

# **'the Good Old Days': The Holocaust as Seen by Its Perpetrators and Bystanders Study Guide**

**'the Good Old Days': The Holocaust as Seen by Its Perpetrators and Bystanders by Ernst Klee**

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# Plot Summary

The book presents a mixture of photographs, photographic reproductions of original documents, and transcribed and translated documents. With a few rare exceptions, the editors do not provide editorial comment on the materials presented. The book is divided into two parts and thirteen named chapters. Each chapter is further divided into numbered and named sections, and sections may in turn contain documents from several sources. Each document is carefully cited in an appendix. Much of the material is derived from post-War legal proceedings and depositions, but much of it is also drawn from wartime reports, letters, diaries, and so forth. The organization of the book presupposes that readers will be familiar with the basic history of the holocaust but does not require in depth knowledge of particular events.

For the most part, the materials presented are related in the first-person point of view and most of the materials are eyewitness accounts of Nazi atrocities directly relating to the holocaust. Many of the documents are official wartime reports from high-ranking officers or politicians, but so too many of the documents represent the point of view of average soldiers or civilians. The text conclusively demonstrates that a wide section of German civilians knew about the holocaust as it was occurring, and many actively participated in promoting some aspect of the holocaust. Several writers enjoy recent promotions or pay raises available only because they became active participants in some aspect of institutionalized mass murder. Very few writers, however, directly implicate themselves in any criminal activity. Thus, it appears that virtually everybody in Nazi Germany and her occupied territories was an accidental witness to extended atrocities, but yet virtually nobody actually performed atrocities. The book also conclusively demonstrates that there was little to no negative repercussions to those Germans—even wartime enlisted men—who refused to participate in mass murder.

What emerges from the book overall is the chilling realization that Nazi Germany, during World War II, was populated with knowing collaborators in the murder of millions of Jews. While not every citizen committed murder, there was surprisingly little resistance to a State-operated machine of genocide; many, in fact, implicitly supported the operation because they hated Jews or because they financially benefitted from the holocaust. The book also includes biographical notes of nearly every author or speaker. These notes help put the included texts in context and form a valuable portion of the book.



# Foreword, Preface, and Introduction

## Foreword, Preface, and Introduction Summary and Analysis

The foreword by Lord Dacre of Glanton presents the English-language translation of the book and discusses its historical significance. It briefly provides a historical background for the materials presented but also assumes the reader is familiar with the basic history of the holocaust and the Nazi occupation of Eastern Europe. Some of the bizarre inconsistencies of German life during the Nazi era are considered and the question of how mass murder could consistently be carried on in public view without opposition is posed. The foreword and preponderance of the book deal with the early period of genocide, before mass evacuations, gassings, and cremations were carried out. The material starts with mass execution by shooting, moves on to mass execution by gas van, and then ends in the extermination camps during c. 1942. The foreword points out the concern shown by the Nazi government for the German executioners' mental health and wellbeing—there was no similar concern for foreigners taken into service as executioners. The Preface is translated and taken from the German-language edition and is very brief. The material includes brief biographies of Ernst Klee and Willi Dressen and includes a biographical statement about Volker Riess. The introduction, much like the foreword, attempts to position the book as a collection of historical documents and also calls out some of the more problematical juxtapositions in a few of the included narratives—such as the Auschwitz doctor who extracts organ tissue samples from living persons and later extols the excellent ice cream available at the camp. The introduction also provides a concise review of the development of early concentration camps. None of these front matter materials are intended to be an exhaustive treatment of their respective subjects.



# The brutalization of precious German Manpower

## The brutalization of precious German Manpower Summary and Analysis

The book proper consists of two major divisions, the first one being titled: "Part One 'Acts of violence...carried out quite openly' - the murder of Jews in the daily life of the Einsatzgruppen". Part One is further divided into ten named but unnumbered chapters of quite unequal length. Chapters are topical and present one or more documents that are related because they discuss the same event or very similar events. The first chapter, "The brutalization of precious German manpower - the occupation of Poland", presents a recurrent theme in the materials of the book—the Nazi government was deeply concerned that the process of institutionalized murder was dehumanizing those tasked with the direct process of execution. The concern was that good German soldiers would become depraved by prolonged participation in mass executions of men, women, and children. The first document, "Notes of Eastern Territories Commander, Johannes Blaskowitz", complains that the execution of ten thousand Jews and Poles was carried out in a disorganized manner which has caused the Wehrmacht to lose local popularity and has caused "brutalization and moral depravity" (p. 5) among the troops who participated in the murders. The second segment, "'Bloody Wednesday' in Olkusz/Iikenau", presents a series of six annotated photographs. During the period of the photographs, July 1940, the Jews of the Polish town experienced a series of murders and beatings. By c. 1942 the surviving Jews were deported to Auschwitz. The third document, "'Foreign Service' - Excerpts from the diary of a cycle battalion Foreign Service of the unit, Field Post No. 44762 D, for the period 9.6.1941 to..." is reproduced in English transcription and also by photographic presentation of the original document itself. The entries extend until from June until September of 1941. The document presents a day-by-day, and often time-of-day, noted series of events concerning the battalion. During the period included the battalion participates in the deployment to Warsaw and then Minsk, formal reviews, and then direct participation in the guarding and mass murder of Jews held in a prison compound. The unit is supported by a company of Ukrainians assembled from prisoners of war. The document illustrates the process of initial reticence to abuse Jews yielding to wholehearted participation in genocide. Also, the legal justification of official reaction to partisan sabotage quickly gives way to the anti-Semitic self-justification of mass murder.



# Each time a victim was beaten to death they started to clap

## Each time a victim was beaten to death they started to clap Summary and Analysis

The second chapter, "Each Each time a victim was beaten to death they started to clap-pogroms in Kaunas and elsewhere in Lithuania" examines the notion that the early stages of the holocaust were not directly enacted by the Nazis but were rather a spontaneous demonstration of anti-Semitism by local populaces who were suddenly freed of repressive Soviet-Jewish rule. The opening photograph shows the infamous 'Death-dealer of Kaunas', his weapon, several victims, and a portion of his audience. The first document, "'Initially difficult to set a pogrom in motion'—Report by Stahlecker, head of Einsatzgruppe A", describes successful German efforts to arrange for local partisans in Kaunas, Lithuania, to perform pogroms. Anti-Semitism in Kaunas had been long established and formal persecution of Jews was carried out by the occupation Soviet government from as early as 1940; nevertheless, many Lithuanians were convinced that the Soviet occupation was caused by local Jews. The Nazi occupation was, at least initially, apparently viewed as liberation from Soviet oppression. Numerous local non-Jewish citizens, including recently freed criminals, participated in the mass murder of about three thousands of Jewish citizens in June, 1941. The German officials in the occupied area considered Lithuanian action preferable to German direct involvement in genocide because of external political pressures. Stahlecker's report recounts the German-inspired spontaneous mass murder of Jews. The second document, "'Cheers and laughter'—mass murder in Kovno" details the same events (Kovno is the English-language name of the city of Kaunas). This report was given by an Oberst, or roughly a Colonel, in the German army. He recounts being a personal witness to a series of murders carried out by the 'Death-dealer of Kovno', a Lithuanian man who publicly murdered dozens of Jews by beating them to death with a huge wooden club. The Jews were brought to him in a central city square by companies of partisans who then cheered at the spectacle of murder. The Jews were beaten repeatedly until they stopped moving; often the spectators would participate in giving blows. During the following days the executions continued in a less spectacular way—groups of men and women were taken out of town and shot into ditches. Graphic photographs accompany the text. Additional segments of text related the same events from the point of view of a photographer, a lance-corporal, a sergeant-major, an enlisted man, and a medical orderly. In salient details all of the accounts agree.

The third document, "'If they get their revenge, we're in for a hard time'—soldiers from a motorized column watch a massacre in Paneriai, Lithuania" presents a similar episode of genocide that transpired in another town during July, 1941. During these events various German soldiers participated in mass shootings and many German soldiers haphazardly witnessed the process of genocide. The documents include reports of



statements made by Jews moments before execution and several of the writers express amazement that the Jews approached mass murder with a calm demeanor. The text is accompanied with graphic photographs. The initial statement is largely corroborated by additional statements made by a co-driver, who refers to the Jews being executed as delinquents, and a book-keeper who took photographs. This execution appears to have been more methodical than the execution in Kaunas and was carried out predominantly by mass shootings in semi-isolated locales. The writers all express concern that if the war is lost by Germany, there will likely be severed repercussions for such atrocities.

The fourth document, "'Total 137,346'—the so-called 'Jäger Report'" was issued from Kaunas by Karl Jäger, the Commander of Police, at the end of December, 1941. It is marked "Secret Reich Business!" and is essentially a date-stamped listing of mass murders conducted by Lithuanian partisans but organized by German officials. Each entry gives the date, a location, some few notes, and a total number of executions. Each month period, July through November, is subtotaled. By the end of the five month period the report tallies 137,346 officially counted murders—nearly all of Jewish men, women, and children. The report then ends with a tally of surviving Jews that are required as slaves in industrial manufacturing, the author expressing regret that such could not be murdered. The book presents some of the supporting documentation provided with the report that details individual actions justifying why certain groups of Jews were murdered when they were otherwise requested as slave labor. The report also recommends sterilization of Jewish workers allowed to survive and concludes by noting the joyful reception that the mass murder of Jews received by the surviving Lithuanian citizenry.





# Pushed to their psychological limits

## Pushed to their psychological limits Summary and Analysis

Chapter 3, "'Pushed to their psychological limits'—members of the Einsatzgruppen on the stresses and strains of killing" presents three documents considering the mental-health impacts to servicemen charged with performing mass murder over prolonged time periods. According to the first series of documents, "'If the victims didn't do as they were told...'—problems during mass shootings", one of the most distressing aspects of performing mass murder was the occasional and varied resistance of the victims who unsurprisingly often did not desire to comply. One affidavit and two statements, all from different individuals, describe events in which victims engaged in resistance—in these cases all futile. The usual recourse for the murderers was of course violence, involving beatings or extemporaneous shootings. As these events often transpired away from semi-isolated execution locales they often had wide audiences unused to witnessing genocide. The statements also assert that many executioners suffered mental breakdown after prolonged experience or after some particularly horrific event.

The second series of documents, "'It took nerves of steel'—the murder of 33,771 Jews in the Babi Yar ravine (29/30 September 1941)" includes three brief statements by different persons. The statements describe the physical process of locating, concentrating, loading, moving, executing, and burying nearly thirty-four thousand persons in two days in one locale. The Babi Yar massacre is a well-documented event and the book does not attempt to provide a comprehensive history. Instead, the statements focus on anecdotal involvement and individual observations. Accompanying photographs show the execution site and bodies exhumed after the war. During the execution Jews were marched into mass graves and made to lie down on top of those killed moments before. Ukrainian 'packers' forced them into tight columns and then men with guns would shoot them. Survivors were held down by the next line of victims. One statement offers the details of the following days as occasional bloody and muddy victims would stagger into town or be found crawling along roads, having self-exhumed from the mass grave; such survivors were shot again. Other statements note that even though the execution at Babi Yar was incredible in scale such processes could not satisfy the Nazi desire to exterminate millions of Jews. Also, the psychological repercussions on the executors were grave. This leads directly to segment three, "'A new and better method of killing had to be found'—the gas-vans". This segment includes three statements on the implementation and use of gas-vans as an execution methodology. The first statement is provided by a gas-van inspector; the other statements are provided by users of the gas-vans. In essence, the gas-vans were nearly airtight cargo trucks in which perhaps three to six dozen people were packed. The van's engine exhaust was then directed into the sealed portion of the truck and as the truck drove from the assembly point to the burial point the victims were asphyxiated by the exhaust. The vans were effective but the users complained that the interiors after



use were often smeared in blood, urine, and feces. Also the loaded corpses were difficult to extricate and unload. The process of murder seemed more clinical and detached and dozens could be killed at once. Also, there were no survivors and few acts of resistance to being loaded into what was perceived as transportation. However, the gas-vans often were not well-maintained, the engine exhaust was fairly slow-acting, and the number of vans obtainable was insufficient for the genocide envisioned. However, the gas-vans were widely used and form a bridge between the genocide by shooting of the early years and the genocide in extermination camps of the latter years.



# Quite happy to take part in shootings

## Quite happy to take part in shootings Summary and Analysis

Chapter 4, "Quite happy to take part in shootings"—forced to obey orders—the myth" examines the widely-held belief that those who participated in genocide were forced so to do. Many now believe that the executioners themselves were forced to decide between being victim or murderer; this chapter seeks to dispel that myth. The brief chapter includes fourteen statements excerpted from larger documents (refer to note IV on p. 284 for sources). The statements come from police officials, government officials, members of the SS, and members of various Einsatzgruppen. All of the statements agree that no definitive punishment was incurred by refusal to participate in various aspects of genocide. Soldiers who refused to perform executions were not summarily sent to the front; civilians who refused to participate were not criminalized or even professionally disadvantaged. Some slight loss of prestige is noted in a few instances but in other instances a general promotion followed refusal. Some of the statements are auto-biographical and others are biographical. Many of them are anecdotal but all contain general statements. Taken collectively they conclusively demonstrate that direct individual participation in the holocaust was voluntary. Some statements demonstrate that those willing to participate enjoyed promotion. But this preferential treatment is far from official persecution of those who resisted.



# Once again I've got to play general to the Jews

## Once again I've got to play general to the Jews Summary and Analysis

Chapter 5, "'Once again I've got to play general to the Jews'—from the war diary of Blutordensträger Felix Landau" provides nineteen printed pages extracted from a wartime diary. The presentation is devoid of commentary. In addition to the chapter's front-matter introduction, Felix Landau has a rather complete biography presented on pp. 297-298. During his youth Landau was heavily involved in Nazi activities. During the period described in the journal, Landau worked as a Jewish slave labor organizer near Lvov. Throughout the journal entries he discusses his wife and his mistress Gertrude—in 1942 Landau divorced his wife and subsequently was briefly married to Gertrude. After the war Landau was convicted of war crimes and sentenced to life imprisonment. He uses the phrase 'general to the Jews' to describe his position as workforce organizer. The journal is particularly repellent because Landau juxtaposes a whiny schoolboy yearning for his mistress, hatred of his estranged wife, organized human trafficking, love of Germanic music, the mass murder of Jews, and descriptions of fancy meals. Landau formally states that he has no empathy whatsoever for murdered Jewish children but worries that his estranged wife might not properly bring up his own children. He denigrates Jewish and Polish women who prostitute themselves for survival but swoons over his distant mistress while realizing she is simultaneously having an affair with another soldier. He considers the local non-Jewish residents to be little better than scum, feeling that everything they do and make is substandard and lazy. He regrets their anti-Germanic tendencies and refuses to be entertained by their women because they are slovenly. On one occasion he objects to beaten Jews being allowed in public covered in blood—not out of sympathy but because it created anti-German sentiment in the region. Surely, he reasons, mass murder should be arranged to be more antiseptic. Yet on several occasions he orders executions of specific individuals because they refuse to work as slave laborers. The Nazi concern with morally depraved members being created by exposure to genocide has an excellent example in Landau.



# Execution as popular entertainment

## Execution as popular entertainment Summary and Analysis

Chapter 6, "Execution as popular entertainment"—the murder of Jews as a public spectacle" details numerous occasions upon which executions of Jews were organized as entertainment and publicized in advance. On a few occasions details of soldiers were ordered to participate as spectators and on other occasions punishment of civilians was carried out by ordering them to attend as spectators. In all events described, local citizens and soldiers in the area participated in the events as spectators. Occasionally, soldiers would proceed from spectator to active participant in the firing lines. Often the executions would take a violent turn as citizens would spontaneously beat those victims destined for execution. Note that consistent with most of the documents in the text, individuals providing statements generally attempt to exclude or exculpate themselves from the activities while simultaneously being an eyewitness to events. In this chapter in particular this rhetorical stance is difficult—how can one be an eyewitness to a spectacle but yet not be a spectator? The first series of documents, "'Soldiers sitting on rooftops and platforms watching the show'—an execution on 7 August 1941 in Zhitomir" presents six documents, mostly excerpted statements, and photographs of a public hanging of supposed saboteurs. Some of the statements also refer to a shooting of about sixty persons in a separate but similar event in the same city on the same day. Many of the statements offer more reasons for why the participant was a witness than actual facts about the event. Those giving statement often have excellent memories about what others did but cannot seem to remember their own acts of participation. The segment "A truck-driver from Technical Battalion 6" includes the obvious factual error of a ditch for human internment being 160 centimeters long, 80 centimeters wide, and 50 centimeters deep. Conversion to meters is also problematic because of the depth. Note also the constant reference to genocide being conducted in retaliation for supposed wrongs—in the section "SS-Obersturmführer August Häfner, Sonderkommando 4a" 3,000 Jews are executed in retaliation for supposedly murdering 2,000 other people; "bodies which had been found in the castle courtyard in Lutsk" (p. 111). What possible connection 3,000 people could have with the alleged atrocity is of course not examined, nor is the claim of an atrocity validated. This document also illustrates the local nature of such atrocities—there was no existing organization to perform the mass murder and thus local officials extemporized local mechanisms. There is also a bizarre note of concern in some statements that the mass executions were cruel or brutal—bizarre because the actual act of execution is not considered at such, only the manner in which it was haphazardly carried out.

The section "'Scores of soldiers, some in bathing trunks, watching the proceedings'—Major Rösler to Infantry General Schniewindt, 3 January 1942" relates an apparently accidental but prolonged witnessing of a mass shooting which the writer deplors. The section is typical of many of the eyewitness accounts where the speaker attempts to



distance themselves from the action by asserting that the witnessing was merely accidental. In this respect, the book's texts would appear to be a collection of accidental witnessing of mass atrocities committed nearly everywhere, as if nobody was really aware of these things except by accident; yet somehow they happened over and over again nearly everywhere. Also, in this section as in many others the speaker deplors the action not so much because it involves genocide, but more because of its inefficient organization.

The section "'When the Jews saw how easy it was to be executed...' - A customs official on murders in Vinnitsa and Brailov" contains one of the most-shocking sentiments in the entire book—a well-organized mass shooting was apparently so inviting to the victims that "[w]hen the Jews saw how easy it was to be executed they ran to be executed of their own accord" (p. 119). This author witnesses the mass shootings of persons he assumes are Jews, including many women and many children. He wonders how the executioners feel about shooting children—and claims they were used to the work which provided utmost satisfaction. In the section "'Present at the execution with heads of other authorities'—A Wirtschaftsführer on mass killings in Bobruisk" an economics officer in the Central Russia zone recalls organizing slave labor for industry and also the execution by mass shooting of twenty-four to thirty thousand Jews, including women and children, over two separate days. Section 5, "'The Twelve Toppers and a Little Hat'—A 'Troop Welfare Kamerad' reports" includes photographic reproductions of original documents. It is a statement by a sort of troop entertainment leader who organized a musical group that also happened to be called upon from time to time to perform genocide. The concluding section "'The execution area was visited by scores of German spectators'—'Execution tourism' in Liepaja, Latvia" presents six statements discussing a series of related incidents. The section also includes eight captioned photographs of mass executions by shooting. In some of these mass shootings the victims were forced to strip naked before being executed, apparently to collect clothing for re-use. Most or all of the victims in the various photographs are female, some running naked before their executioners, others standing and then sprawling in an execution trench full of prior victims. The various statements establish that numerous German servicemen and even groups of civilians would voluntarily assemble to watch the mass shootings. Other statements assert that the local populace in general viewed the executions with disgust. Other comments indicate the mass graves were insufficiently covered with numerous portions of bodies sticking up out of the ground.



# **'In the interest of maintaining military discipline...'**—The massacre of children in Byelaya Tserkov, military chaplains and the Wehrmacht

## **'In the interest of maintaining military discipline...'**—The massacre of children in Byelaya Tserkov, military chaplains and the Wehrmacht Summary and Analysis

Chapter 7, 'In the interest of maintaining military discipline...'

—The massacre of children in Byelaya Tserkov, military chaplains and the Wehrmacht, has a tight focus on events transpiring over about two days in the Ukrainian village of Byelaya Tserkov, during August of 1941. Byelaya Tserkov, or Bialacerkiew, is a Ukrainian village about thirty miles from Kiev. During August of 1941 an extended execution program was carried out on a rifle-range. Initially, adult Jews were executed. Numerous children were then imprisoned in a building on the outskirts of the village, and the following day most of them were executed by shooting. About ninety children remained in the building with no access to food, water, or sanitation. They were guarded as prisoners but had no adult oversight. The next day several German chaplains visited the building and made a complete inspection, reporting on the unsanitary conditions in which the children were being housed. Their reports involved higher authorities in the matter and the execution of the ninety children was delayed until such time as an organized execution could be carried out. After two days of delay, during which time it is unclear that the children's situation was ameliorated in any way, the children were executed. The various chaplains' reports do not condemn the execution of children but instead focus on what is seen as senseless suffering of children caused by their conditions of imprisonment. Of course, the two-day reprieve the children received did not include a change in circumstance and one therefore wonders whether the chaplains hurt more than helped. In any event, they made no attempts to prevent the execution. The first section, "An officer cadet on the killing of the adults", discusses the mass murder of the children's parents and others in the town. As usual, the witness claims to have been uninvolved and a witness only by happenstance. Nevertheless, the speaker stays around to witness 162 people murdered by firing squad, nine at a time—eighteen executions, each taking about ten minutes. In other words, three hours of accidental witnessing. This was followed by close inspection of the mass grave, conversations with some participants, and the subsequent witnessing of five additional executions; happenstance indeed. The following sections, "Report by the military chaplain, Dr. Reuss, to Lieutenant-Colonel Groscurth, 1st Generalstabsoffizier, 295th Infantry Division", "Report by Wehrmachtoberpfarrer Kornmann", "Lieutenant-Colonel Groscurth's report to C.-in-C. Sixth Army, Field Marshal von Reichenau", and "Report by military chaplains Tewes and Wilczek" present the original series of documents that detail the children's living



conditions and object to the impact on morale that such conditions had on German soldiers in the area. The document in Section 6, "Statement by C.-in-C. Sixth Army, Field Marshal von Reichenau" demonstrates the chaplains' complaints reached the highest echelons of command—Reichenau responds that the mass execution was poorly organized but that the complaints about the brutality of it are "incorrect, inappropriate and impertinent in the extreme" (p. 153), and concludes by saying that such reports are better off left unwritten. The final section, "SS-Obersturmführer August Häfner on the killing of the children" details the ultimate execution of the ninety children—carried out in an organized fashion. The author recalls escorting one of the victims, a small fair-haired girl, to the execution spot by holding her hand as they walked.





# 'Practical work for our Führer'—Daily life during the Holocaust

## 'Practical work for our Führer'—Daily life during the Holocaust Summary and Analysis

Chapter 8 includes three sections and is brief. The first section, "Letters by Gendarmerie chief Fritz Jacob" presents four letters from Fritz Jacob to Lieutenant-General Querner, dated from April, 1941, through June, 1942. In essence, the letters are from a younger man seeking to maintain a friendship and relationship with an older, more-established man. The letters reveal certain details of typical life and also mention the mass executions of Jews. Jacob is full of hatred for Jews, whom he describes as "ape people" (p. 159). The letters are shocking in their casual juxtaposition of the facts of genocide with mentions of things such as a girlfriend's pay raise. Section 2, "A Gendarmerie Oberwachtmeister's photographs" presents five photographs of mass executions, four of them mass executions of naked women. Section 3, "Letters of SS-Obersturmführer Karl Kretschmer (SK 4a)" presents five letters from Karl Kretschmer to his family, dated from September through October, 1942. Like Jacob's letters, these letters present a litany of daily minutiae and trivia, mingled with news of direct participation in mass murder. Kretschmer couches his participation in fairly vague terms but claims he is doing a great and necessary service for Germany; he is particularly enthusiastic about his financial income as a member of a roving execution squad and includes lists of items and delicacies he has shipped home. He complains about the local citizenry's predilection for sunflower seeds, stating "and then out it all shoots...[l]ike parrots" (p. 164), and also states they are lazy, dirty, and generally incompetent. Kretschmer signs his letters as "Your Papa" (p. 171) and assures his beloved children that he "is not shooting immoderately" (p. 167).



# 'His attitude towards the Jews is quite impossible'—Documents on persecution in the White Russia Generalbezirk

## 'His attitude towards the Jews is quite impossible'—Documents on persecution in the White Russia Generalbezirk Summary and Analysis

Chapter 9 includes four sections. The first section, "'The bodies piled up in the streets'—Communication of Slutsk Gebietskommissar to the Generalkommissar in Minsk, 30 October 1941", is labeled secret and is a fairly lengthy description of a series of mass executions of Jews transpiring in Slutsk. The report is in essence a complaint that the executions were not well planned, were carried out under dubious authority, and were very poorly coordinated. This led to mass hysteria in the town and the execution of a large number of highly-skilled Jews who were otherwise wanted for slave labor. In addition, the non-Jewish citizenry of the city was terrified and in some occasions harmed. Also concerning, after the shootings the graves were inadequately covered and surviving victims were able to work themselves out of the graves and wander around the area. The report indeed has a sense of outrage that is buried under a formal construction. The second section, "'The action rid me of unnecessary mouths to feed'—From the situation report of Gebietskommissar Gerhard Erren, 25 January 1942" takes an opposite view and regrets only that the mass killings did not extend into small villages with fewer than 1,000 inhabitants—thus leaving these killings to the local authorities of which Erren is one. This section includes a brief statement by Erren's driver and interpreter, Alfred Metzner, which focuses on the extreme sadism of the murderers. The third section, "'Eliminate the Jews once and for all'—Generalkommissar for White Russia Wilhelm Kube, 31 July 1942, to the Reichskommissar for the Ostland, Hinrich Lohse", also labeled secret, summarizes recent actions taken to murder Jews and lists various figures of people murdered in specified areas. The report also lists still-living Jews and reasons for their survival, complains about the difficulties of arranging for the mass executions of so many people, and asks for future shipments of Jews to be suspended for a temporary period of reorganization. The author, Kube, was a devoted Nazi. But his attitude toward the difficulties of genocide earned him an official rebuke as reported in section four, "A 'quite literally slavish' attitude to the Jews—SS-Obersturmbannführer Dr Strauch on Gauleiter Kube". In this report from July 1943, Strauch addresses General of the Police von dem Bach and vituperates Kube as uncommitted to the mass extermination of Jews. The lengthy report attacks Kube on several letters, including noting that his Kube's wife was not held on a tight leash and that on at least one occasion Kube publically thanked a Jew for risking his life to save Kube's prized automobile from a burning garage. In general, Strauch does not complain about Kube's performance of mass murder but generally that Kube's attitude toward the Jews is undesirably lenient.



# 'None of the Jews that were killed is any great loss'—Secret verdict of the SS and Police Supreme Court in Munich

## 'None of the Jews that were killed is any great loss'—Secret verdict of the SS and Police Supreme Court in Munich Summary and Analysis

Chapter 10 includes three sections and considers the peculiar situation of SS-Untersturmführer Max Täubner. In section one, "Verdict against SS-Untersturmführer Max Täubner, 24 May 1943", Täubner is presented as a self-confessed "fanatical enemy of the Jews" (p. 196), but one who was not directly appointed as an executioner. Instead, after a typical Nazi career he entered military service and ended up stationed in occupied areas where he pursued impromptu murders of Jews. He also sought out occasions to join officially-sanctioned murders and participated in them with apparent gusto. During this period he personally photographed atrocities and also allowed men under his command to photograph atrocities. The charges in question stem from an unsanctioned mass murder of Jews that Täubner orchestrated in Scholochowo in October 1941, using his platoon to perform mass shootings of about five hundred Jews. The executions are described as brutal, but typical. After a lengthy period of combat and occupation service, Täubner was rotated home to Germany for a period of rest. There, he circulated photographs of atrocities and told family and friends about his personal involvement in mass murder and bragged of his hatred for the Jews. The section includes several statements of Täubner's personal initiative in killing Jews, entirely outside the realm of officially sanctioned actions. Täubner is therefore placed in legal jeopardy not because he has performed genocide, but because he did not have permission; also because he allowed photographic documentation to be produced, and—worse—circulated such documentation at home in Germany. Working for Täubner is the fact that he murdered Jews which the court recognizes as necessary. In other words, he is not guilty of murder but of murder without permission. Section two "Dismissal of the case against the remaining parties, 1 June 1943" establishes that Täubner's many acquaintances and the men under his command are not guilty of anything. Täubner receives a sentence in the German courts, but section three, "The pardon" releases him for future service at the front. Täubner apparently spent some months in a German prison—but this served him well, for post-War charges were not brought against him on the grounds that he had already been convicted and sentenced for his known crimes against humanity.



# 'Their soldierly conduct is exemplary'— Kulmhof (Chełmno) extermination camp in the Wartheland Reichsgau

## 'Their soldierly conduct is exemplary'—Kulmhof (Chełmno) extermination camp in the Wartheland Reichsgau Summary and Analysis

The book proper consists of two major divisions, the second one being titled: "Part Two 'Delivered and Killed'—The Extermination Centers". Part Two focuses on events in several concentration camps and is further divided into three named but unnumbered chapters of quite unequal length. These materials do tend to be more concise than the materials presented in Part One of the book. These documents come from a period of the war when genocide was a well-established fact among the Nazi party; the thinly veiled and euphemistic references of roving execution bands gives way to blatant discussion of industrialized mass murder. Chapter 11 is quite brief but includes six sections, the first of which, "Photographs", presents nine photographs of persons, events, or places related to the chapter. Section 2, "Theodor Malzmüller on the 'plague boils of humanity'" is a statement describing the extermination camp at Kulmhof; the writer was a guard. Section 3, "Gas-van driver Walter Burmeister on whether he ever thought about what he was doing" establishes that in fact Burmeister never did think about what he was doing as he daily drove a gas van packed with asphyxiating Jews. He did still remember, however, how unpleasant it was to clean the van's interior after the corpses had been removed. Section 4, "Kurt Möbius on the guilt of the Jews and his own lack of blame" presents Möbius as he exculpates Möbius of his war crimes because what the State orders is obviously correct (this defense did not work for Möbius—he was sentenced to eight years imprisonment for accessory to murder). Section 5, "Interrogation of Adolf Eichmann" presents a brief excerpt from a taped interview where Eichmann expresses horror at the witnessing of an actual execution which he made possible through his organizational skills. Section 6, "Gauleiter Greiser to Himmler, 19 March 1943" praises the bravery and dedication of the members of an execution squad and forwards a substantive sum of cash to Himmler to be used for the benefit of the Reich—or the personal use of Himmler, as suitable. Following mention of the bribe Greiser requests permission to take extended leave with some of his men.



# 'The Wannsee Conference decisions implemented'—The extermination camps of Belzec, Sobibor and Treblinka'

## 'The Wannsee Conference decisions implemented'—The extermination camps of Belzec, Sobibor and Treblinka' Summary and Analysis

Chapter 12 includes seven sections and details some of the actions and consequences of the Wannsee Conference, a meeting of senior Nazi officials in January 1942 that set into motion the industrialization of the holocaust by establishing extermination and concentration camps. Section 1, "SS-Untersturmführer Josef Oberhauser on the early days at Belzec" provides information about the early establishment and operation of Belzec. Prior to August 1942 the camp operated at a relatively slow rate of mass murder, killing about 600 to 900 Jews each day. This period was followed by a massive expansion in operations under new leadership. The initial period demonstrated the possibility of mass murder on an industrial scale; during this period bottled gasses or vehicle engine exhaust were used to asphyxiate victims. Section 2, "Erich Fuchs on his duties at Sobibor" details Fuchs' deployment to Sobibor. There, Fuchs was responsible for keeping an engine working to produce exhaust to asphyxiate women and children. Section 3, "The train journey to Belzec—Schutzpolizei Zugwachtmeister Jäcklein's report" describes Jäcklein's participation in organizing and guarding a deportation train. The train began with 8,200 Jews but during the several days travel no food, water, or sanitation was provided. Prisoners would attempt to smash holes in the freight cars; some are believed to have escaped, others attempting escape were shot; holes were patched over at each station. Roughly one fourth of the Jews died during the transit, and the rest were murdered shortly after arrival at Belzec. This section also includes five photographs of Nazis associated with Belzec. Section 4, "'The camp had clean sanitary facilities'—Professor Wilhelm Pfannenstiel, Waffen-SS hygienist, on a gassing at Belzec" presents another bizarre contradiction within Nazi Germany. Pfannenstiel was employed by the SS as a hygienist and inspected the extermination camp at Belzec to ensure that genocide was being carried out in a hygienic method. Pfannenstiel relates his eyewitness account of the exact methods used to transport, organize, and murder thousands of Jews. He also complains that such mass murder can hardly be said to be hygienic, in particular the methodology used for buried being inadequately hygienic. In section 5, "The first day at Treblinka—Kurt Franz, deputy camp commandant" Franz describes seeing swollen bodies in the sun and guards fraternizing with female prisoners upon his first arrival at Treblinka; he assures the reader that by the next day things were put to order. Section 6, "'It was my job to shoot these people'—Willi Mentz, the 'Gunman' of Treblinka" describes Mentz's so-called job of shooting arrivals that were too ill, frail, or wounded to make the short journey to the gas chambers. Mentz no longer remembers how many people he shot but estimates it at two to twenty per transport,



one or two transports per day, and months and months of work. Mentz was sentenced to life imprisonment after the war for the murder of thousands. Section 7, "Kurt Franz on the end of Treblinka" presents some of Franz's sentiments upon the close of Treblinka; Franz objects to some witness statements that his dog, Barry, was trained to attack Jews. He states that efforts were undertaken to dismantle Treblinka and disguise it as a common farm before its capture by the advancing Soviet army.



# 'Food in the officers' mess excellent'— Auschwitz

## 'Food in the officers' mess excellent'—Auschwitz Summary and Analysis

Chapter 13 includes five sections. Section 1, "'I only took part in the murder of some three million people out of consideration for my family'—Statement of Maximilian Grabner, head of the Political Department" offers Grabner's utterly fantastic self-defense. Section 2, "'Grabner ordered me to pour Zyklon B into the opening'—Statement of Hans Stark, registrar of new arrivals" explains some of the methodologies Grabner used to demonstrate consideration for his family by overseeing and ordering the murder of thousands of Jews. The lengthy section 3, "'There was Bulgarian red wine and Croatian plum brandy'—From the diary of SS-Dr Kremer" provides extracts from Kremer's diary from August through November, 1942. Kremer makes daily notes about attending mass murder, worries about mundane things in life, and richly enjoys the copious and varied diet of a medical doctor at Auschwitz. After Kremer has been at Auschwitz for a few weeks he begins to pursue a pet project of examining organ tissue from until-examined-living prisoners. He "extracted and fixed fresh live material from liver, spleen, and pancreas" (p. 263) and so forth. In July 1947 at war crimes trials Kremer explained that 'fresh live material' really indicated tissue samples taken from recently-murdered victims that somebody else had actually murdered. In his diary, Kremer seems absolutely pitiless and entirely disinterested in the fate of hundreds of thousands of human beings. He goes on at length about the décor in a local cinema, however. He is also pleased to finally receive a promotion in academia which leads him to depart the extermination camp. Section 4, "'The highest number of gassings in a day was 10,000'—Statement by Rudolf Höss" offers Höss' views of the procedures used to pass a shipment of Jews through extermination and disposal. Also by Höss, section 5, "'So that in the future it would be impossible to establish how many people had been burnt'—Rudolf Höss on the elimination of the mass graves" describes how Höss led work details that exhumed corpses from mass graves and more-thoroughly cremated the remains in the vicinity of Kulmhof. Errata: the book concludes with several sections including "Glossary and abbreviations", "Table of equivalent ranks", "Einsatzgruppen (mobile execution units in Eastern Europe)", "Document sources", "Biographical details", "Chronology", and "Index to persons and places". The index is quite useful, as are the glossary, table of ranks, and chronology entries. The lengthy biographical details section includes notes about numerous persons presented in the text—most at witnesses. It is particularly useful and informative, though the biographical treatment of individuals is quite uneven in scope. These materials span pages 275 through 314 and are thus obviously substantive; about half of these pages are biographies. The document sources listed are comprehensive and significant inasmuch as the book successfully dispels allegations that the holocaust was faked or of exceptionally limited scope.



# Characters

## Gerhard Erren

Erren was an athletics instructor and joined the Nazi party in 1931 after difficulties with establishing his eligibility. From 1934 onward he was in the fulltime employment of the Nazi party and moved into political leadership positions with increasing responsibility from 1937 until the beginning of the war. From late 1941 to mid 1944 he was a politically significant administrator in Byelorussia and in March 1944 he was accepted by the SS. From early 1945 he was placed in charge of ideological training of the SS. From 1950 to 1960 he was employed as a schoolteacher in public schools, and from 1961 through 1971 as a school teacher in private schools. In 1974 he was sentenced to life imprisonment.

## Kurt Franz

Franz was a cook and was not politically active before joining the SS in 1937, serving as a guard at Buchenwald. In 1939 he participated in various assignments regarding 'euthanasia' programs, during 1942 he was at Belzec and later Treblinka. He rose through the ranks as a guard. He afterwards was detailed to Italy. From 1945 to 1949 he worked as a laborer and from 1949 to 1959 he worked as a cook. He was arrested in 1959 and in 1965 was sentenced to life imprisonment. Franz's dog, Barry, was trained to assault prisoners at Treblinka and is said to have torn several to pieces—charges which Franz denied at his trial. The trial transcript indicates that Franz admitted to being in charge of Treblinka, but only after mass murder has stopped. He claimed his conscious was clear and he was innocent of any wrongdoing to any person.

## Erich Fuchs

Fuchs was a skilled motor mechanic and joined the Nazi party in 1933, being employed in 1940 to operate and improve gas vans. These vans had sealed cargo areas in which victims were packed and then asphyxiated by the vehicle's exhaust as it was driven to the internment site. Fuchs installed gassing systems at Belzec and operated gassing engines at Sobibor before being given a position of importance at Treblinka. From 1942 through 1943 he again researched methods of mass murder, using mentally ill patients as experimental subjects. After the war he worked as a truck driver, a mechanic, and a car salesman. He was sentenced to four years' imprisonment in 1966 for being an accessory to murder of at least 79,000 people.

## Kurt Gerstein

Gerstein held an engineering degree and studied medicine before joining the Nazi party in 1933. He was subsequently ejected in 1936 for hostile religious activity and spent





some time in 1938 as a prisoner in a concentration camp. His sister-in-law was gassed and cremated, apparently sparking an interest in the process of genocide. He joined the SS in 1941 and became a specialist in Zyklon B, or prussic acid, and transported materials used in gassing. He witnessed several mass executions by gas in 1942. During the closing days of the war he was captured by the French, imprisoned as a member of the SS, and in mid-1945 he was found dead in his cell, an apparent suicide. Prior to his death, Gerstein wrote several reports on his experiences and observations. These reports have become somewhat controversial because of a number of known inaccuracies; some theorize that Gerstein was actually murdered to prevent him from writing more materials.

## **Odilo Globocnik**

Globocnik joined the Nazi party in 1931 while it was still prohibited in Austria. Prior to the war he was convicted of several crimes performed in the interests of the Nazi party. After the Anschluss, Globocnik became Gualiter of Vienna. He was then transferred for several offenses including financial irregularities. In 1939 he was appointed police commissioner in Lublin. In 1942 he was transferred by Himmer to 'Operation Reinhard', or the 'final solution'. He participated in the organization of the liquidation of the Warsaw and Bialystok Ghettos. In 1943 he was a police chief, and in mid-1945 he was captured by the British and subsequently killed himself. A prominent Austrian Nazi and SS leader, Globocnik is today considered one of the persons primarily responsible for the holocaust.

## **Rudolf Höss**

Höss was a school instructor until 1922 when he joined the Nazi party. He served time in prison from 1923 until 1928 for murder. In 1934 he joined the SS and was placed in a position of command at Dachau and Sachsenhausen. Promoted in 1939, he was placed in charge of Auschwitz from 1940. From 1943 he was head of the SS effort of concentration camps and in 1944 returned to Auschwitz to oversee the murder of 430,000 Hungarian Jews, an even informally known as 'Operation Höss'. During this period the camp crematoria was unable to keep up with the gas chambers and tens of thousands of corpses were burned in open pits. Höss lived undercover from the end of the war until his arrest in early 1946; he was sentenced to death and hanged in 1947. Höss envisioned many changes to Auschwitz which allowed the camp to murder and cremate more Jews than Treblinka and other such camps.

## **Johannes Paul Kremer**

Kremer received a PhD in 1914 and an MD in 1919. By 1929 he was a professor and university lecturer. From 1936 through 1945 he was a senior lecturer on heredity, radiology, and anatomy. He joined the Nazi party in 1932 and the SS in 1934. During university vacations he was appointed duties as an SS officer, once serving at Dachau.



He served for two months at Auschwitz during which time he kept a diary, excerpts of which are presented in the book. After Auschwitz, he received a promotion and returned to his university work where he enjoyed more promotions within the SS. He was arrested in late 1945 and was deported to Poland in 1946; sentenced in 1947 to death, his sentence was later commuted to life in prison. He was released in early 1958 for good behavior. Later in 1958 he was arrested again and sentenced to ten years' imprisonment as an accessory to murder—however, his sentence was deemed already served. Kremer's diary excerpt is one of the most-chilling documents in the book.

## **Felix Landau**

Landau was born in Austria. Landau's single mother married a Jewish man, Landau's step-father giving him a surname before dying in 1919. Landau spent time in a Catholic school but was expelled for actively recruiting other students to the Nazi Youth. In 1931 he joined the Nazi party and became a political leader. He was a member of the SA from 1933 to 1934 and then joined the SS. He was imprisoned from 1934 through 1937 for participation in the Dollfuss affair; upon his release he actively engaged in Nazi propaganda activities. He eventually fled legal complications, becoming a German citizen. By 1938 he was working as a police official in a Gestapo office and married his first wife. In 1940 he was transferred to Radom and met Gertrude, a typist. From 1941 he was transferred to an Einsatzgruppen squad, and until 1943 he was in charge of organizing Jewish slave-labor. He divorced his wife in 1942 and married Gertrude in 1943—they were in turn divorced in 1946. He was arrested in 1946 but escaped in 1947 and lived underground for several years. He was eventually, in 1963, sentenced to life in prison. Landau's letters to his beloved Gertrude provide an eerie glimpse into the mind of a typical Nazi murderer.

## **Willi Mentz**

Mentz was an unskilled laborer and joined the Nazi party in 1932. From 1940 to 1941 he was working as a laborer at several gassing chamber sites without apparent direct involvement in the gassing operations. From mid 1942 to the end of 1943 he was appointed to Treblinka where he organized slave labor. There, his main job was at the so-called 'military hospital' where new arrivals too weak, ill, frail, or injured to walk to the gas chambers were transported. In the 'hospital' they were murdered, partially incinerated, and buried in mass graves. Mentz was the man who shot them, usually using a handgun pointed at the back of the neck at close range. Mentz did not check to see if his victims were still alive, and many are said to have been burned alive. He also served briefly at Sobibor and in Italy. After the war he worked as a milkman until his arrest. He was sentenced to life imprisonment. He is estimated to have personally murdered some thousands of people.



## Hans Stark

Stark joined the SS at the age of sixteen in 1937. He was thereafter stationed at Sachsenhausen, Buchenwald, and Dachau. He served in the political department at Auschwitz in 1940. From late 1941 to early 1942 he was on leave to finish his school education, and through early 1943 he studied law. After the war he studied agriculture and from 1953 to 1959 taught at various agricultural schools. He was arrested in 1959 and in 1965 was sentenced to ten year's detention; his sentence was unusually light because he was a juvenile during much of the time period—and hence was tried as a minor. Stark is known to have been especially brutal and delighted in murdering and tormenting women and openly admitted to having personally executed a few dozen Russian political prisoners and having personally dropped Zyklon B pellets into the gas chambers. After his release from prison in 1968, Stark returned to private life and he died in 1991 at his hometown.

## Max Täubner

Täubner, an aircraft engineer, joined the Nazi party in 1932 but was expelled for non-payment of dues. He was readmitted in 1937, having joined the SS in 1933. Chapter 10 is devoted to Täubner's peculiar situation as a private murderer of Jews. Unsanctioned by the government, Täubner took it upon himself to organize mass murder. He also photographed and allowed to be photographed some of these actions and then circulated the photographs and stories of atrocities while home on leave. Täubner was put on trial in Nazi Germany for these actions and received a prison sentence which was later commuted. He was returned to the front. After the war he was brought to trial but the charges were dismissed on the grounds that he had already been tried and served time for his known war crimes.



# Objects/Places

## Kaunas

Kaunas is a large city in present-day Lithuania and is located at the confluence of two large rivers. Between the world wars Lithuania came under Soviet influence and in 1940 Kaunas was annexed by the Soviet Union. When the Germans arrived in 1941 many citizens greeted them as liberators from Soviet oppression. Public sentiment appears to have been very anti-Semitic with many non-Jews considering the Jews to be instruments of the Soviet State, even though anti-Semitic persecution had been severe during Soviet rule. In June 1941, there were apparently numerous groups of anti-Communist and anti-Semite citizens who spontaneously organized for the purposes of committing genocide. When the Nazis took control they condoned these activities and later organized them on a much larger scale. Kaunas is also known as Kovno.

## Einsatzgruppen

Einsatzgruppen were German paramilitary death squads, organized under the auspices of the SS. The name translates as 'special-operation units'. Einsatzgruppen were organized to proceed into occupied areas immediately after their capture by the German armed forces. The Einsatzgruppen were primarily concerned with the systemic and organized mass murder of undesirable civilians, Jews, Communists, and others. They usually executed people by firing squad.

## Babi Yar

Babi Yar is a ravine outside the Ukrainian city of Kiev and was the site of one of the most notorious mass murders of all time. Over two days in late September 1941, 33,171 Jews were marched to the ravine and shot. It is today considered the largest single massacre of the holocaust and, because there were a few actual survivors, it is very well documented.

## Byelaya Tserkov

Byelaya Tserkov, or Bialacerkiew, is a Ukrainian village about thirty miles from Kiev. During August of 1941 an extended execution program was carried out on a rifle-range. Initially, adult Jews were executed. Numerous children were then imprisoned in a building on the outskirts of the village, and the following day most of them were executed by shooting. About ninety children remained in the building with no access to food, water, or sanitation, for a period of about three days. The prison conditions for these children became a topic of several communiqués presented in the book.



## Gas Vans

Several distinct types of motor vehicles were used in the mass murder of Jews by the Nazi regime. Collectively they are known as gas vans, and all shared common features. Gas vans had a large cargo area that was more-or-less airtight and that was of heavy construction with a door that could be strongly bolted closed. A few dozen people at a time were loaded into the cargo area which was then sealed. The gas van would then drive to a mass grave and along the way the engine's exhaust fumes were directed into the sealed cargo area, asphyxiating the victims. Though the gas vans worked well in principle they proved unable to murder as many people as the Nazi state desired. Also, unloading the vans was said to be difficult. Gas vans were used to euthanize mental patients and the physically deformed before they were used in mass executions of Jews. They were eventually replaced by fixed gas chambers.

## Jewish Slave-labor

Much of the focus of the holocaust is on the murder of Jews and other elements considered undesirable by the Nazi State. Prior to murder, however, many able-bodied Jews, primarily young men and women, were forced into slave-labor for a period. During this time they were nearly always undernourished, beaten, and exposed to severed hardships and disease. Most of the labor performed was more-or-less unskilled work for industrial concerns and military fabrication plants. When workers became ill or too weak to work, they were murdered and replaced by others.

## Minsk

Minsk is a large Russian city that was occupied by the Nazis from 1941 and 1942. During this time Minsk suffered bombings and many other wartime activities. Civilian casualties were high. Minsk was also the site of the largest Nazi ghetto in the Soviet Union, at one time housing over one hundred thousand Jews. This ghetto was the source of much organized slave labor for the Nazi regime.

## Chełmno Extermination Camp

Chełmno Extermination Camp was a Nazi death camp situated outside the village of Chełmno, Poland. The camp was opened in 1941 and at least 153,000 people were murdered there. The gassing operations at Chełmno were conducted mostly with gas vans and were accompanied by theatrics and props to convince the victims that they were going through delousing. Particularly during 1944, executions were also carried out by shooting. Chełmno was considered an extermination camp, and not a concentration camp, because there were no facilities there for housing inmates or organizing slave labor—those sent to Chełmno were sent there to die.



## Wannsee Conference

The Wannsee Conference was a meeting of senior Nazi officials held in January 1942. During the meeting high-ranking German officials of various departments were informed that Reinhard Heydrick had been appointed and authorized as the executor of the so-called "Final Solution to the Jewish Problem"; in other words, the Wannsee Conference made public the formal policy of the genocide of the Jews.

## Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka

Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka were three Nazi extermination camps situated in Poland. At least 434,500 people (mostly Jews) were murdered at Belzec, beginning in 1942; 250,000 at Sobibor, beginning in 1940; and 850,000 at Treblinka, beginning in 1941. These three extermination camps differed somewhat from Auschwitz inasmuch as, like Chelmno, they were intended solely for the mass murder of people and had no organized slave labor component. Unlike Chelmno, they were built around gas chambers and crematoria—instead of gas vans and burial pits. These camps are discussed primarily in Chapter 12 of the book.



# Themes

## It's Only Wrong if it's Disorganized

One of the most peculiar recurrent themes of the documents collected in the book is the apparent opinion that the most-basic problem with the holocaust was its disorganized implementation. Although a few writers or speakers voice horror at the actual fact of mass murder and genocide, far more voice horror over the simple processes used during mass murder and genocide. Especially within official reporting—but also among private statements and letters—there is little or no sense of moral outrage over the deaths of Jews whether these take place a dozen at a time or several hundred thousand at a time. Instead, the tone of most of the documents suggests that State-sponsored and industrialized genocide are simply the way things are and that everyone is complicit in acknowledging that the holocaust should happen and will happen. There are occasional sentiments that Germany needs to win the war, because the international repercussions of genocide might prove severe—but no sentiment that genocide should stop. Indeed, most of the writers of contemporaneous documents argue that they are doing good, satisfying work in a great cause. The consensus appears to be that the mass murder of millions of persons is more or less a good thing to do. However, many—perhaps most—writers are fairly outraged by the process of genocide. Town citizens are angered when Jews are herded through the streets and shot in the town because it makes the town center unpleasant. Others are angry that piles of corpses are not properly incinerated or buried. Still others complain that the gathering of Jews was haphazard and incomplete. Soldiers in charge of trainloads of Jews complain that the transportation facilities are inadequate to the task. Factory owners are angry that skilled employees are grouped with unskilled Jews. Government officials are angry that the Einsatzgruppen missed several small towns. All of these objections to the holocaust are not fundamentally aimed at the fact of the holocaust, but at the methodologies implemented.

## I Was an Accidental Witness

With only a very few exceptions, all of the speakers and writers take considerable care to establish the reasons why they happened to be at the site of an atrocity, and to explain how and why they happened to witness the things they subsequently relate. Over and over again the text presents persons who claim to have been an accidental witness to genocide—a sort of innocent bystander. Many of the statements spend more time and care constructing the reasons for being at a certain place at a certain point in time—passing through on orders, retrieving some supplies, sent their by command—than they do on establishing what transpired at the atrocity described. Nearly all of the writers would have their audience believe that they were simply an accidental witness to an event which they had no involvement with and of which they had no prior knowledge. This is somewhat critical for many of the speakers whose statements were offered under oath at war crimes trials, but even those not offering potentially incriminating



testimony go out of their way to establish their non-involvement. This is perhaps nowhere more bizarrely asserted than in Chapter 7, Section 1 ("An officer cadet on the killing of the adults", pp. 139 - 141) where the speaker first asserts his rationale for being in a given town on a given date—he was "with my unit" (p. 139) and hence merely posted there. Then he relates an accidental witnessing of a mass shooting in which 162 people are murdered by firing squad, nine at a time—eighteen executions, each taking about ten minutes. In other words, three hours of accidental witnessing. This was followed by close inspection of the mass grave, conversations with some participants, and the subsequent witnessing of five additional executions over several days. Yet, instead of admitting to being a voluntary spectator of genocide as a spectacle, the speaker repeatedly claims to have been an accidental witness.

## **I Never Did Anything Really Wrong**

Many of the speakers and writers strongly assert that they are innocent of any wrongdoing in the holocaust. The most-common appearance of this recurrent theme is the lengthy statements of nearly all speakers and writers that seek to establish their happenstance witnessing of events unconnected to their actual responsibilities—a sort of 'I saw this but was uninvolved' approach to being an eyewitness. These individuals assert innocent through nonparticipation. Other manifestations of this theme involve those who did participate but still advocate their innocence. This group includes Walter Burmeister asserting that operating a van to asphyxiate Jews was not wrong because he never stopped to think about it (pp. 219 - 220), Kurt Möbius asserting that murdering Jews was not wrong because it was State policy (pp. 220 - 221), Willi Mentz asserting that shooting thousands of Jews was not wrong because it was simply his job (pp. 245 - 247), and various soldiers' statements that they were simply following orders. A final group of people proclaiming their own innocence are like Kurt Franz, commandant of an extermination camp, who admits to perhaps hitting one person once but vehemently denies any involvement in any act of genocide (pp. 247-249). All of these people are in some way involved with, and many are complicit in, genocide. Yet all of them announce their own innocence and clear conscience in the matter. It is as if millions of people were murdered, incinerated, and buried without anyone actually performing the murdering, incinerating, and burying.





# Style

## Perspective

The perspective of the book varies by contribution. Photographs are obviously a visual record, but many of the photographs are arranged in photograph albums in methods that construct additional meaning around the images—for example, six rather innocuous photographs of animals are given contextual significance by the fact that they were in Kurt Franz's photograph album and represent the "camp zoo" at Treblinka extermination camp (see p. 227). Official reports are usually presented from the detached, impersonal, third-person point of view. Diaries and letters are obviously personal and of a typically more-limited perspective. Much of the material in the book consists of first-person perspective eyewitness accounts of atrocities. These are often transcriptions of spoken testimony or actual written statements utilized during criminal proceedings. As such, they are constructed in an effort to exculpate the speaker or writer of guilt or association with horrific events. Taken individually, perhaps many of the documents are not significant historically. But assembled as a body of work, the materials make it clear that the holocaust happened, that it was widely known and supported at the time, and that it was not perpetrated by isolated individuals. Rather, it was a society-sponsored process that was well organized, supported by substantive resource commitments, and endured over a period of years. Many of the individuals involved personally benefited in financial ways from their participation in the holocaust.

## Tone

The tone of the book is startling and horrifying. Here are presented artifacts documenting the mass murder of millions of people. Reports are offered, with clerical efficiency, that document the murder of hundreds of thousands of Jews over a few months (for example, see pp. 46 - 58); photographs of victims both before and after execution are reproduced; diaries of participants are excerpted; letters of eyewitnesses are provided; and numerous official statements are reproduced. The book establishes that the holocaust occurred, that many Germans were complicit in genocide, that millions were murdered without any process of law or any rationale, and that in general the public was aware of, and inferred support of, the entire operation. Those not supporting genocide were deemed unfit to hold political positions. Even medical doctors and police—the types of persons one ordinarily looks to for protection—became complicit in the process of industrialized murder. The tone of individual selections varies greatly, of course, but what emerges from the collection is a tone of detached historicity—here are the actual documents produced, here are the statements, here are the irrefutable facts.

## Structure

The 314-page book has a complex structure, with two parts. Part One is mostly focused on the early stages of genocide where mass murder was systemic, brutal, and often fairly unorganized in execution. Part Two is focused on latter stages when extermination camps were established and operational. Part One includes ten named but unnumbered chapters; Part Two includes three named and unnumbered chapters. Each chapter is further divided into named and enumerated sections; many of these sections include several distinct documents. These sections are arranged topically to support the chapter's primary topic. There is virtually no editorial comment in the book, but the chapter and section topics are made obvious by their titles which usually consist of an excerpted sentence fragment from one of the included documents and a subtitle comprised of an editorial statement. The book also includes a foreword, a translated preface from the original German-language edition, and an introduction. Following the documents themselves, the book includes a glossary and abbreviations section, a useful table of equivalent ranks, a brief discussion of the Einsatzgruppen, an exhaustive source listing, extensive biographical details for nearly all of the original authors or speakers, a chronology of the holocaust, and a comprehensive index of persons and places. The book's impact is heightened by constant reference to the biographical section and the chronology helps put the book's selections into a historical context.



## Quotes

Notes of Eastern Territories Commander, Johannes Blaskowitz  
Eastern Territories Commander - HQ Schloss Spala, 6.2.1940

1. Military/political situation:

"In the industrial area of Kamienna for the first time the existence of a rebel and sabotage organization with wide ramifications has been confirmed. Leaders of the organization are members of the former Polish army. The material that was discovered during numerous arrests is currently being examined. The Staatspolizei are refraining from making further arrests in order not to jeopardize plans to eliminate the organization as a whole." (p. 4)

31.8.41

15.00 Jewish action in the city of Minsk ghetto.

"9th Coy manned the outer cordon while 7th Coy, N.S.K.K. Coy and the SD carried out search. All Jews aged between 15 and 60 were apprehended. In addition all Jewesses who were not wearing the prescribed yellow star on their clothing. A total of 916[?] Jews of both sexes were apprehended and taken to the police prison."

1.9.41

5.30 "Execution of Jews apprehended yesterday some 10 km east of Minsk, north of the Minsk-Smolensk-Moscow highway. Three Execution Kommandos were deployed. The Kommando from 9th Coy shot a total of 330 Jews (of who 40 were Jewesses)." (p. 11)

A police official from Neu-Sandez Grenzpolizeikommissariat (Cracow District/General-Gouvernement):

"Members of the Grenzpolizeikommissariat were, with a few exceptions, quite happy to take part in shootings of Jews. They had a ball! Obviously they can't say that today! Nobody failed to turn up...I want to repeat that people today give a false impression when they say that the actions against the Jews were carried out unwillingly. There was great hatred against the Jews; it was revenge, and they wanted money and gold. Don't let's kid ourselves, there was always something up for grabs during the Jewish actions. Everywhere you went there was always something for the taking. The poor Jews were brought in, the rich Jews were fetched and their homes were scoured." (p. 76)

"A small incident demonstrated to me the complete fanaticism of these people. One of the Poles tried to put up some resistance. He tried to snatch the carbine out of the hands of one of the men but did not succeed. A few seconds later there was a crack of gunfire and it was all over. A few minutes later after a short interrogation a second one was finished off. I was just taking over the watch when a Kommando reported that just a few streets away from us a guard from the Wehrmacht had been discovered shot dead." (p. 90)



"I saw a major from the Wehrmacht being handed a heavy-machine-gun by some privates, which he pointed straight at the ditch, firing a whole round of bullets into it. If I remember correctly he shouted out, 'Some of them are still alive!' Then an elderly man rose up from the pile of corpses near him and shouted, 'Give me another one!' I do not know who then shot this man. I was appalled that so many people were left lying wounded in the grave. These people were left to die wretchedly." (p. 112)

"I saw children who tried to escape being shot at as though they were hares and you could see a number of bloody children's bodies lying round this crowd of people. They were then led to the graves under guard. The way to the grave was strewn with torn-up paper money. The Jews had probably torn up the money so that it would not fall into the hands of their killers." (p. 120)

"On the orders of a superior they fired shots at the heads of these people with their carbines. When hit, these people fell forwards into the ditch. Some of them went head over heels. Sometimes the tops of their skulls flew up into the air. Some of the marksmen were sprayed with blood. They were shooting from a distance of about five meters. It was a terrible scene. I remember an SS officer walking along the edge of the ditch and firing shots into it with a sub-machine-gun as he went along." (p. 140)

"Every one of them without exception said things like, 'Sei'mer Spezialisten, werd'n sie uns schiess'n nicht' ['We're specialists, you're not going to shoot us, are you?]. These were not human being but ape people.

Well, there is only a small and rapidly dwindling percentage left of the 24,000 Jews originally living in Kamenets Podolsky. Those little Jews living in the Rayons [the lowest administrative district—Ed.] are also some of our best clients. We are forging ahead and suffer no pangs of conscience and then 'Die Wellen schlagen zu, die Welt hat Ruh' ['the waves will claim what is theirs and the world will have peace']. " (p. 159)

"I had barely established that the bodies were not completely burned when a layer of earth was thrown over them and then more bodies were put into the same grave. During the disposal of the bodies I also established that the whole procedure was not entirely satisfactory from the point of view of hygiene." (p. 244)

"I never killed a person or beat any one. I would like to correct myself—the latter may have occurred once. Basically I have never done wrong to anyone nor would I ever have wished to do a wrong. I vehemently deny these attacks against me. I state that the entire thing is a sham. I believe that I am now being maligned for the sole reason that I was a member of the SS. I wore the uniform of an SS officer and for this reason alone was a familiar figure among the prisoners." (p. 249)

"I am a Roman Catholic and today still believe in God. I believe there must be such a thing as divine justice as well as justice on earth. I only took part in the murder of some three million people out of consideration for my family. I was never an anti-Semite and would still claim today that every person has the right to life." (p. 252)



18 October 1942

"Attended 11th Sonderaktion (Dutch) in cold wet weather this morning, Sunday. Horrible scenes with three naked women who begged us for their lives." (p. 264)

## Topics for Discussion

Most of the authors or speakers in the book go to great lengths to explain exactly why they 'accidentally' witnessed atrocities. Why do you think establishing a banal rationale for being in the wrong area at the wrong time was so important to these people, decades after the events they described?

Most of the documents in the book that present objections to genocide do not object to the actual fact of genocide, but rather the methodology in which it was carried out. In other words, many of the speakers seem to infer that genocide per se is not bad as long as it is carried out in an organized fashion. Why do you think the disorder of mass murder was so objectionable to so many people?

Many of the speakers or authors in the book particularly object to the mass murder of women and children. Is it any more horrific to shoot women or children than to shoot men? If so, why?

Some people try to deny the holocaust as a fictional creation. Others try to minimize the holocaust and claim that though it did happen, its scale was small. Do you think that holocaust deniers are purely politically motivated? What other motivations might people have for refusing to accept history?

The book puts a large degree of emphasis on the sources of the documents, listing not only the original titles but also the repositories in which the documents are housed. Why do you think the editors chose to put such emphasis on citation?

The book presents a mixture of documents and photographs. Which type of material has more impact, and why?

Could something like the holocaust ever happen again? Discuss.