, 304-305.

⁹⁰ Shepherd, *Hitler’s Soldiers*, 304-305.

devastated economy and “threatened to weaken French culture” through cultural diversity.⁹¹ Amongst the French workforce, foreign “Jews appeared more as rival workers than as predatory capitalists,” fostering “the existence of working-class xenophobia.”⁹² Similarly, intellectuals feared foreign permeation into French culture. Intellectuals “blam[ed such] troubles on foreign competition, especially from Jews,” as conservative institutions like the *Action française* lamented the Jewish domination of France’s film and radio industries.⁹³ As the effects of the Great Depression lingered in France until the dawn of war, xenophobic antisemitism prevailed throughout the interwar years. Although, French antisemitism, too, harbored its own paranoia, induced by the tense years preceding the Second World War.

Coupled with the growing threat of German military aggression, French antisemitism was increasingly influenced by the nation’s fear of international confrontation prior to the outbreak of war. Revealing their general paranoia over involvement in a second, daunting world conflict, the French believed refugees “were eager to drag [them] into dreaded international complications.”⁹⁴ This sentiment most prominently targeted foreign, refugee Jewish communities as Hitler’s regime rapidly radicalized Jewish persecution in Germany. Marrus and Paxton detail how both the French public and authorities worried that “German Jews could poison relations with Germany.”⁹⁵ To illustrate this fear, they cite the extradition of German-Polish-Jewish refugee Herschel Grynszpan to Germany after he assassinated diplomat Ernst vom Rath at the German embassy in Paris on November 7, 1938. In response, “the French public blamed [Grynszpan] for increasing the risk of war with Germany” while “French authorities,” fearing similar rebellious outbreaks, “tightened

⁹¹ Marrus and Paxton, *Vichy France and the Jews*, 24-25.

⁹² Marrus and Paxton, *Vichy France and the Jews*, 24-25.

⁹³ Marrus and Paxton, *Vichy France and the Jews*, 25.

⁹⁴ Marrus and Paxton, *Vichy France and the Jews*, 24.

⁹⁵ Marrus and Paxton, *Vichy France and the Jews*, 24-25.

their surveillance of foreigners.”⁹⁶ As *Kristallnacht* devastated Jewish communities in Germany following Rath’s assassination, France’s xenophobic antisemitism gained increasing support. As a result, xenophobic antisemitism became firmly grounded amongst the Vichy collaborationists who rose to power following the German occupation.

Subject to the demands of German occupational authorities, the Vichy regime quickly employed its xenophobic antisemitism to appease Hitler’s agenda. Initially, the Vichy regime only condoned the rounding up and deportation “of Jews who were not of French citizenship.”⁹⁷ So, in July of 1942, “French police and collaborators swept up thirteen thousand stateless Jews in Paris” during the notorious Vel d’Hiv round-up, contributing to the nearly 42,000 Jewish deportees amassed by year’s end.⁹⁸ In his politically self-serving observations of Jewish deportations in October of 1944, veteran of the Legion of French Volunteers Against Bolshevism (LVF) Pierre Rusco emphasized the conservative, xenophobic antisemitism of the Vichy regime. In his own rendition of the events, Rusco recalled seeing Jews “‘rushing forward’ to board a [‘resettlement’] train” since “the Russians were coming, and even Jews...would rather flee toward the country that has ostracized them than have to deal with the wild, barbarian hordes pouring in from the East.”⁹⁹ Alongside the Germans’ paranoid hatred of Judeo-Bolshevism, Rusco reveals how Vichy antisemitism depicted non-French Jews as the despised *other* based upon nationality or, as Rusco identifies, statelessness. Despite its own antisemitism, the Vichy regime shared Stülpnagel’s concern over deporting assimilated Jewish citizens and its effect on the greater population. Vichy officials “feared that deporting assimilated French Jews to the extermination camps [in the East]

⁹⁶ Marrus and Paxton, *Vichy France and the Jews*, 24.

⁹⁷ Marrus and Paxton, *Vichy France and the Jews*, 17.

⁹⁸ Shepherd, *Hitler’s Soldiers*, 305.

⁹⁹ Pierre Rusco in Philippe Carrard, *The French Who Fought for Hitler: Memories from the Outcasts* (Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 76.

would dangerously unsettle the wider population” of the country.¹⁰⁰ Through the collective reservations of the Vichy French and Stülpnagel’s military government, the proportion of French Jews to die during the Holocaust totaled around twenty-five percent; a percentage far less than the staggering seventy-five percent of Dutch Jews, for instance.¹⁰¹ Now, both Stülpnagel and the Vichy French stood at odds with the initiatives of Hitler’s regime. Over in Belgium, Falkenhausen’s military government fared no better.

In Belgium, indigenous antisemitism also revolved around the notion of xenophobia, but was even more so reserved than in France. This, in large part, can be attributed to the fact Jews “retained a fringe presence in [Belgian] society and had made less effort to assimilate.”¹⁰² Thus, remaining more or less separate from the rest of society and difficult to trace. Falkenhausen’s military government “calculated correctly that the Belgian authorities were not prepared to see Belgian Jews deported,” but would allow the deportation of Jewish “‘emigrants and other foreigners,’ as long as the German police rather than the Belgian police did the job.”¹⁰³ With that said, foreign Jews accounted for “90 per cent of the 10,000 Jews who were deported in September 1942” from Belgium.¹⁰⁴ Focusing almost entirely on the motto ‘out of sight, out of mind,’ Belgian collaborators refused to partake in deporting Jews even if they believed foreign Jews should be purged from Belgian society. So, German police forces, along with the help of willing Belgian authorities, organized the rapid deportation of reportedly stateless Jews from Belgium. But, after the cruel treatment of Jews by German policemen was revealed to the Belgian public, the military government “scaled back the hunt, [and] forbade further large-scale ‘cleansing’ actions.”¹⁰⁵ In

¹⁰⁰ Shepherd, *Hitler’s Soldiers*, 305.

¹⁰¹ Shepherd, *Hitler’s Soldiers*, 305.

¹⁰² Shepherd, *Hitler’s Soldiers*, 307.

¹⁰³ Shepherd, *Hitler’s Soldiers*, 306.

¹⁰⁴ Shepherd, *Hitler’s Soldiers*, 306.

¹⁰⁵ Shepherd, *Hitler’s Soldiers*, 306.

total, approximately 25,000 Jews were deported between the efforts of the German police, *Wehrmacht*, and collaborationist forces, resulting in the deportation of “40 per cent of the country’s prewar Jewish population” by war’s end.¹⁰⁶ Considering Belgium’s smaller geographic size and minimal local resistance, Jewish deportations produced far ghastlier results than did the complicated efforts of the Vichy regime and Stülpnagel’s military government in France.

Perhaps the greatest factor explaining the disconnect between Hitler’s genocidal initiatives and Vichy French collaboration lies in their differing cultures rather than objectives. That is, humanist aspects of French culture and national attitude permeated even the staunchest Vichy ideology, even its antisemitism. Members of both the Vichy and Nazi regimes have referred to this effect merely as ‘Frenchness.’¹⁰⁷ Pierre Rostaing, a career soldier and veteran of the Legion of French Volunteers Against Bolshevism (LVF), best describes the aspects of ‘Frenchness’ the Germans so readily despised. Rostaing explained “that his countrymen...cultivate[d] demeanors like ‘we don’t give a shit’” as well as “‘anger and grumbling [rohne et grange]’” at orders from their German superiors.¹⁰⁸ While referencing the petty insubordination and individuality of LVF volunteers, Rostaing accurately described the Vichy regime’s skepticism toward Berlin’s radically antisemitic demands. Such skepticism revealed the French collaborators’ ability to think on their own initiative, outside the blind control of Hitler and Berlin. Free thinking of which concealed appeals to reason amongst the irrationality of antisemitism and the Holocaust. Described as the “‘Voltaire’s smile’” by collaborationist writer Alphonse de Châteaubriant, “France’s main liabilities” in contributing to indiscriminate Jewish persecution was a sense of subjective reasoning.¹⁰⁹ Châteaubriant’s thesis concludes that the interaction between Hitler’s regime in

¹⁰⁶ Shepherd, *Hitler’s Soldiers*, 306.

¹⁰⁷ Carrard, *The French Who Fought for Hitler*, 119.

¹⁰⁸ Pierre Rostaing in Carrard, *The French Who Fought for Hitler*, 119.

¹⁰⁹ Alphonse de Châteaubriant in Carrard, *The French Who Fought for Hitler*, 121.

Berlin and the Vichy regime in France was “a clash of mentalities between the two cultures.”¹¹⁰ Notably absent from this conclusion is any mention of race or the need to undermine and eliminate the enemies of French *culture*. Giving life to their ‘Voltaire smile,’ Vichy and other French collaborationists argued that since “France was a ‘civilized’ country, [its Jewish population] should be treated differently from the ‘culturally inferior’ nations of Eastern Europe.”¹¹¹ Thereby, the objective of Hitler’s *total* war of extermination against world Jewry appeared overly inclusive to French collaborationists. The Vichy regime simply valued nationality and nationalism over indiscriminate, racialized genocide.

Even radically antisemitic officials in the Vichy regime exhibited aversion to the Nazis’ perception of French Jews. Xavier Vallat, the Commissioner-General for Jewish Questions in the Vichy government, offers a prominent example of this divide between the French and their German overlords. According to Marrus and Paxton, “Vallat renounced the Nazis’ racialist antisemitism in favor of a more benign cultural form” through which “Jews [were] bearable in homeopathic doses.”¹¹² Elaborating his argument, Vallat stated how trace remnants of Jewish culture “sufficiently diluted...the undeniable qualities of their race.”¹¹³ Thus, employing the term race in a more collective, cultural context rather than one of bloodline or National Socialist pseudoscience. Vallat also argued that French nationalism and ethnicity were critical mechanisms protecting certain Jews from deportation, despite German demands. He asserted that “Jews who showed ‘attachment to this country [France]’” were inherently less threatening than the persistent “saturation” of Jewish culture--perceived as inherently foreign--in French society.¹¹⁴ With

¹¹⁰ Châteaubriant in Carrard, *The French Who Fought for Hitler*, 121.

¹¹¹ Noakes and Pridham, *Nazism 1919-1945*, vol. 3, *Foreign Policy, War and Racial Extermination*, 605.

¹¹² Xavier Vallat in Marrus and Paxton, *Vichy France and the Jews*, 54.

¹¹³ Vallat in Marrus and Paxton, *Vichy France and the Jews*, 54.

¹¹⁴ Vallat in Marrus and Paxton, *Vichy France and the Jews*, 54.

Berlin's increasing demands for Jewish deportations in the final months of 1941--coinciding with the war of extermination in the East--Vichy officials felt pressured to maintain French national dignity and honor. That is, through their continued promise to protect French Jews from the same roundups and deportations they *encouraged* for the masses of foreign Jewish refugees in France.

Ironically, Vichy French antisemitic policy held no official distinction between domestic and foreign Jews until the end of 1941. Vichy officials readdressed this lack of distinction following the humiliating arrest and deportation of 743 "professional [Parisian] men and intellectuals" or otherwise "notable [Jewish] personages" in December of 1941--i.e. Jewish business leaders and military veterans of French ethnicity.¹¹⁵ Ensuring French national dignity through its reliance on xenophobic antisemitism, the "Vichy [regime] focused its anti-Jewish policy more directly against foreigners."¹¹⁶ Attempting to maintain the ethnic interests of France contrary to Hitler's demands, Vichy officials radicalized their pre-existing xenophobic antisemitism. The primary targets of this upsurge in persecution were, again, Jewish refugee communities who fled Nazi persecution westward after 1933. On January 2, 1942, the Vichy regime declared that all foreign Jews who fled to France after January 1, 1936, "had to be reassigned either to [forced] labor battalions...or, for those with resources, assigned to a residence."¹¹⁷ Notably, little antisemitic Vichy doctrine released after 1941 officially included French Jews in their efforts to appease the Nazi regime. Instead, Vichy officials attempted to protect French Jews, labeling them French nationals and not subhuman Jewry, at the expense of other, easily identifiable foreign Jewish communities. The January 1942 doctrine also reveals the importance of socio-economic status to the Vichy French relative to their xenophobic

¹¹⁵ Marrus and Paxton, *Vichy France and the Jews*, 167-168.

¹¹⁶ Marrus and Paxton, *Vichy France and the Jews*, 167-168.

¹¹⁷ Marrus and Paxton, *Vichy France and the Jews*, 168.

antisemitism. If a foreign Jew was economically prosperous, he too could evade the labor battalions and, shockingly, earn *residency*! Therefore, it is unfortunately no surprise that nearly two-thirds of Jewish deportees from France, whose lives were claimed by the Holocaust, “were foreign-born refugees.”¹¹⁸ With the Vichy regime’s stubborn reluctance to deport French Jews, Berlin struggled to urge French collaborationists to diligently execute its racialized initiatives.

Such a subjective disconnect further complicated the Vichy regime’s participation, if not acquiescence, in the Holocaust. In his postwar testimony, SS *Hauptsturmführer* Dieter Wisliceny confirmed that “the Vichy government [reluctantly] agreed to the deportation of French citizens” in August of 1941.¹¹⁹ But, they continued their “resistance to the deportations” well into the summer of 1942, resulting in “a general halt to the [Jewish] deportations” in France.¹²⁰ Even some German occupation officials stalled their orders after reading the underlying messages of both Stülpnagel’s military government and the Vichy regime. In late 1942, Adolf Eichmann “accused the commander of the Sipo in Paris”—short for *Sicherheitspolizei*, or Secret Police—“Dr. Helmut Knochen, of sabotaging” Eichmann’s efforts to rapidly deport French Jews.¹²¹ Peculiarly, Eichmann did not directly ridicule the military government or Stülpnagel, who allowed such stalls in Jewish deportation to occur. Furthermore, in an attempt to mitigate the deportation of French Jews, Vichy Chief of State Philippe Pétain “asserted [to the Germans] that he could not understand why Jews of French nationality were being deported when there were so many *other* Jews in France [*italics mine*].”¹²² Thus, continuing to divert German attention away from French Jews and onto those already unwelcomed in France due to their innately foreign statelessness. As for assimilated

¹¹⁸ Marrus and Paxton, *Vichy France and the Jews*, 263.

¹¹⁹ Dieter Wisliceny in Noakes and Pridham, *Nazism 1919-1945*, vol. 3, *Foreign Policy, War and Racial Extermination*, 601-602.

¹²⁰ Wisliceny in Noakes and Pridham, *Nazism 1919-1945*, vol. 3, *Foreign Policy, War and Racial Extermination*, 605.

¹²¹ Noakes and Pridham, *Nazism 1919-1945*, vol. 3, *Foreign Policy, War and Racial Extermination*, 602-603.

¹²² Noakes and Pridham, *Nazism 1919-1945*, vol. 3, *Foreign Policy, War and Racial Extermination*, 609.

French Jews who obtained citizenship before the Nationality Law of 1927, Vichy authorities considered them “in a different light from the émigré Jews” who fled persecution in Germany or Eastern Europe.¹²³ Despite the destruction of approximately 72,500 French Jews by war’s end, Vichy French skepticism toward Hitler’s racialized campaign mitigated Jewish deportations eastward. Skepticism of which presented considerable internal resistance to the Nazis’ genocidal project in France.

Perpetrating and Enduring the War of Extermination in the East

Historians, however, are still left with the question of why ordinary *Wehrmacht* soldiers actively participated in Hitler’s genocidal campaigns on the Eastern Front. As war with the Western Allies resumed, Alsatian infantry volunteer Guy Sajer explained how combat in the East increasingly brutalized his fellow German soldiers. Thus, numbing them to the value of human life while simultaneously causing them to fear death. Sajer recalled how “he and his companions were ‘physically destroyed’ by the hardships” of war in the East.¹²⁴ He wrote how German soldiers “‘were sleepy,’” but “‘knew that [they] couldn’t sleep as long as a Bolshevik was alive’” since death could only come to “‘either them or us.’”¹²⁵ Similarly, one *Wehrmacht* Corporal detailed the feared Judeo-Bolshevik invasion into Germany seemingly ensured by their unthinkable defeat in the East. The Corporal resolved that “‘a complete destruction [of Bolshevism] is...required,’” fearing how, “‘if these bestial hordes of soldiers were to fall upon Germany[,] all would be gone

¹²³ Noakes and Pridham, *Nazism 1919-1945*, vol. 3, *Foreign Policy, War and Racial Extermination*, 609.

¹²⁴ Guy Sajer in Carrard, *The French Who Fought for Hitler*, 81-82.

¹²⁵ Sajer in Carrard, *The French Who Fought for Hitler*, 81-82.

that is German.”¹²⁶ Under this intensely paranoid psychological state, divisions of German soldiers deteriorated into a frenzy for survival against the Soviets.

For many soldiers, the enemy was no longer human, but an omnipresent entity which sought their gruesome destruction. In his postwar reflections, veteran Harry Mielert stated that ““as a soldier, you don’t think [of the enemy] as an individual at all.””¹²⁷ Instead, he explained how soldiers in the East ““shoot at ‘profitable targets’”” so that one does not have to think about killing someone else’s father or husband.¹²⁸ Moreover, one *Wehrmacht* Corporal described the bitter, irrational hatred soldiers along the Eastern Front shared for their Soviet counterparts. He fumed about how Soviet soldiers and partisans were ““no longer people, but wild hordes and beasts, who have been bred by Bolshevism in the last twenty years.””¹²⁹ Revealing his own inhuman brutalization, the Corporal concluded that ““one must not allow any sympathy to grow for these people.””¹³⁰ According to historian Stephen Fritz, the National Socialist indoctrination of *Wehrmacht* soldiers, combined with the psychological damage of Eastern Front combat, warped their collective perception of the enemy--the other. This festering environment of fear and hatred corrupted these men to such a high degree “that the unthinkable became banal.”¹³¹ German soldiers’ desensitizing indoctrination, coupled with the barbarization of warfare and the lurking fear of partisans, allowed “these men [to] not think of the innocent human beings who were being killed but worried instead about the consequences to them personally” if they did not kill.¹³² Such

¹²⁶ Fritz, *Frontsoldaten*, 196.

¹²⁷ Harry Mielert in Fritz, *Frontsoldaten*, 59.

¹²⁸ Mielert in Fritz, *Frontsoldaten*, 59.

¹²⁹ Fritz, *Frontsoldaten*, 60.

¹³⁰ Fritz, *Frontsoldaten*, 60.

¹³¹ Fritz, *Frontsoldaten*, 59.

¹³² Fritz, *Frontsoldaten*, 59.

brutalized physical and psychological conditions fostered the perfect environment for *Wehrmacht* soldiers to willingly participate in Hitler's eastern war of extermination.

One of the leading psychological mechanisms that enabled German soldiers to both endure combat and scrupulously kill unarmed civilians was the concept of comradeship, or *Kameradschaft*. Although, according to historian Thomas Kühne, the *Wehrmacht's* implementation of soldierly comradeship differed tremendously from its prewar interpretation. During the Interwar Period, earlier notions of soldierly comradeship were “reserved to a humane type of sociality,” hindering the ability of trained soldiers to fight tenaciously.¹³³ As explained by one Nazi insider in the 1930s, “the humanity of comradeship suited the citizen,” implying that it “only constrained the radicalization of violence [the Nazi regime] craved.”¹³⁴ Such humanizing sentiment clashed with Hitler's desire for relentless and ruthless efficiency in both military maneuvers and executing his mass extermination campaigns. In the National Socialist reinterpretation of comradeship, “civilian selves...managed to overcome their individualities, egoisms, or class identities as soldiers.”¹³⁵ These soldiers would “eventually merg[e] into the entirety of the soldierly community,” and form “the nucleus of the ideal [German] nation.”¹³⁶ Formerly central to the intent of comradeship, Hitler's political and military leadership discouraged civilian identity within the ranks of the *Wehrmacht*. National Socialist comradeship sought to remove all aspects of civilian individuality from the refined friendships of nationalistic, charismatic warriors. Hitler intended to create a superior *Kampfgemeinschaft*, or ‘Combat

¹³³ Thomas Kühne, *The Rise and Fall of Comradeship: Hitler's Soldiers, Male Bonding, and Mass Violence in the Twentieth Century* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 33.

¹³⁴ Kühne, *The Rise and Fall of Comradeship*, 33.

¹³⁵ Kühne, *The Rise and Fall of Comradeship*, 53-54.

¹³⁶ Kühne, *The Rise and Fall of Comradeship*, 54.

Community,’ of ‘brothers in arms’ committed to the grueling, even genocidal, campaigns launched by his regime.

As the *Wehrmacht* struggled to cope with the brutalized, paranoid combat of the Eastern Front, Hitler’s reinterpretation of comradeship quickly turned violent. Officers noted how “a ‘guerrilla-psychosis’ spread through the troops” as fierce eastern “resistance cast doubt on the alleged racial, moral, and physical superiority” of the German invaders.¹³⁷ This “fear of guerrillas” fostered a “fear of one’s own weakness” in the *Wehrmacht*, dissolving professional soldier comradeship.¹³⁸ Furthermore, German soldiers were consistently caught between two opposing moral systems during Hitler’s eastern war of extermination. The first mandated “mercy for the unarmed civilian and a defeated enemy” from German combatants.¹³⁹ The other, Nazi-augmented system demanded “an ‘ethics’ that complies ‘solely with the needs of [the German] people’” and the ‘National Community.’¹⁴⁰ This created an evident dichotomy--as well as opportunities for contradiction--in the actions expected of *Wehrmacht* soldiers in the East. In 1942, Private Erich Kuby was appalled by the persistent violence and genocidal conduct of his surrounding *Wehrmacht* comrades. Kuby noted how his peers “so ‘easily intertwined middle-class norms and barbarism,’” simultaneously “‘play[ing] the role[s] of decent soldiers’” as well as “‘criminal accomplices.’”¹⁴¹ Like Kuby’s peers, many regular infantrymen became disillusioned under the guise of professional, soldierly comradeship. These men could not formulate a moral link between their work as professional soldiers and the persistent violence against civilian populations demanded by Hitler’s regime.

¹³⁷ Kühne, *The Rise and Fall of Comradeship*, 148.

¹³⁸ Kühne, *The Rise and Fall of Comradeship*, 148.

¹³⁹ Kühne, *The Rise and Fall of Comradeship*, 143.

¹⁴⁰ Kühne, *The Rise and Fall of Comradeship*, 143.

¹⁴¹ Erich Kuby in Kühne, *The Rise and Fall of Comradeship*, 142.

Similarly, German infantry on the Eastern Front were often conflicted by the excessive violence prescribed against Soviet soldiers and partisans. In March of 1941, 250 *Wehrmacht* generals received orders from Hitler to “forget the concept of comradeship between soldiers,” especially with foreign militants, as “a communist is no comrade before or after the battle.”¹⁴² Such a blatant breach of traditional military comradeship sought an ulterior motive: “the genocidal radicalization of warfare desired by the Nazis.”¹⁴³ Feeding off the fear of eastern resistance and ideological tensions between National Socialism and Bolshevism, the *Wehrmacht* changed its tone along the Eastern Front. *Wehrmacht* generals could no longer accept the bonds of professional, soldierly comradeship potentially interrupting the brutal eradication of Judeo-Bolshevik influence. Echoing Hitler, General Halder proclaimed that his forces “must get away from the standpoint of soldierly comradeship” as a “Communist is from first to last no comrade.”¹⁴⁴ Halder also summarized the *Wehrmacht*’s supposed legal justification for contributing to the *Führer*’s war of extermination. He wrote that all Soviet intelligentsia were considered both racial and ideological “criminals and must be treated as such,” falling into line “with [the] unprecedented, unmerciful, and unrelenting harshness” demanded by Hitler’s war in the East.¹⁴⁵ The only solution to preserve professional comradeship alongside Hitler’s genocidal campaigns was an escalation in violence, curtailing mercy for suspected sources of resistance. Therefore, any futile bonds of transnational humanity cracked under the pressure of the Eastern Front.

Loosely strung together by the remnants of National Socialist comradeship, *Wehrmacht* soldiers broadened their destructive scope in favor of self-preservation on the front. This new,

¹⁴² Adolf Hitler in Kühne, *The Rise and Fall of Comradeship*, 145.

¹⁴³ Hitler in Kühne, *The Rise and Fall of Comradeship*, 145.

¹⁴⁴ Halder in Noakes and Pridham, *Nazism 1919-1945*, vol. 3, *Foreign Policy, War and Racial Extermination*, 483.

¹⁴⁵ Halder in Noakes and Pridham, *Nazism 1919-1945*, vol. 3, *Foreign Policy, War and Racial Extermination*, 484; Hitler in Fritz, *Frontsoldaten*, 199.

reactionary comradeship “exert[ed] a communal force against those who wrong[ed] the [German military] or its members.”¹⁴⁶ Under the pretext of “revenge ensures justice,” soldiers struck back at “the whole group the wrongdoer belongs to, [and] not the individual.”¹⁴⁷ This further radicalized the violence exerted by the *Wehrmacht*, contributing towards the Nazi regime’s ultimate goal of mass extermination. Detailing the bonds of German comradeship against the enemy, infantryman Guy Sajer described his company commander’s fierce, passionate devotion to his men. Sajer wrote how this man of ““obvious and passionate sincerity”” stated that he ““would burn and destroy entire villages if by so doing [he] could prevent even one of [his men] from dying of hunger.””¹⁴⁸ Utilized as both a physical and psychological mechanism of self-preservation, German comradeship facilitated the widespread genocidal environment necessary to rapidly execute the Final Solution in the East. Influenced by the fear of eastern resistance, “the morality of revenge and retribution lured Wehrmacht soldiers into the Nazi genocidal project,” fostering “violent dynamism from the intertwining of obligation and permission” to kill.¹⁴⁹ Such confusing dynamism, complicated by influences of National Socialist ideology, enabled *Wehrmacht* infantry to commit mass murder on behalf of Hitler’s regime. Hence, *Wehrmacht* units were employed by their political and military leadership to perpetrate Hitler’s campaigns of Judeo-Bolshevik extermination in the East.

Apart from *Wehrmacht* soldiers’ devotion to their comrades and fear of partisan activity, individual combatants perpetrated mass murder for a wide array of reasons. In his renowned book *Ordinary Men*, historian Christopher Browning analyzes one battalion of German men, Reserve Police Battalion 101, and their motivations for rounding up and shooting Jews in Poland. Reserve Police Battalion 101 provides a prominent case study into the varying justifications of men who

¹⁴⁶ Kühne, *The Rise and Fall of Comradeship*, 147.

¹⁴⁷ Kühne, *The Rise and Fall of Comradeship*, 147.

¹⁴⁸ Sajer in Bartov, “The Distortion of Reality,” in *Hitler’s Army*, 117.

¹⁴⁹ Kühne, *The Rise and Fall of Comradeship*, 148.

agreed to kill, or not to kill, Jewish civilians in the East. When analyzing the murderous motivations of the Battalion, it is important to understand that not all men were influenced by equal justifications. Varying aspects of perpetrator individuality influenced the reserve policemen in different ways. Three of the leading motivations detailed by Browning fall under the category of the comradely *us versus them*, or the *other* principle: fear of social ostracization, perceptions of masculinity, and obedience to authority. That is, within Reserve Police Battalion 101, the adoption of “overtly nonconformist behavior, was simply beyond most of the men” as “it was easier for them to shoot” than to face the social consequences if they did not.¹⁵⁰ Thus, revealing an unsettling combination of groupthink, comradeship, and fear of non-conformity amongst the men. Building off Kühne’s concept of soldierly comradeship, non-shooters “risked isolation, rejection, and ostracism” which presented “a very uncomfortable prospect within the framework of a tight-knit unit stationed among a hostile population.”¹⁵¹ The fear of social ostracization forged an unspoken, intangible commitment between the men in the Battalion, subconsciously submitting them to a community governed by groupthink. Under such dangerous group dynamics, other motivations quickly took root as the men subconsciously feared becoming part of the outcasted *other*. This established the groundwork for the reserve policemen’s murderous conduct, but does not fully encompass all factors influencing them.

The men’s collective perception of their own masculinity, under the guidelines of National Socialism, also set behavioral precedents which urged some to perpetrate murder. As a key feature of Nazi ideology on gender roles, historian Lisa Pine explains that “the Nazi regime...vigorously constructed and explicitly articulated aggressive and dominant models of masculinity.”¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ Christopher R. Browning, “Ordinary Men,” in *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York, NY: HarperPerennial Publishers, 1993), 184.

¹⁵¹ Browning, “Ordinary Men,” in *Ordinary Men*, 185.

¹⁵² Pine, “Men, Masculinity and the Wehrmacht,” in *Hitler’s ‘National Community’*, 93.

Therefore, masculinity in Nazi Germany “was characterized by ambition for promotion or achievement, as well as attempts to displace or discredit peers or competitors.”¹⁵³ It is in this atmosphere that German men entered a “perpetual struggle...not only to acquire power but also maintain it against all potential rivals”; a concept referred to as *ubermensch*, or ‘superman,’ denoting the “‘will to power.’”¹⁵⁴ Several men in Reserve Police Battalion 101 took this perpetual competition to heart. Those who opted out of shooting “pleaded not that they were ‘too good’ but rather that they were ‘too weak’ to kill” and voluntarily fulfill their duties.¹⁵⁵ These admissions reveal an underlying influence of masculinity through an idolization of strong-willed, dominant, and determined male personas. Importantly, these admissions do not depict remorse for the evident immorality of mass murder, but rather that these few men could not bring themselves to kill; a lack of devotion to an otherwise justifiable cause. By refusing to shoot, non-shooters “only reaffirmed the ‘macho’ values of the majority”--including the ability “to kill unarmed, noncombatant men, women, and children”--in an effort “not to rupture the bonds of comradeship that constituted their social world.”¹⁵⁶ The men’s perceptions of an idyllic gritty, dominating masculine presence in the field placed artificial shame onto the few who opted out of shooting. This sense of shame further encouraged the murderous actions of the shooters, depicting them as the righteous, manly patrons of their duties. Thus, fostering the image of a strong, masculine, murderous *us* versus a weak, emasculated, non-shooter *them* within the Battalion.

Furthermore, the concept of German combatants’ obedience to authority should not be understood in the same light as the rhetoric scapegoated by Nazi criminals in postwar trials. To define the purpose of obedience to authority in Reserve Police Battalion 101, Browning cites the

¹⁵³ Pine, “Men, Masculinity and the Wehrmacht,” in *Hitler’s ‘National Community’*, 93.

¹⁵⁴ Pine, “Men, Masculinity and the Wehrmacht,” in *Hitler’s ‘National Community’*, 93.

¹⁵⁵ Browning, “Ordinary Men,” in *Ordinary Men*, 185.

¹⁵⁶ Browning, “Ordinary Men,” in *Ordinary Men*, 185.

work of psychologist Stanley Milgram. Milgram concluded that “the notions of ‘loyalty, duty, [and] discipline’” to a higher authority foster “moral imperatives overriding any identification with the victim.”¹⁵⁷ Attempting to legitimize their gruesome actions, the reserve policemen narrowed their psychological and mental focus toward the Battalion’s authoritative duties. Thereby, using the concept of authority as a catalyst to depersonalize and desensitize the men to the excesses of the killing process. This helped the men construct a psychological barrier between themselves and the immense number of Jewish victims they agreed to kill. Additionally, a “‘situational obligation,’” as Milgram explained, “makes refusal [of orders] appear improper, rude, or even an immoral breach of obligation” within the Battalion, placing the men into a self-generated “‘agentic state.’”¹⁵⁸ Again drawing upon groupthink dynamics, these men became willing tools of the Nazi genocidal project out of their own psychological self-preservation combined, ironically, with civilized courtesy to authority. The reserve policemen did not do so blindly, but as a deliberate subordination of oneself to the concept of duty. Subsequently, “the killing process became progressively easier,” making “brutalization...the effect of these men’s behavior” rather than its cause.¹⁵⁹ Thus, the psychological brutalization of seemingly obedient German combatants became increasingly necessary for perpetrating Hitler’s war of extermination on the Eastern Front.

Conclusion: Eastern Extermination versus Western Administration

In conclusion, the *Wehrmacht*’s execution of the Final Solution differed tremendously between the Eastern and Western Fronts of the Second World War. In the East, Hitler’s war of

¹⁵⁷ Stanley Milgram in Browning, “Ordinary Men,” in *Ordinary Men*, 173.

¹⁵⁸ Milgram in Browning, “Ordinary Men,” in *Ordinary Men*, 173.

¹⁵⁹ Browning, “Ordinary Men,” in *Ordinary Men*, 161.

extermination against Judeo-Bolshevism demanded--but did not force--ordinary German soldiers to perpetrate the mass murder of both Jews and Soviet partisans. Under the strenuous, psychologically devastating climate of combat in the East, the *Wehrmacht* found itself operating in a foreign, hostile environment. As a result of German soldiers' National Socialist indoctrination, such daunting combat quickly challenged their preconceived notions of both military and racial superiority. Though, instead of appealing to reason and logic--which ultimately denounced their inherent superiority--*Wehrmacht* soldiers located justification and consent within their ideological training to enact their military and genocidal duties. Thus, leading to their steep brutalization in a rather brief period of time. Through its own brutalization, the *Wehrmacht* was simultaneously conditioned to perpetrate and endure Hitler's genocidal initiatives in the East. Constructing psychological barriers through soldierly comradeship, German soldiers *willingly* rounded up and shot Jews and partisans in response to their victims' symbolic threat to Germany.

On the Western Front, however, the tone of the Final Solution was much more reserved, yet still sought the same end goal as Hitler's war in the East. Since the Nazi regime's racial hierarchy deemed the people of occupied Western Europe second class citizens, local collaborationist regimes played a central role in executing the Final Solution. While *Wehrmacht* soldiers were busy fighting the Western Allies in 1940 and again in 1944, German occupational authorities delicately mandated collaborationist regimes' cooperation. The resulting power sharing dynamic between the occupying, dominant Germans and local, collaborationist regimes fostered the Western Front's administrative occupation approach to the Final Solution. This awkward dynamic enabled the subtle objections of the collaborationist French and Belgians to mitigate Hitler's indiscriminate deportation and annihilation of Jews from the West. Therefore, Falkenhausen and Stülpnagel's military governments failed to meet the killing standards achieved

by the *Wehrmacht* in the East--ironically, much to their respective credit. Both occupational German governments, as well as their local collaborators, lacked the racialized hatred and psychological brutalization of soldiers in the East. Motivations of which festered only under the daunting stress of war in the East. Without such irrational motivation, German administrative and local collaborator resistance mitigated the Final Solution's destruction of Jews in the West.

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